Masters of Art

VINCENT VAN GOGH

DELPHI CLASSICS

Masters of Art
by DELPHI CLASSICS

VINCENT VAN GOGH

(1853–1890)

Contents

The Highlights

STILL LIFE WITH CABBAGE AND CLOGS
AVENUE OF POPLARS IN AUTUMN
THE POTATO EATERS
SKULL WITH BURNING CIGARETTE
SELF-PORTRAIT WITH STRAW HAT
THE WHITE ORCHARD
PORTRAIT OF THE POSTMAN JOSEPH ROULIN
STILL LIFE: VASE WITH TWELVE SUNFLOWERS
VINCENT’S HOUSE IN ARLES (THE YELLOW HOUSE)
THE CAFÉ TERRACE ON THE PLACE DU FORUM, ARLES, AT NIGHT
PORTRAIT OF DR. GACHET
VINCENT’S BEDROOM IN ARLES
VINCENT’S CHAIR WITH HIS PIPE
THE RED VINEYARD
SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BANDAGED EAR
THE STARRY NIGHT
WHEAT FIELD WITH CYPRESSES
IRISES

WHEAT FIELD WITH CROWS

The Paintings

THE COMPLETE PAINTINGS
ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PAINTINGS

The Letters

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF VINCENT VAN GOGH

The Biography

MEMOIR OF VINCENT VAN GOGH by Johanna Gesina van Gogh

Vincent

© *Delphi Classics 2012*

Version 1

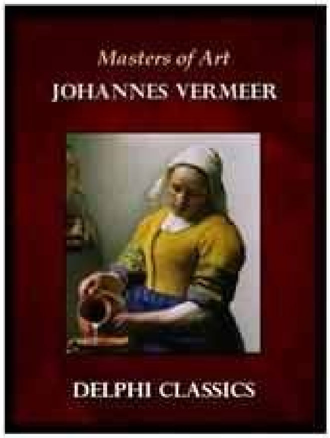
Masters of Art

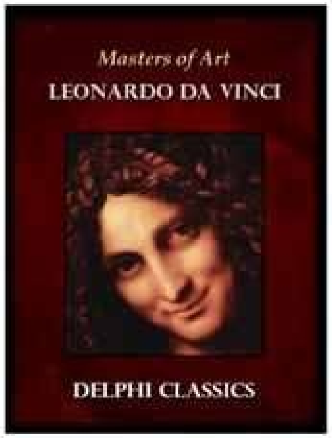
by DELPHI CLASSICS

CARAVAGGIO
CLAUDE MONET
DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ
EUGÈNE DELACROIX
GUSTAV KLIMT
J.M.W. TURNER
JOHANNES VERMEER
JOHN CONSTABLE
LEONARDO DA VINCI
MICHELANGELO
PAUL CÉZANNE
PAUL KLEE
PETER PAUL RUBENS
PIERRE-AUGUST RENOIR
RAPHAEL
REMBRANDT
T. GAINSBOROUGH
TINTORETTO
TITIAN
VINCENT VAN GOGH

For more information or to buy direct, please visit:

www.delphiclassics.com


Masters of Art
JOHANNES VERMEER
DELPHI CLASSICS


Masters of Art
LEONARDO DA VINCI
DELPHI CLASSICS

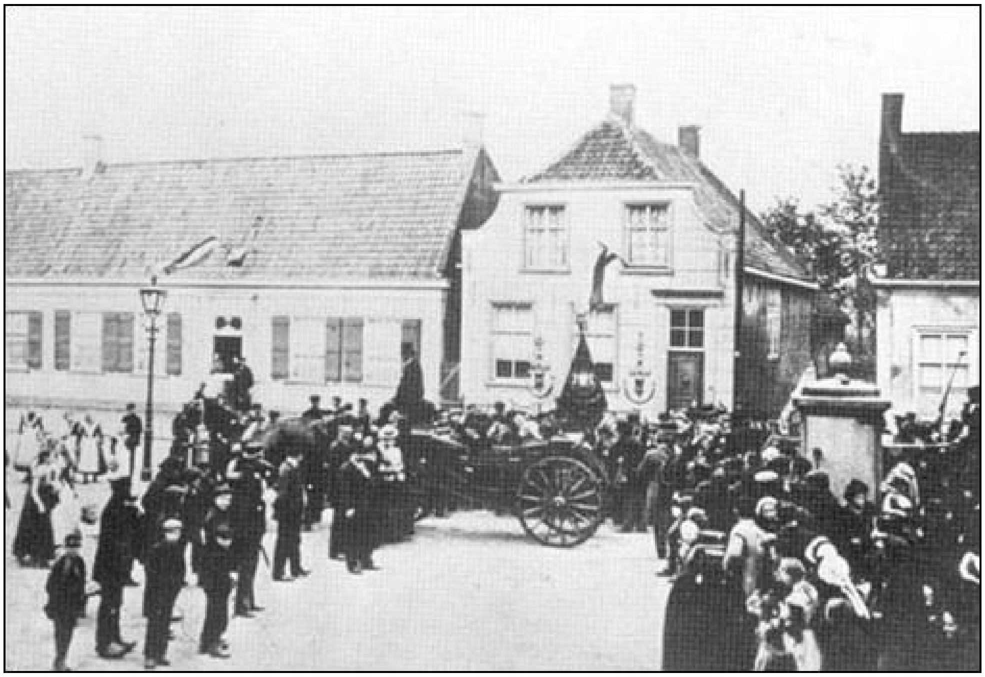
Masters of Art
VINCENT VAN GOGH
DELPHI CLASSICS

MASTERS OF ART

VINCENT VAN GOGH

By Delphi Classics, 2012

The Highlights



Vincent van Gogh was born at “Markt 29” in Zundert, Netherlands. The flag marks the room in which he was born. The house no longer stands.

Zundert today

THE HIGHLIGHTS

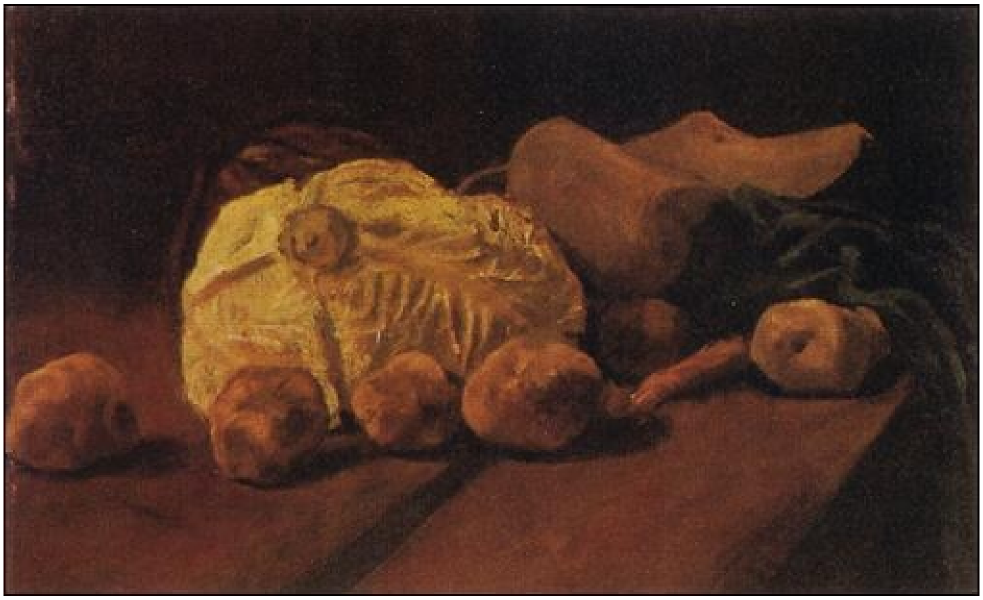
In this section, a sample of some of van Gogh’s most celebrated works are provided, with concise introductions, special ‘detail’ reproductions and additional biographical images.

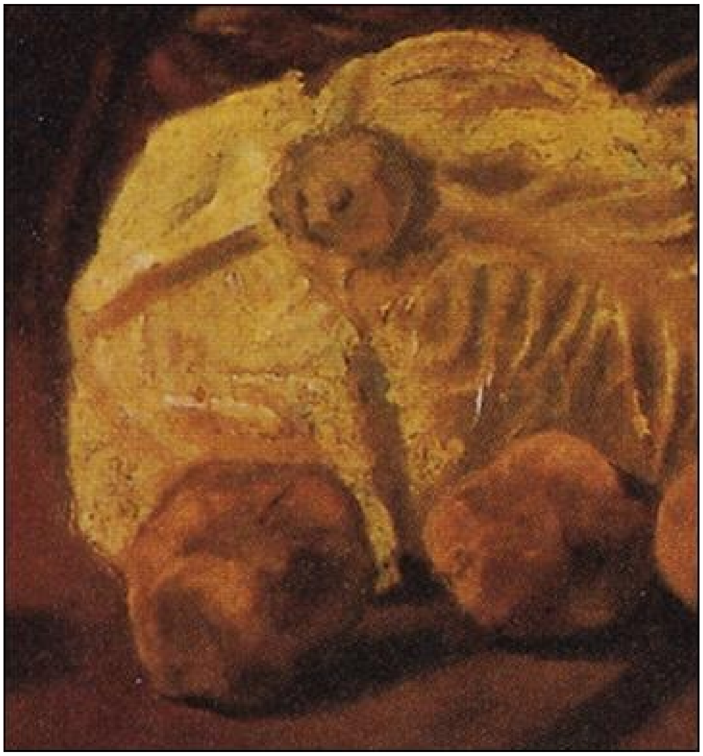
Van Gogh, aged 13

STILL LIFE WITH CABBAGE AND CLOGS

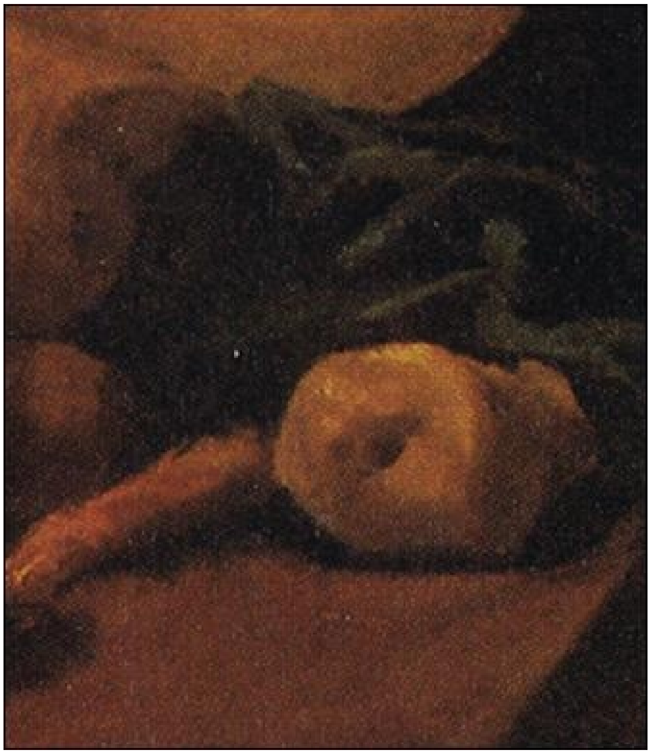
This painting was completed while van Gogh was living in The Hague in December, 1881. It is currently located at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and depicts everyday belongings that are typical of other still life subjects in van Gogh’s early works. The ‘earthy’ dark colours are also characteristic of this period.

After settling in The Hague, van Gogh called on his cousin-in-law, the painter Anton Mauve, who introduced him to painting in both oil and watercolour. She also lent him the money to set up a studio. Nevertheless, the two soon fell out, possibly over a disagreement about drawing from plaster casts, and Mauve appears to have suddenly grown cold towards van Gogh, choosing not to return a number of his letters. The young artist supposed his relative did not approve of his domestic arrangement with an alcoholic prostitute, Clasina Maria “Sien” Hoornik and her young daughter.





Detail

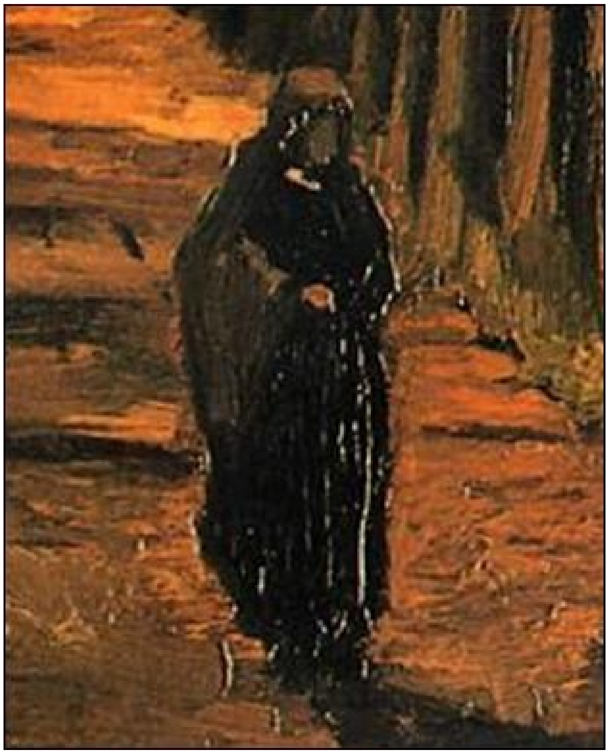


Detail

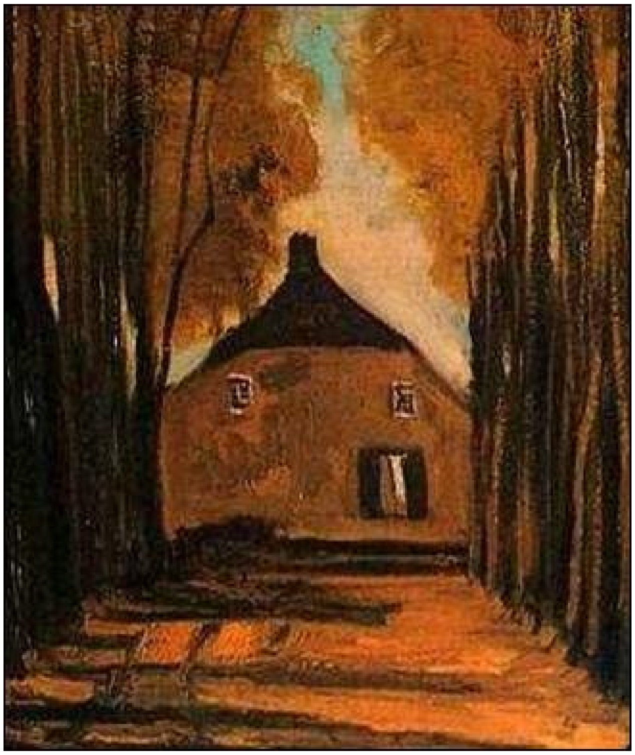
AVENUE OF POPLARS IN AUTUMN

This painting was completed in 1884 and is now housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. It depicts a lone figure of a woman, head covered and clothed in shadow, walking towards the viewer on the right side of a darkening path. The painting evokes an atmosphere of isolation and melancholy, enhanced by the rich autumnal colours and the theme of the dying day. Threatening shadows slash across the path, heightening the sinister mood.

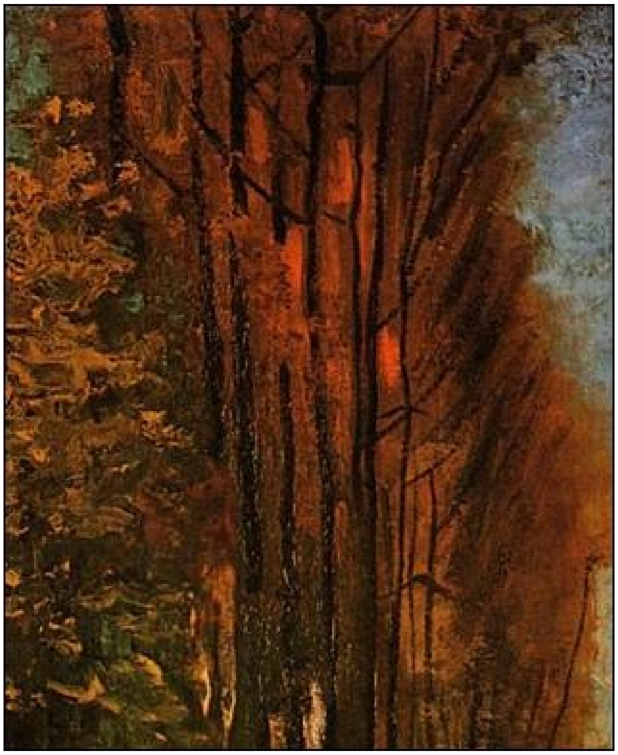
In October 1884, van Gogh described the work to his brother Theo, an art dealer living and working in Amsterdam, explaining that “the last thing I made is a rather large study of an avenue of poplars, with yellow autumn leaves, the sun casting, here and there, sparkling spots on the fallen leaves on the ground, alternating with the long shadows of the stems. At the end of the road is a small cottage, and over it all the blue sky through the autumn leaves.”



Detail



Detail



Detail

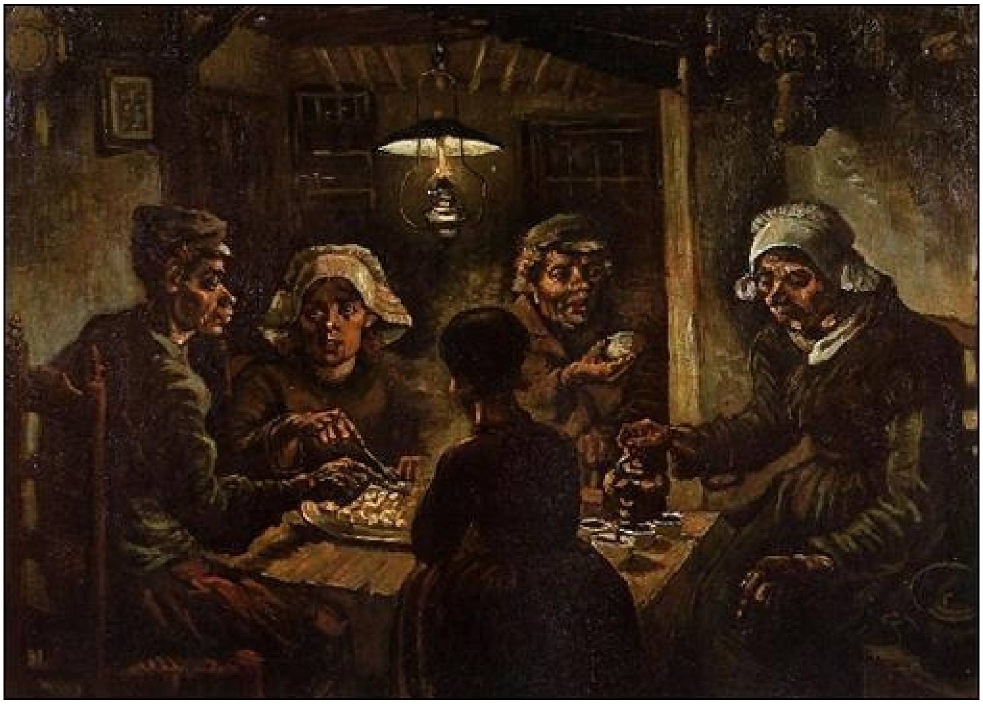
THE POTATO EATERS

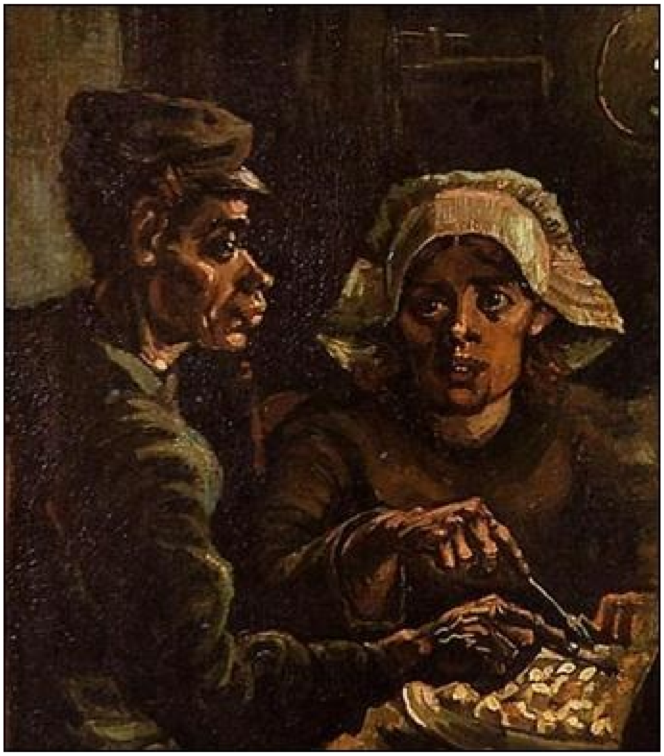
Created in April 1885, while van Gogh was staying in Nuenen, this early painting is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. During March and April 1885, van Gogh sketched studies for the painting and corresponded with his brother, who was not impressed with the work. The artist persevered with the painting until the beginning of May, when it was mostly complete, except for minor changes which he made with a small brush later the same year.

Van Gogh said he wanted to depict peasants as “they really were”. He deliberately chose coarse and unattractive models, believing they would be natural and unspoiled in his finished work. In a letter to Theo, he explained, “You see, I really have wanted to make it so that people get the idea that these folk, who are eating their potatoes by the light of their little lamp, have tilled the earth themselves with these hands they are putting in the dish, and so it speaks of manual labour and — that they have thus honestly earned their food. I wanted it to give the idea of a wholly different way of life from ours — civilised people. So I certainly don’t want everyone just to admire it or approve of it without knowing why.”

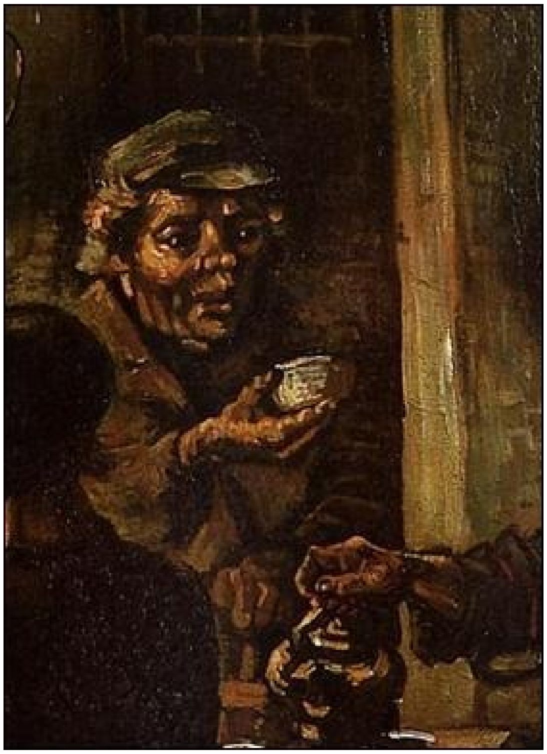
Writing to his sister Willemina two years later, van Gogh still considered *The Potato Eaters* his most successful painting: “What I think about my own work is that the painting of the peasants eating potatoes that I did in Nuenen is after all the best thing I did” However, the painting was criticised by his friend Anthon van Rappard soon after it was completed, which was a blow to van Gogh's confidence. He wrote back to his friend, “you...had no right to condemn my work in the way you did.”

On April 14, 1991, twenty major paintings were stolen from the Vincent van Gogh National Museum, including the *The Potato Eaters*. For unknown reasons, the thieves abandoned the art 35 minutes after the robbery and the paintings were quickly recovered.





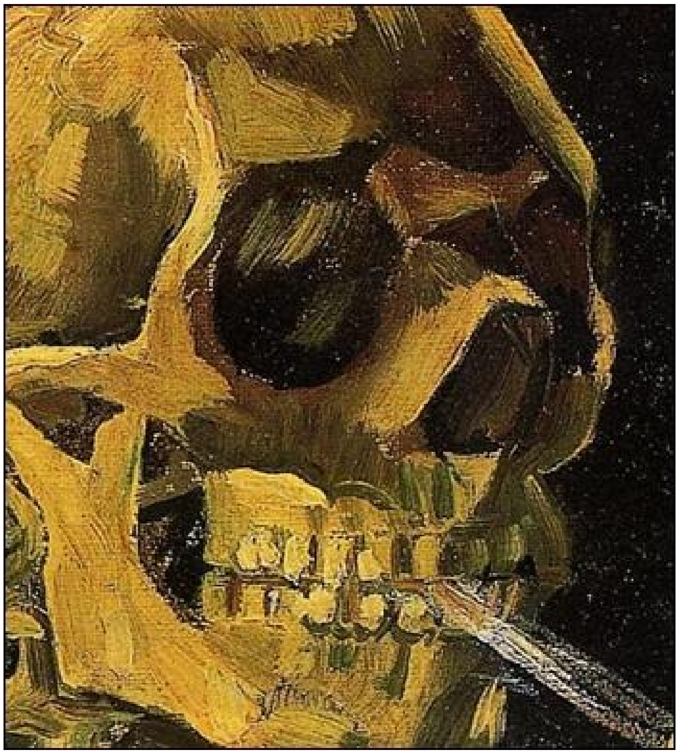
Detail



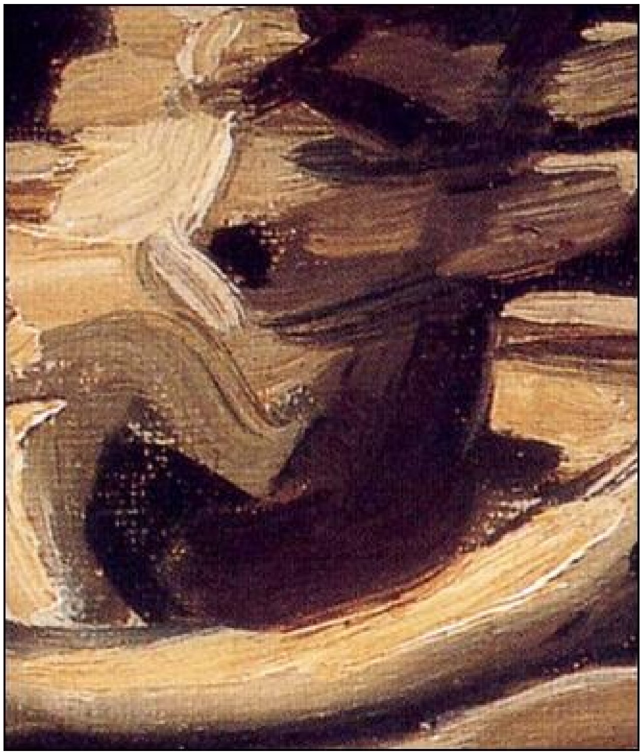
Detail

SKULL WITH BURNING CIGARETTE

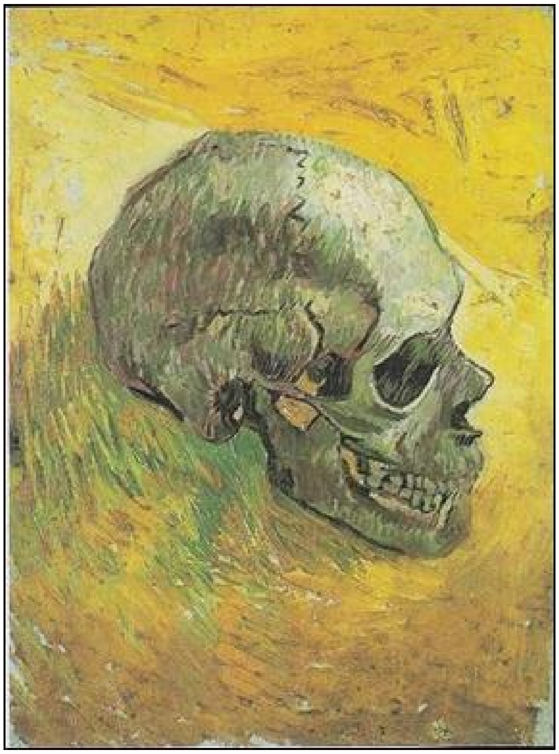
This unusual work is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Completed in 1886, it portrays a skeleton smoking a cigarette. The work has roused many interpretations, including a depiction of mortality and a prophetic cry of the dangers of tobacco. In the next two years van Gogh painted two other paintings with skulls, illustrating his fascination with the subject.



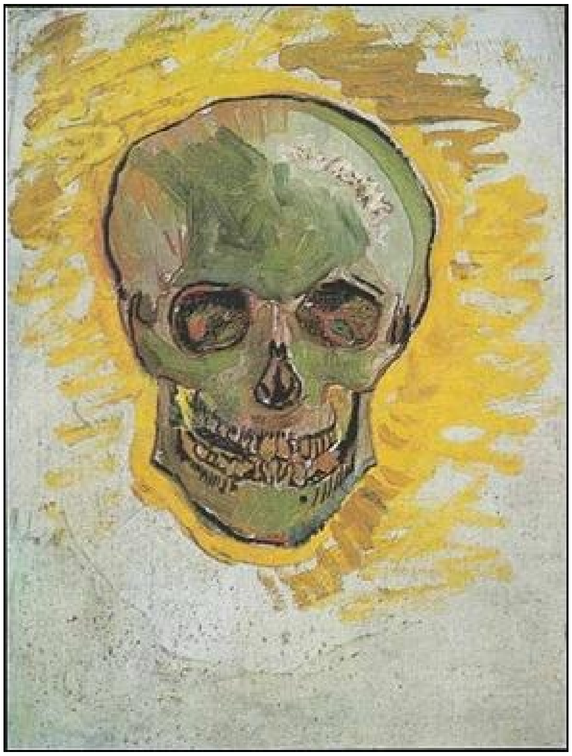
Detail



Detail



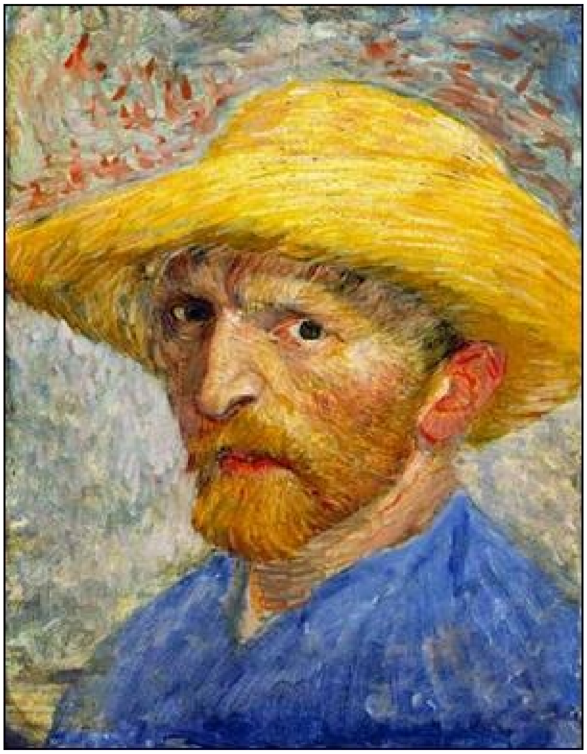
One of two other skull paintings (1882)

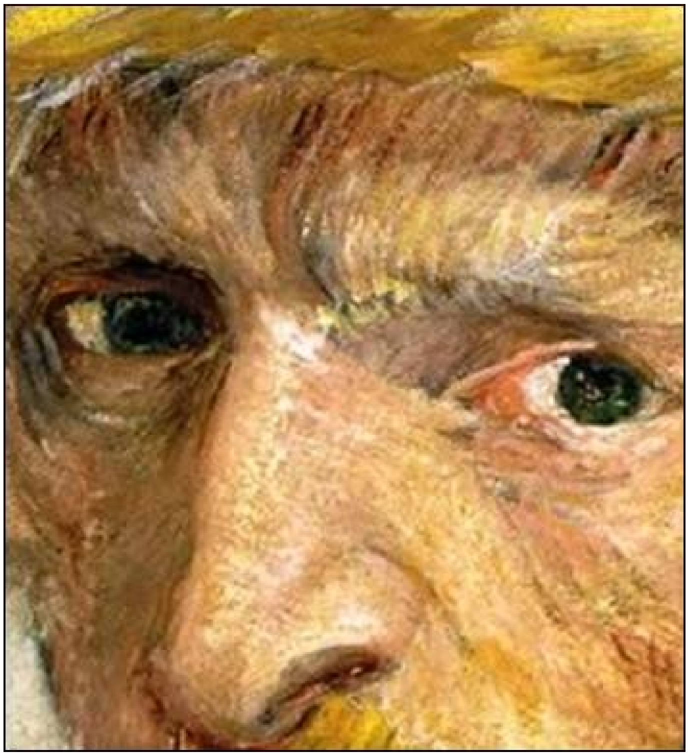


One of two other skull paintings (1888)

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH STRAW HAT

This painting was completed in the summer of 1887 and is now housed in the Detroit Institute of Arts. The dozens of self-portraits by van Gogh are an important part of his oeuvre, charting a vast range of emotions throughout the artist's short life. As in all the self-portraits, this painting depicts van Gogh's face as it appeared in the mirror. This work is particularly lurid in its choice of colours, with a vibrant blue uncharacteristic of van Gogh's other works in this genre. The artist portrays one eye in shadow, while he peers at the viewer with a searching gaze, at one time suggesting suspicion, and at another curiosity.



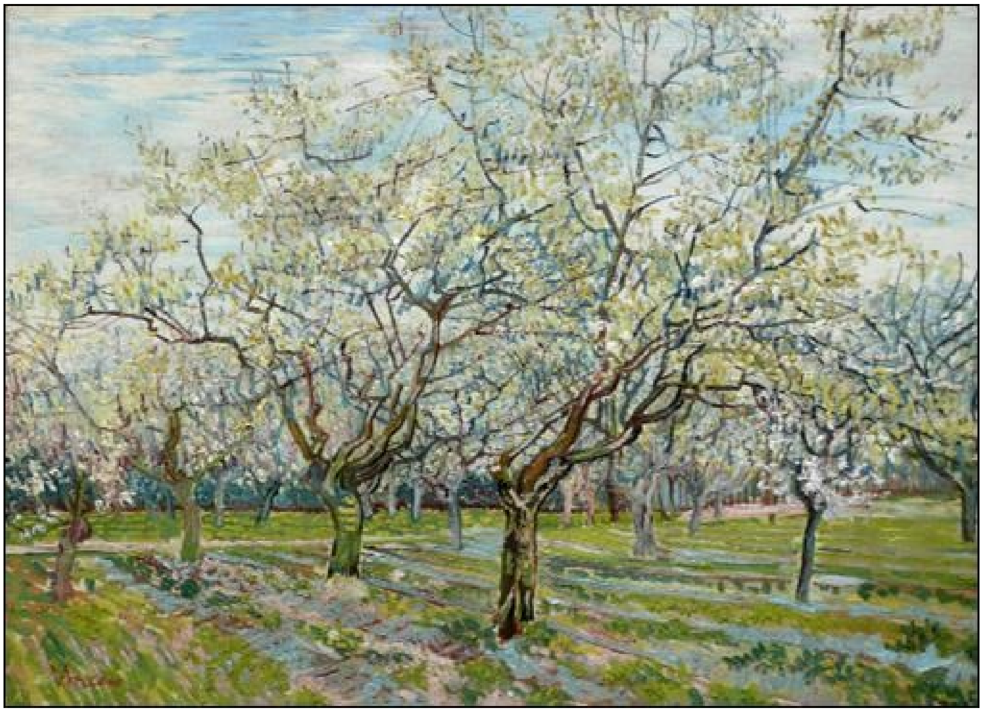


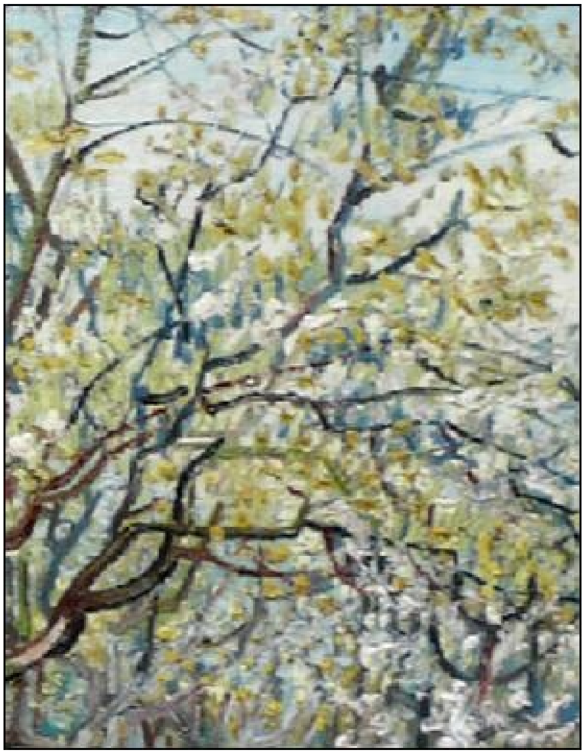
Detail

THE WHITE ORCHARD

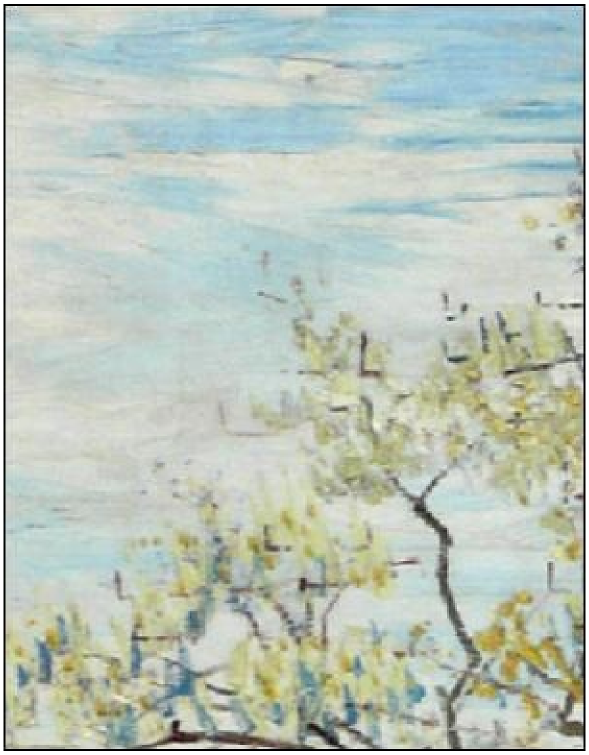
In the spring of 1888, while staying in Arles, southern France, van Gogh created a series of paintings now known as *The Flowering Orchards*. The artist arrived in Arles in February 1888 amid a snowstorm, but within two weeks the weather had changed and the fruit trees were in blossom. Appreciating the symbolism of rebirth, van Gogh worked with zeal on fourteen paintings of flowering trees in the early spring.

In April he completed *The White Orchard*, which now hangs in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Van Gogh wrote at the time in a letter to his brother Theo, “I am working on some plum trees, yellowish-white, with thousands of black branches.” Two days later he wrote of the same painting, “This morning I worked on an orchard of plum trees in bloom; all at once a fierce wind sprang up, an effect I had seen nowhere else but here, and returned at intervals. The sun shone in between, and all the little white flowers sparkled. It was so lovely. My friend the Dane came to join me, and I went on painting at the risk and peril of seeing the whole show on the ground at any moment - it's a white effect with a good deal of yellow in it, and blue and lilac, the sky white and blue.”

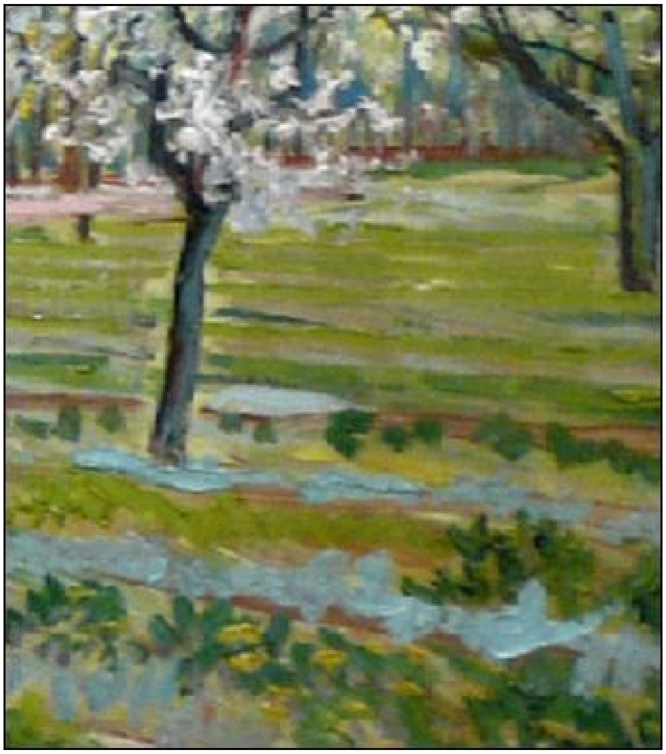




Detail



Detail

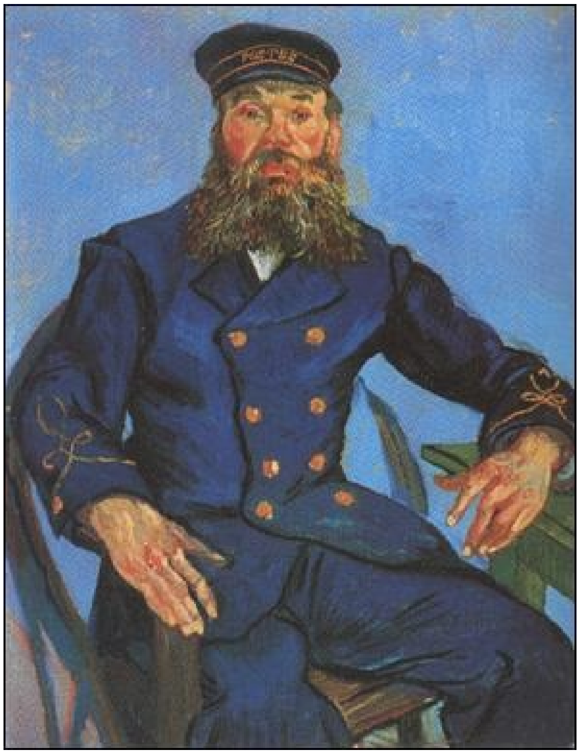


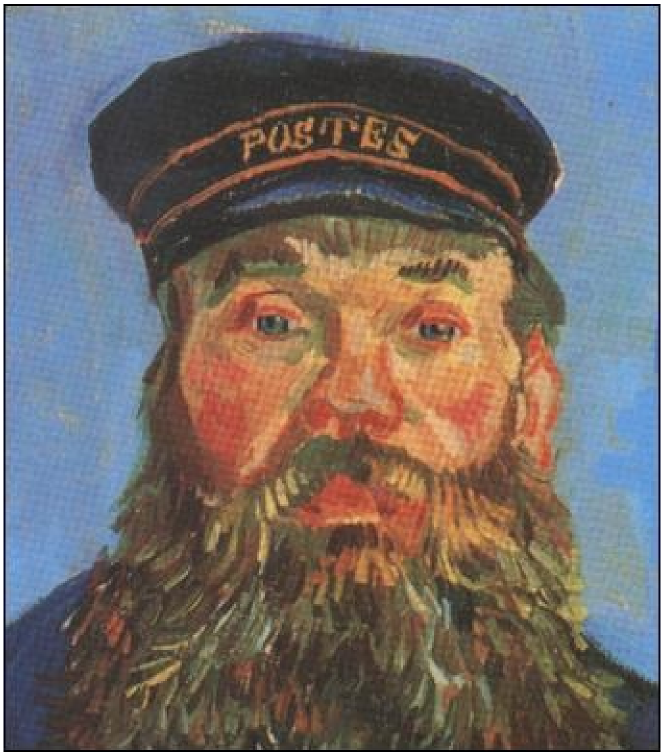
Detail

PORTRAIT OF THE POSTMAN JOSEPH ROULIN

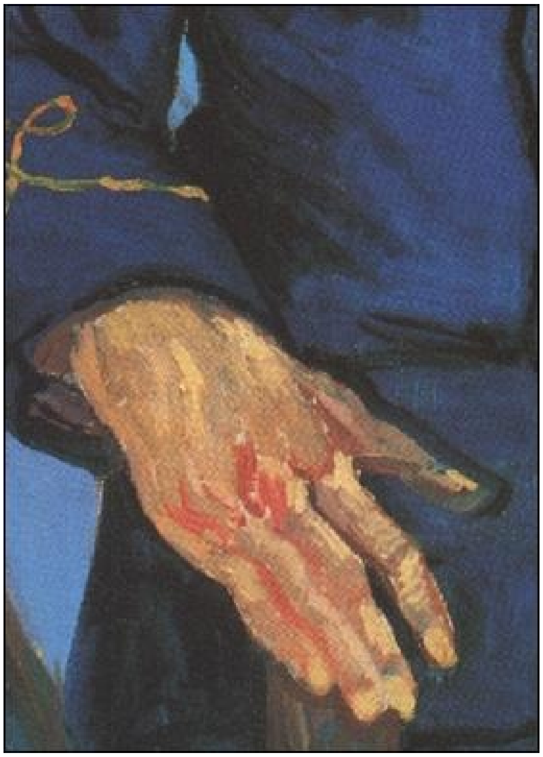
Van Gogh painted the family of postman Joseph Roulin in the winter of 1888. The family included Joseph Roulin, the postman; his wife, Augustine; and their three children. Van Gogh described the family as “really French, even if they look like Russians.” Over the course of just a few weeks, he painted Augustine and the children several times. Van Gogh used colour for dramatic effect. Each family member's clothes are portrayed in bold primary colours and van Gogh used contrasting colours in the background to intensify the impact of the work.

Completed in 1888, this painting is housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It depicts Joseph, the father of the family, who was born on 4 April 1841 in Lambesc. Van Gogh and the postman became good friends and drinking companions. Van Gogh compared Roulin to Socrates on many occasions. In appearance, Roulin reminded the painter of the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who had the same broad forehead, nose and shape of beard.





Detail



Detail

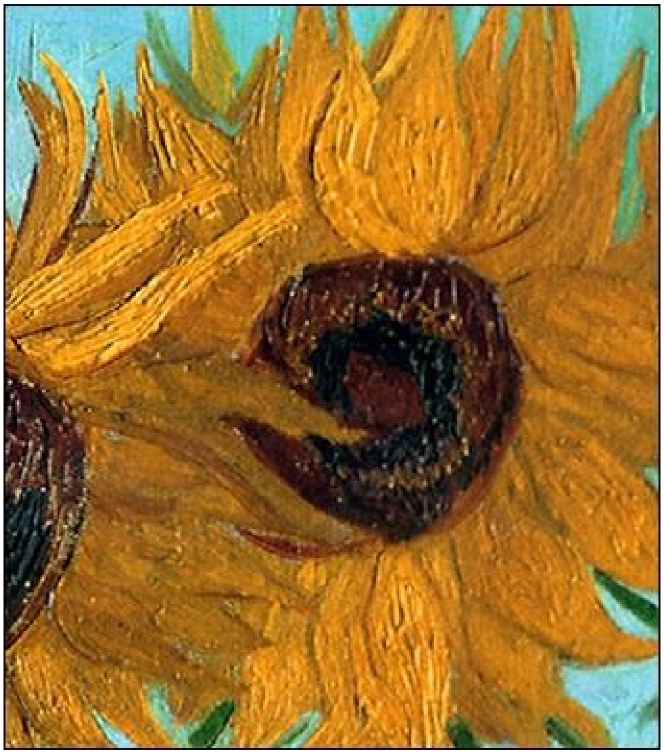
STILL LIFE: VASE WITH TWELVE SUNFLOWERS

Van Gogh completed two series of still life paintings of sunflowers. The earlier series was executed in Paris in 1887, depicting the flowers lying on the ground, while the second series was undertaken a year later in Arles, portraying bouquets of sunflowers in a vase. Van Gogh had hoped to welcome and impress his artist friend Gauguin with a Sunflowers work, which he hung in the guestroom of his Yellow House where Gauguin stayed.

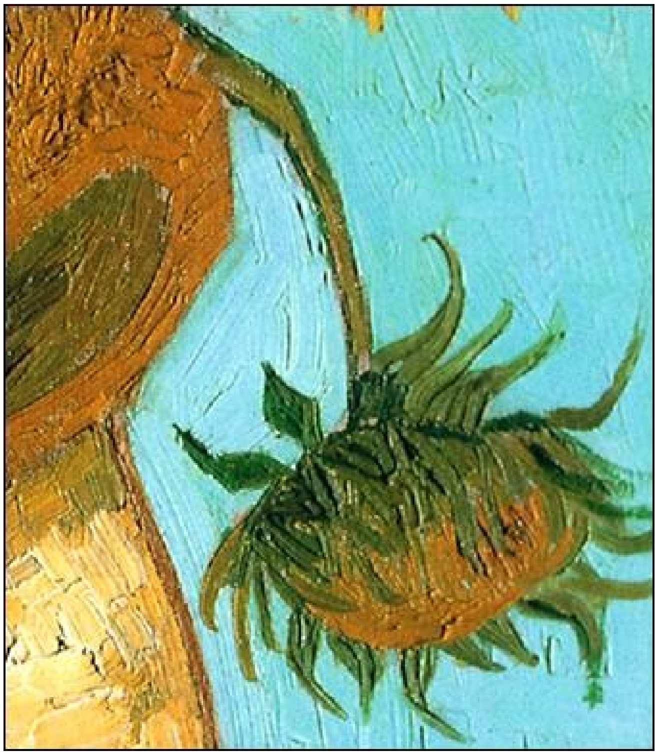
In a letter to Theo, van Gogh wrote, “It is a kind of painting that rather changes in character, and takes on a richness the longer you look at it. Besides, you know, Gauguin likes them extraordinarily. He said to me among other things, 'That...it's...the flower.' You know that the peony is Jeannin's, the hollyhock belongs to Quost, but the sunflower is somewhat my own.”

The sunflowers painting now housed in the Neue Pinakothek museum in Munich offers a particularly vibrant palette. The work is accentuated with deep sky blues and golden oranges, representing a time when van Gogh was truly happy, welcoming his friend Gauguin, with dreams of establishing an artists’ commune.

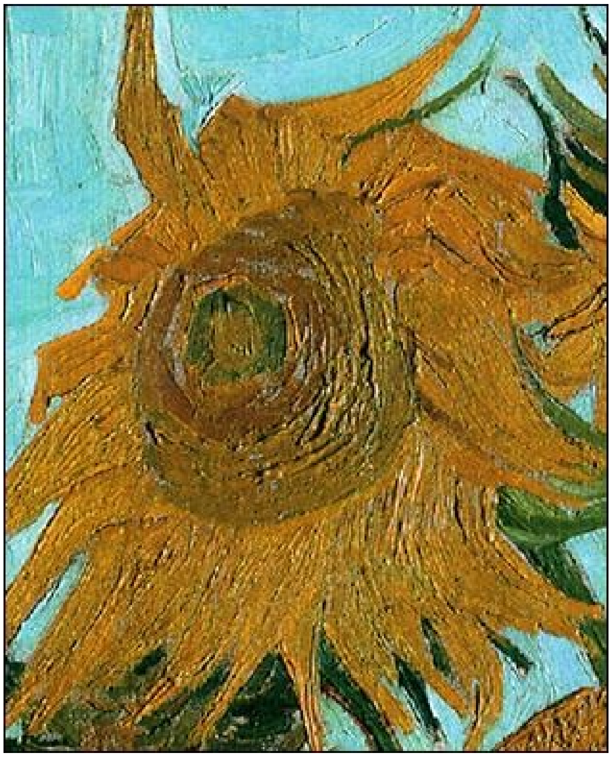
As van Gogh anticipated, his sunflower works have gone on to largely symbolise his corpus of works, with no Van Gogh exhibitions since 1901 voluntarily missing them out. There have been many forgeries of these works and they have also encouraged record-setting prices at auctions.



Detail



Detail



Detail

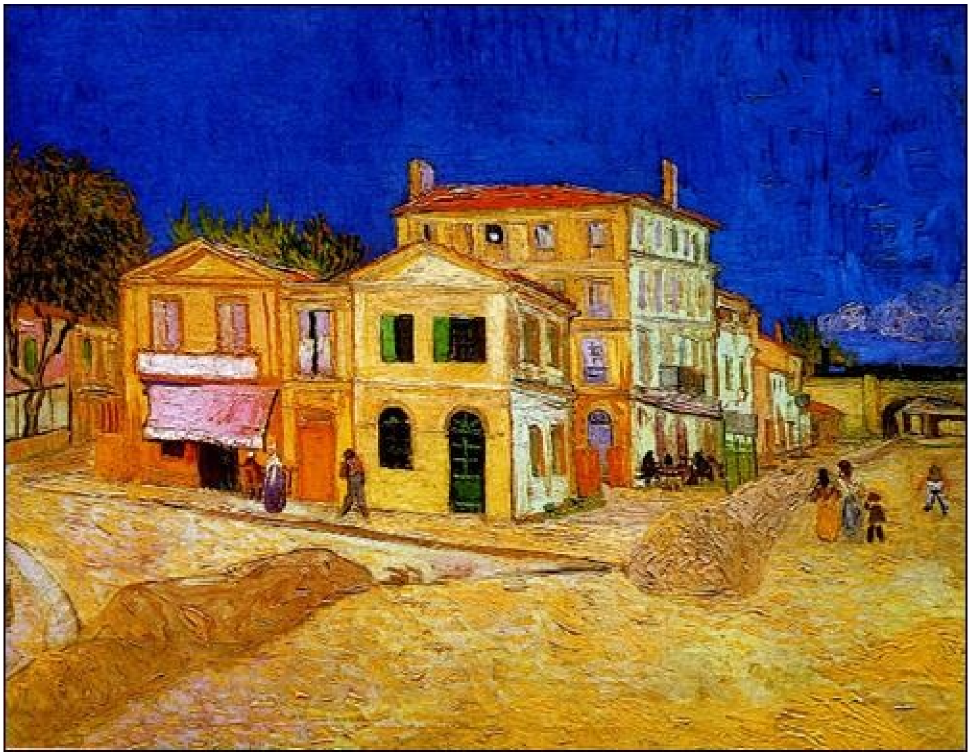
VINCENT’S HOUSE IN ARLES (THE YELLOW HOUSE)

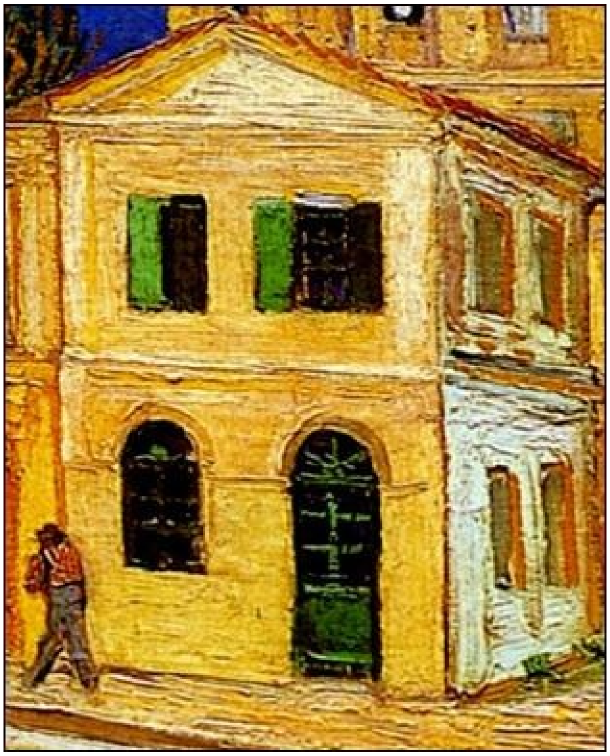
This painting depicts the right wing of 2 Place Lamartine, Arles, France — the house van Gogh rented in May 1888. The window on the first floor near the corner with both shutters open is the artist’s guest room, where Gauguin lived for nine weeks later in the same year. Behind the next window, with one shutter closed, is van Gogh's bedroom. Van Gogh depicts the restaurant, where he used to have his meals, in the building painted pink close to the left edge of the painting. To the right side of the Yellow House, the Avenue Montmajour runs down to the two railway bridges. The first line, with a train just passing, served the local connection to Lunel, which is on the opposite bank of the river Rhône. Sadly, the building was severely damaged in a bombing raid by the Allies on June 25, 1944 and was later demolished.

The painting was executed in September 1888, at which time van Gogh sent a sketch of the composition to his brother Theo, describing, “a sketch of a 30 square canvas representing the house and its setting under a sulphur sun under a pure cobalt sky. The theme is a hard one! But that is exactly why I want to conquer it. Because it is fantastic, these yellow houses in the sun and also the incomparable freshness of the blue. All the ground is yellow too. I will soon send you a better drawing of it than this sketch out of my head.

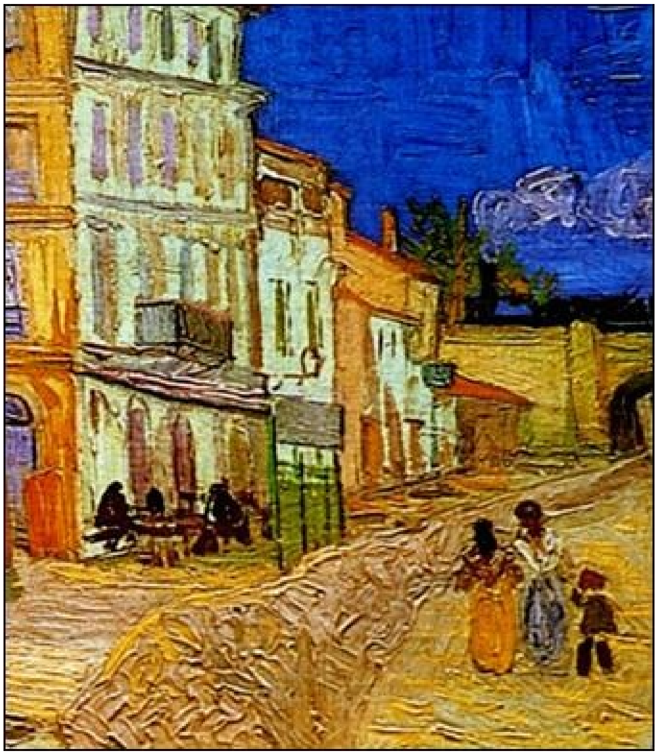
“The house on the left is yellow with green shutters. It's the one that is shaded by a tree. This is the restaurant where I go to dine every day. My friend the factor is at the end of the street on the left, between the two bridges of the railroad. The night café that I painted is not in the picture, it is on the left of the restaurant.”

The Yellow House has never left the artist's estate. Since 1962, it has been held by the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, established by the artist's nephew, and is permanently housed in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

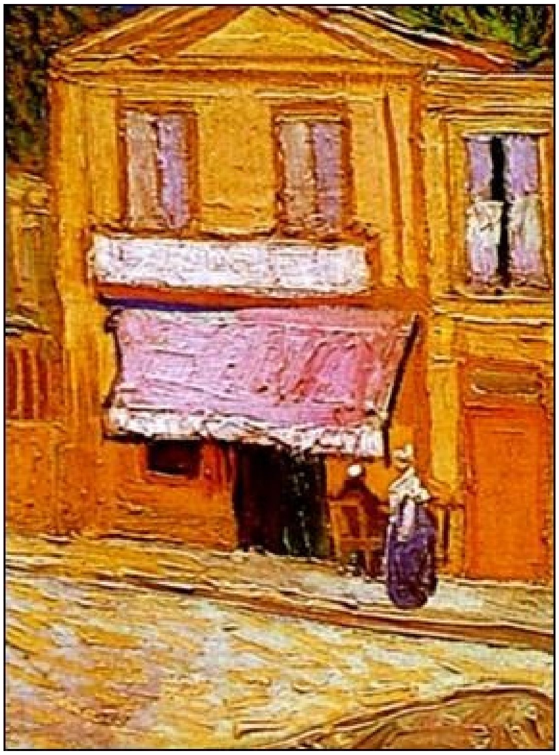




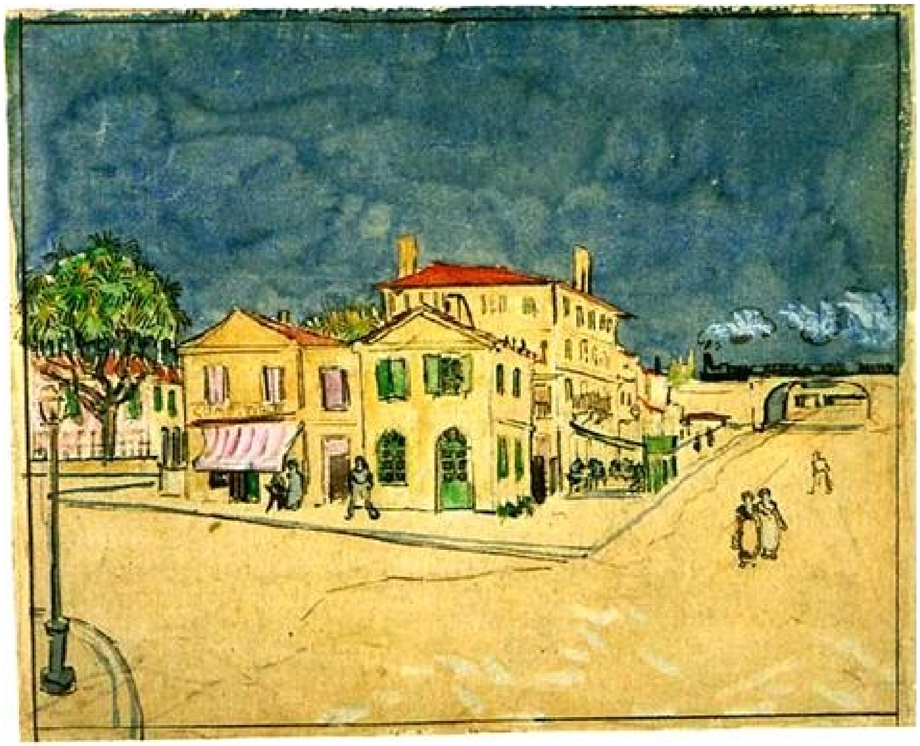
Detail



Detail



Detail



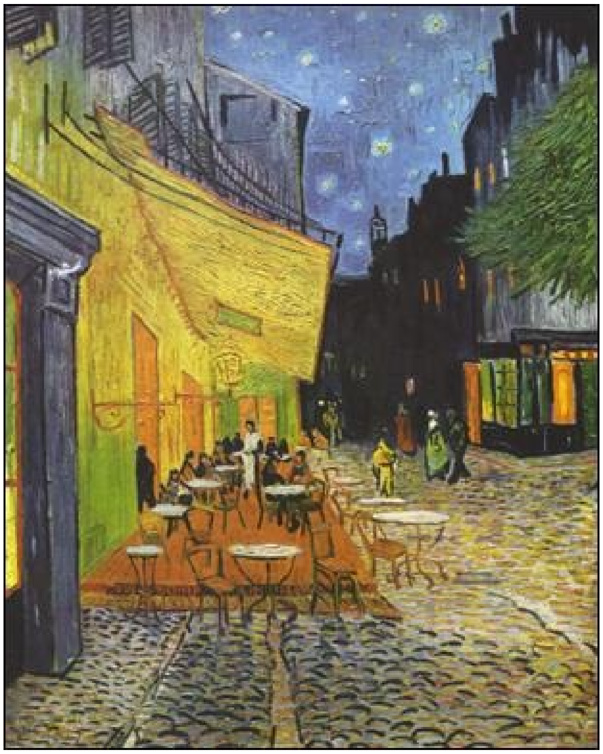
A watercolour of the house also by the artist

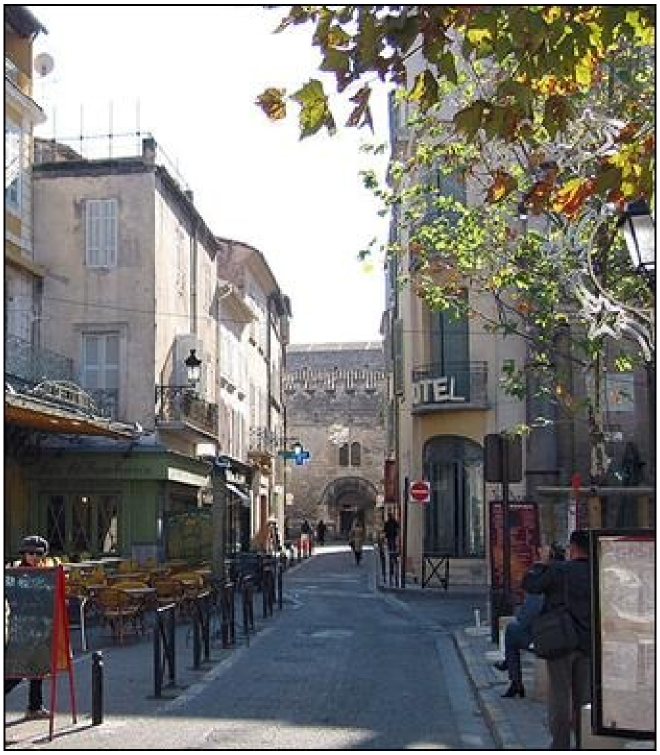
THE CAFÉ TERRACE ON THE PLACE DU FORUM, ARLES, AT NIGHT

This painting is housed at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands. Completed in Arles, France, in September 1888, it depicts the northeastern corner of the Place du Forum, looking south towards the terrace of the popular coffee house and the darkness of the rue du Palais. Towards the right, van Gogh portrays a lighted shop, with branches of the trees surrounding the place.

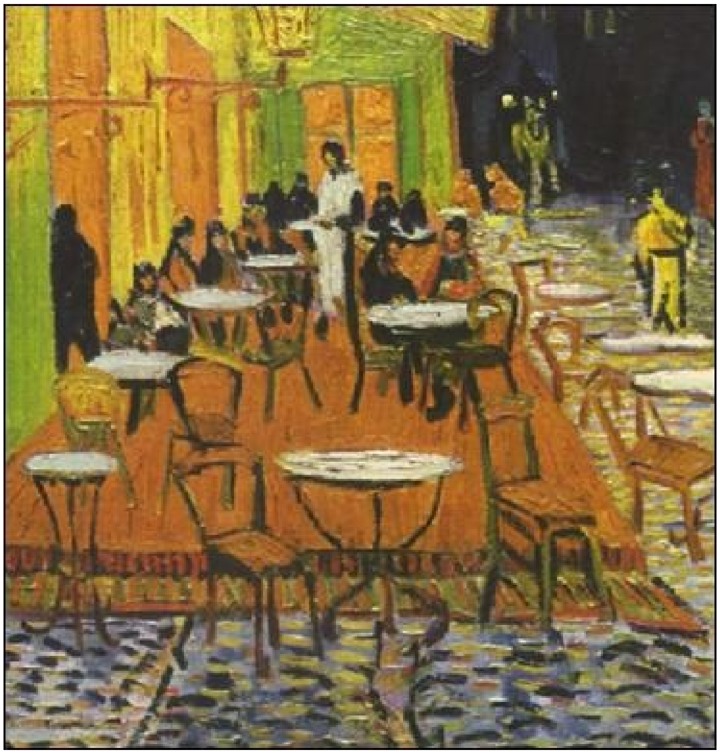
After finishing the work, van Gogh wrote a letter to his sister, saying, "I was only interrupted by my work on a new painting representing the exterior of a night café. On the terrace there are small figures of people drinking. An immense yellow lantern illuminates the terrace, the facade, the side walk and even casts light on the paving stones of the road which take a pinkish violet tone. The gables of the houses, like a fading road below a blue sky studded with stars, are dark blue or violet with a green tree. Here you have a night painting without black, with nothing but beautiful blue and violet and green and in this surrounding the illuminated area colours itself sulfur pale yellow and citron green. It amuses me enormously to paint the night right on the spot. Normally, one draws and paints the painting during the daytime after the sketch. But I like to paint the thing immediately. It is true that in the darkness I can take a blue for a green, a blue lilac for a pink lilac, since it is hard to distinguish the quality of the tone. But it is the only way to get away from our conventional night with poor pale whitish light, while even a simple candle already provides us with the richest of yellows and oranges."

Café Terrace at Night is the first painting in which van Gogh used starry backgrounds. Later, he went on to use this technique more prominently in *The Starry Night.*

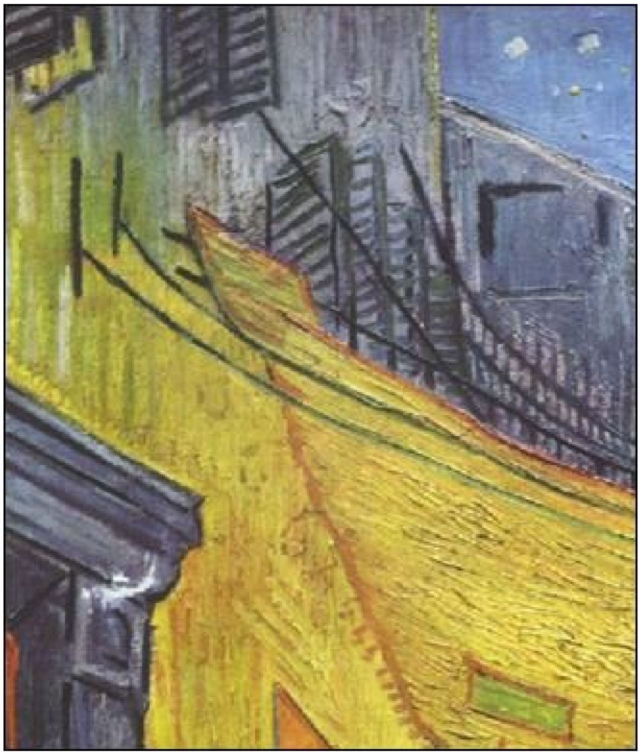




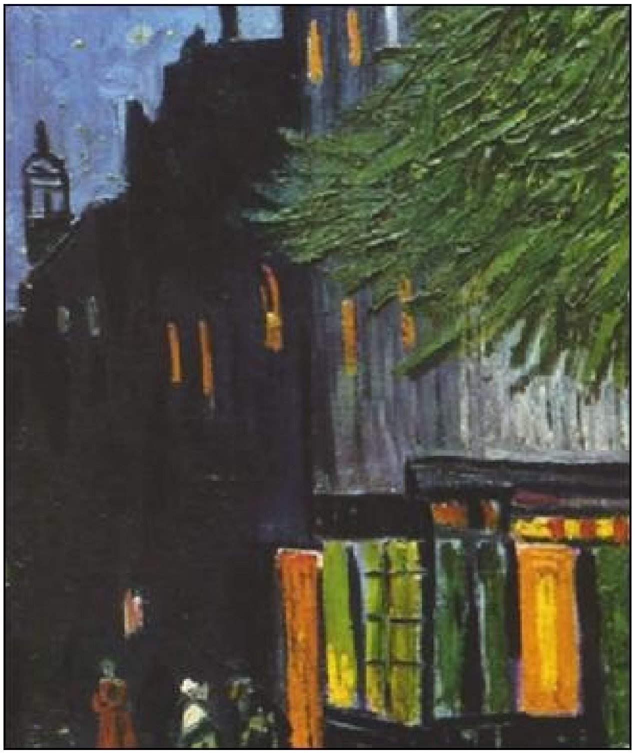
The same view in modern times



Detail



Detail



Detail

PORTRAIT OF DR. GACHET

This painting depicts Dr. Paul Gachet, who took care of van Gogh during the final months of his life. There are two authenticated versions of the portrait, both painted in June 1890 at Auvers. They portray the doctor sitting at a table and leaning his head on his right arm, but they are differentiated in colour and style. In the more famous version of the painting, two yellow books as well as the purple medicinal herb foxglove are displayed on the table. The foxglove in the painting is a plant from which digitalis is extracted for the treatment of certain heart complaints, perhaps an attribute of Gachet as a doctor.

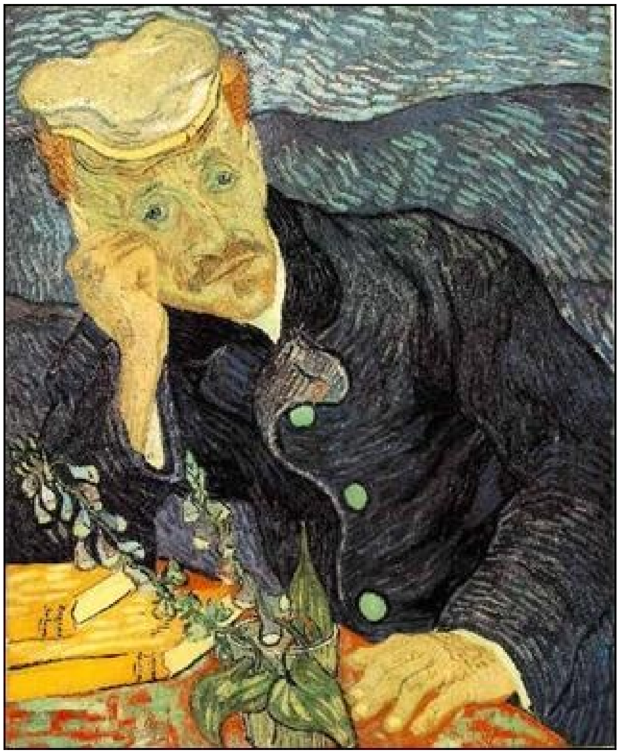
In 1890, Theo was searching for a home for his brother after his release from the asylum at Saint-Rémy. Upon the recommendation of Camille Pissarro, a former patient of the doctor, who told Theo of Gachet's interests in working with artists, Theo sent Vincent to Gachet's second home in Auvers.

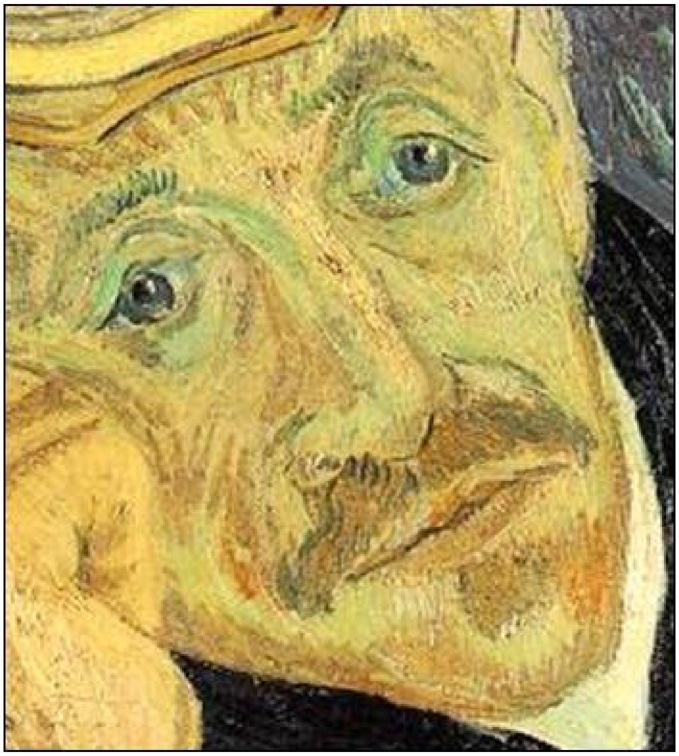
Van Gogh's first impression of Gachet was unfavourable, as shown when he wrote to his brother, “I think that we must not count on Dr. Gachet at all. First of all, he is sicker than I am, I think, or shall we say just as much, so that's that. Now when one blind man leads another blind man, don't they both fall into the ditch?” However, a letter dated two days later to their sister Wilhelmina, he remarked, “I have found a true friend in Dr. Gachet, something like another brother, so much do we resemble each other physically and also mentally.”

Later in the year, van Gogh wrote to Theo, “I've done the portrait of M. Gachet with a melancholy expression, which might well seem like a grimace to those who see it... Sad but gentle, yet clear and intelligent, that is how many portraits ought to be done... There are modern heads that may be looked at for a long time, and that may perhaps be looked back on with longing a hundred years later.”

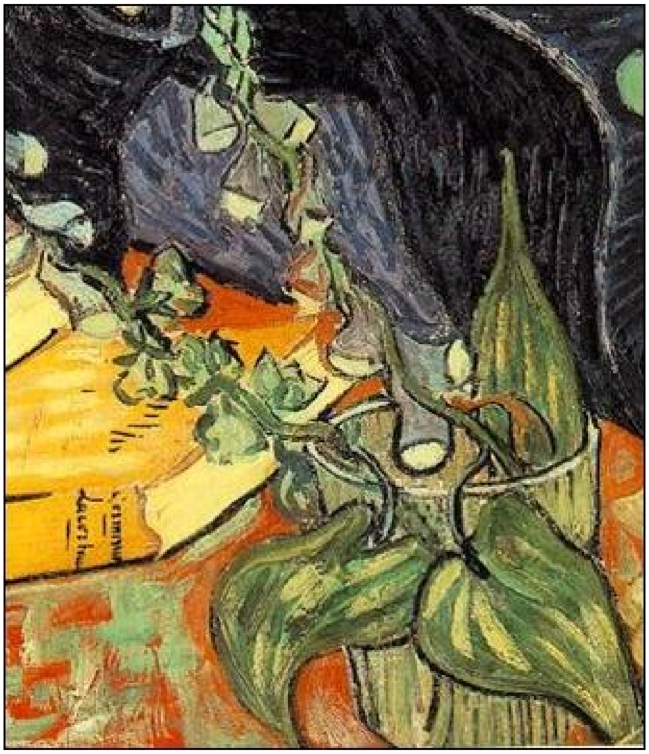
Van Gogh wrote to Paul Gauguin that in the painting the expression on the doctor’s face bears “the heartbroken expression of our time”, which comment has now achieved an element of fame in itself.

In 1990, the portrait fetched a record price of $82.5 million at auction in New York and so the work now resides in a private collection.

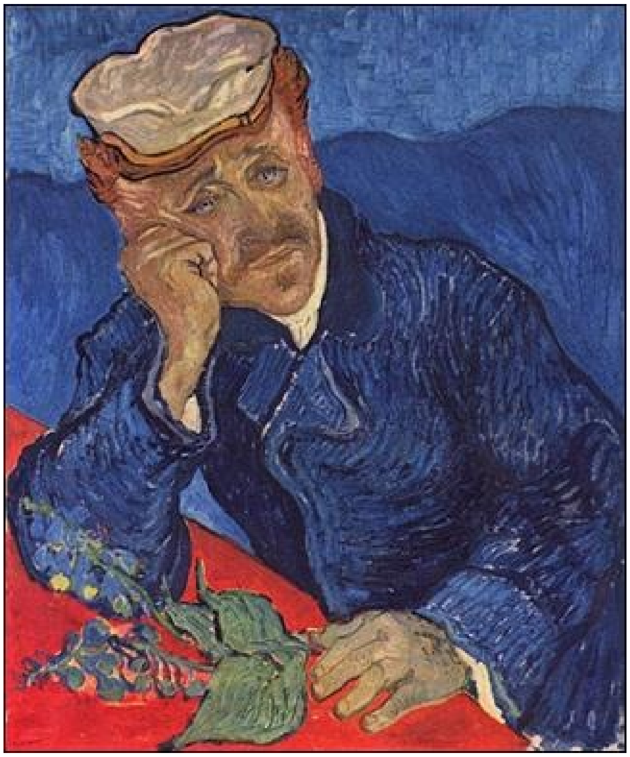




Detail



Detail



The second version, housed in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris

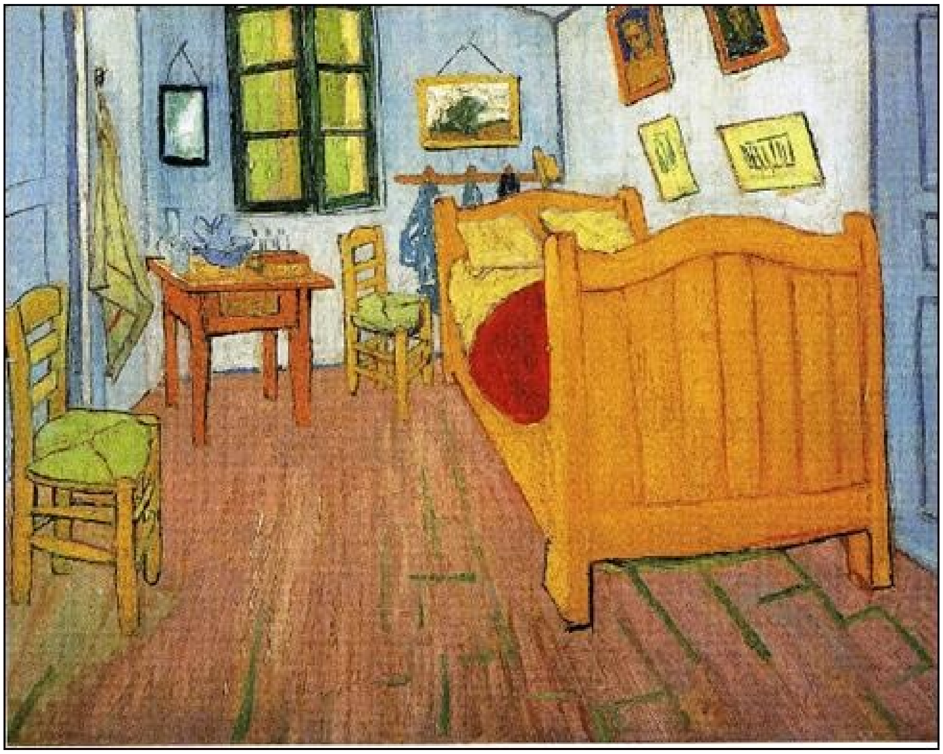
VINCENT'S BEDROOM IN ARLES

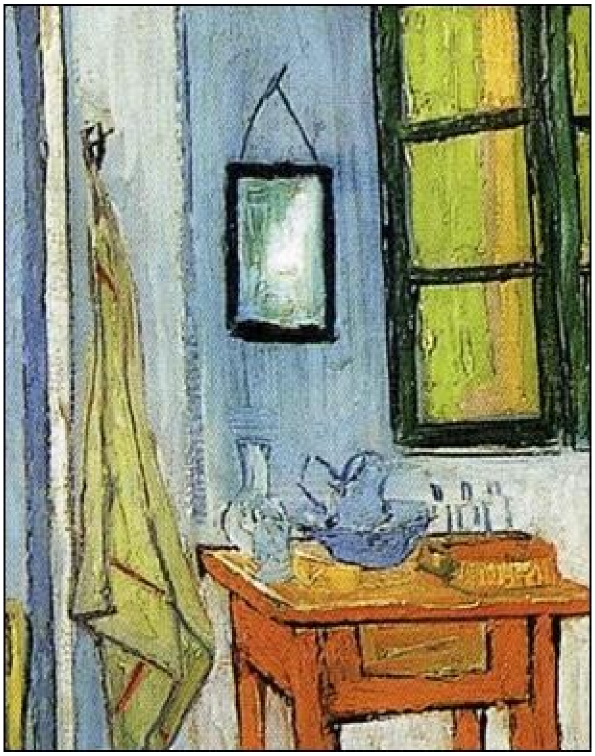
There are three versions of this painting, which are easily differentiated by the pictures depicted on the wall to the right. The painting portrays van Gogh's bedroom in Arles, Bouches-du-Rhône, known as his Yellow House. In the room, the door to the right opened to the upper floor and the staircase and the door to the left served the guest room he held prepared for Gauguin. The window in the front wall looked out towards Place Lamartine and the public gardens.

The first version was completed in October 1888 and is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. In a letter to Theo, van Gogh wrote, "it simply reproduces my bedroom; but colour must be abundant in this part, its simplification adding a rank of grandee to the style applied to the objects, getting to suggest a certain rest or dream. Well, I have thought that on watching the composition we stop thinking and imagining. I have painted the walls pale violet. The ground with checked material. The wooden bed and the chairs, yellow like fresh butter; the sheet and the pillows, lemon light green. The bedspread, scarlet coloured. The window, green. The washbasin, orangey; the tank, blue. The doors, lilac. And, that is all. There is not anything else in this room with closed shutters. The square pieces of furniture must express unswerving rest; also the portraits on the wall, the mirror, the bottle, and some costumes. The white colour has not been applied to the picture, so its frame will be white, aimed to get me even with the compulsory rest recommended for me. I have depicted no type of shade or shadow; I have only applied simple plain colours, like those in crêpes."

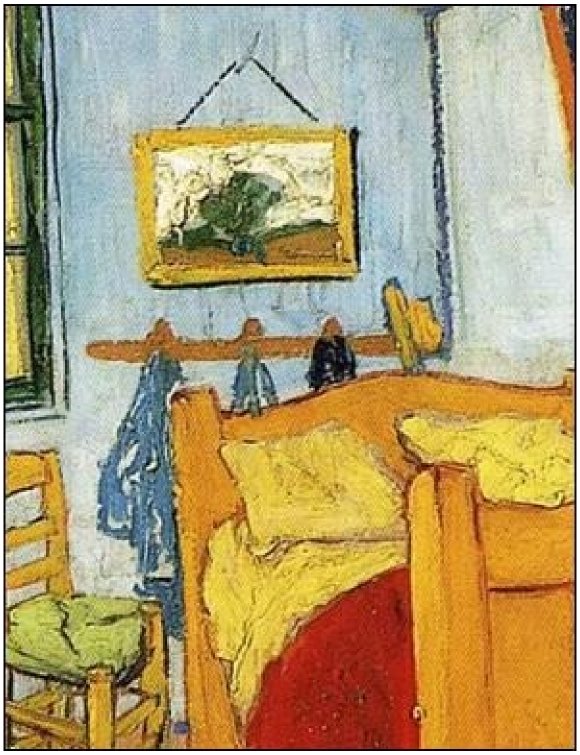
In April 1889, van Gogh sent the first version to his brother, regretting that it was damaged by the flood of the Rhône, while he was interned at the Old Hospital in Arles. Theo proposed to have it relined and sent back to him in order to copy it. This "repetition" in original scale was executed in September 1889. Both paintings were then sent back to Theo.

The first version never left the artist's estate. Since 1962, it has been held in the possession of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, established by Vincent Willem van Gogh, the artist's nephew, and is on permanent loan to the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. The second version is housed in the Art Institute of Chicago, whilst the third can be viewed in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

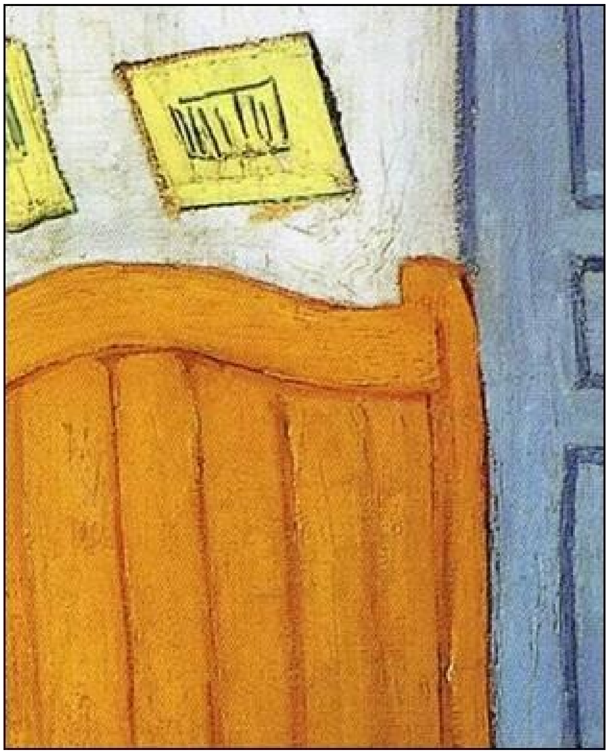




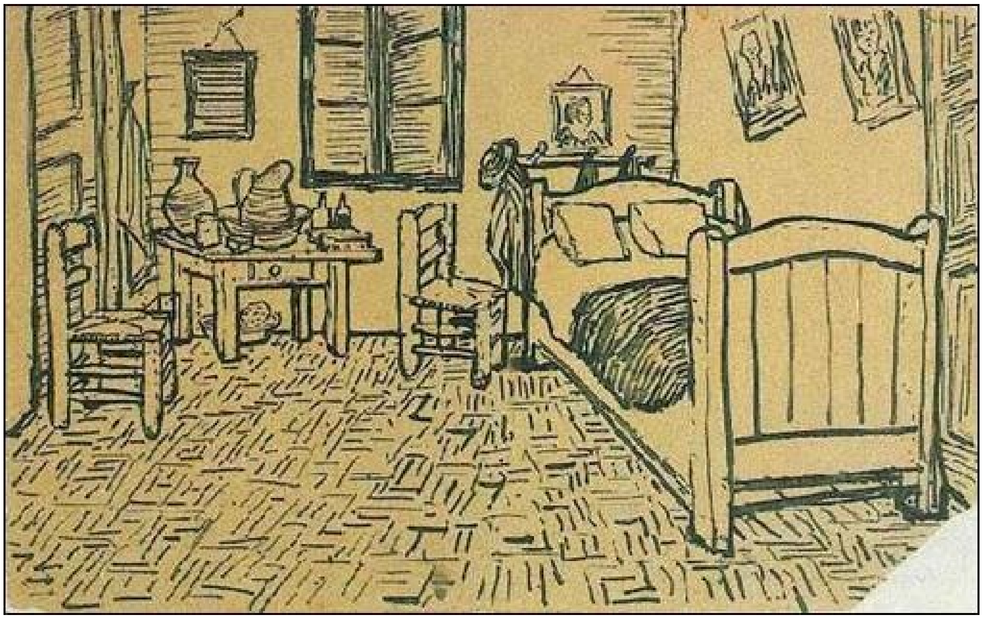
Detail



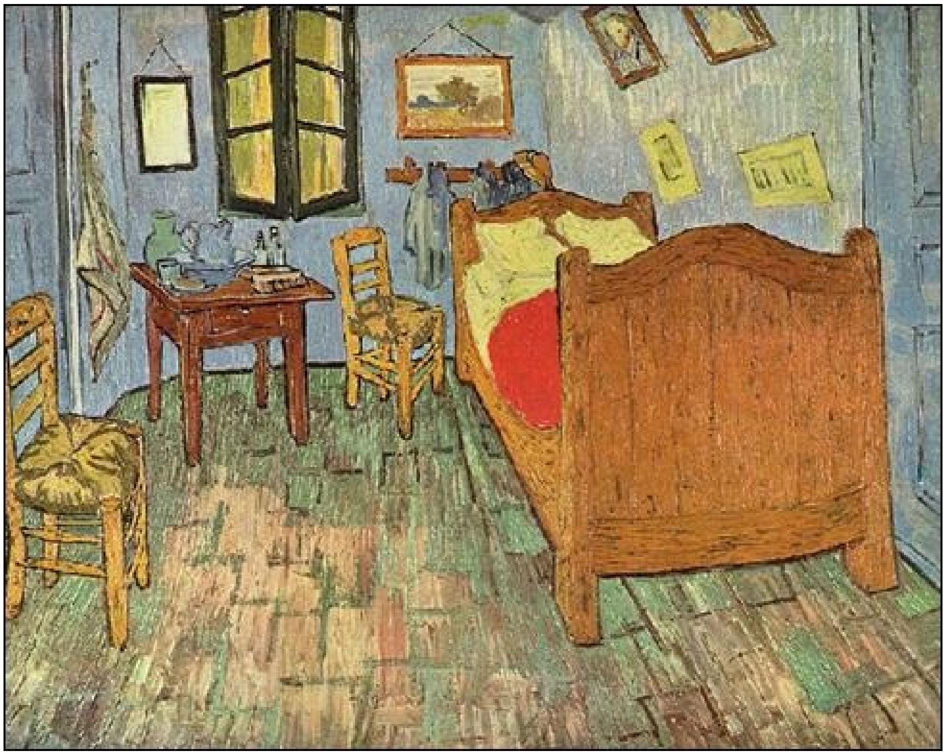
Detail



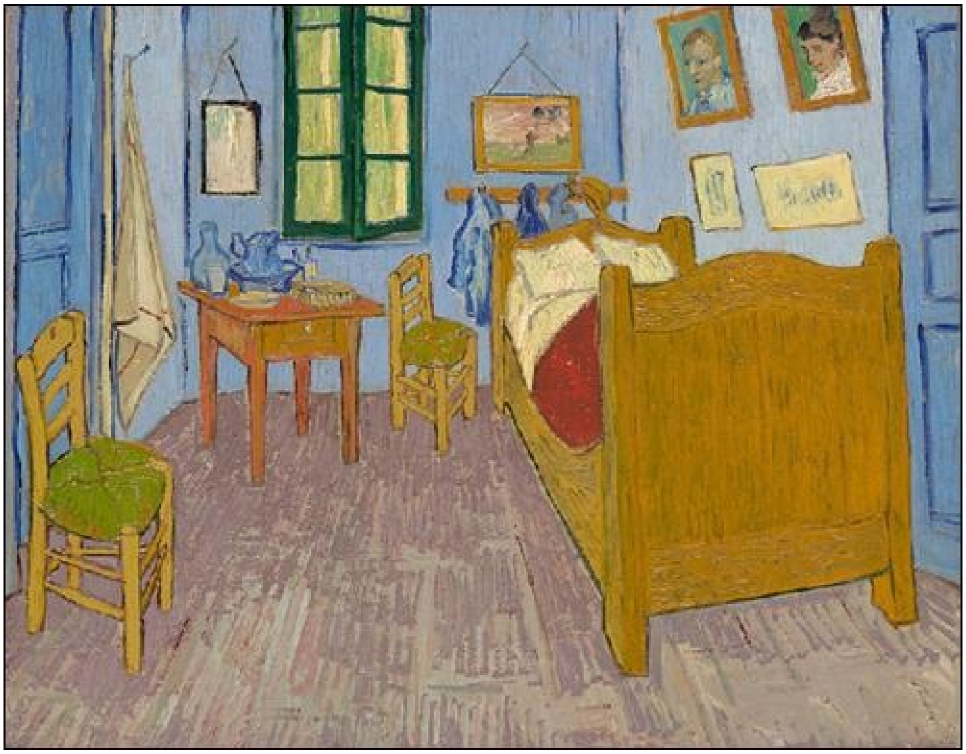
Detail



A sketch of the bedroom made to Theo



Second version

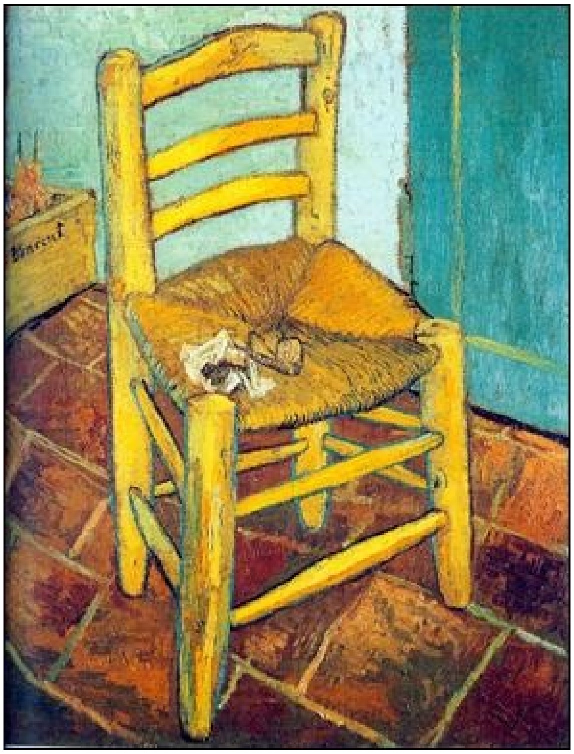


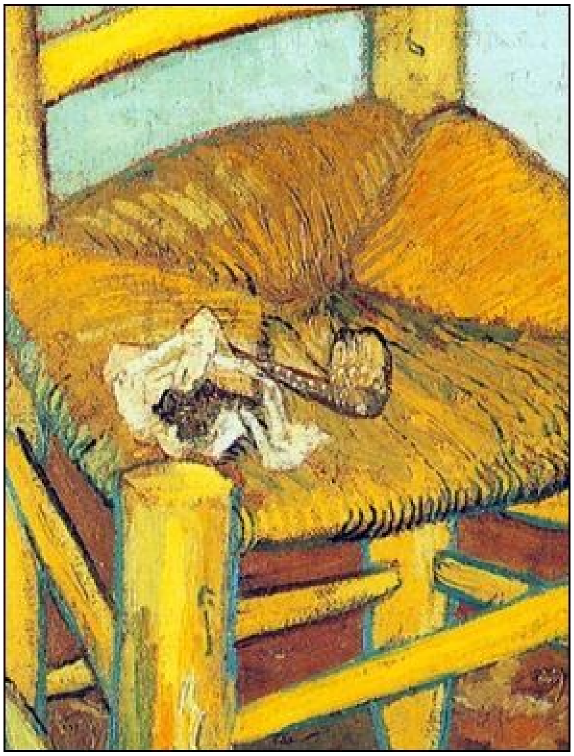
Third version

VINCENT'S CHAIR WITH HIS PIPE

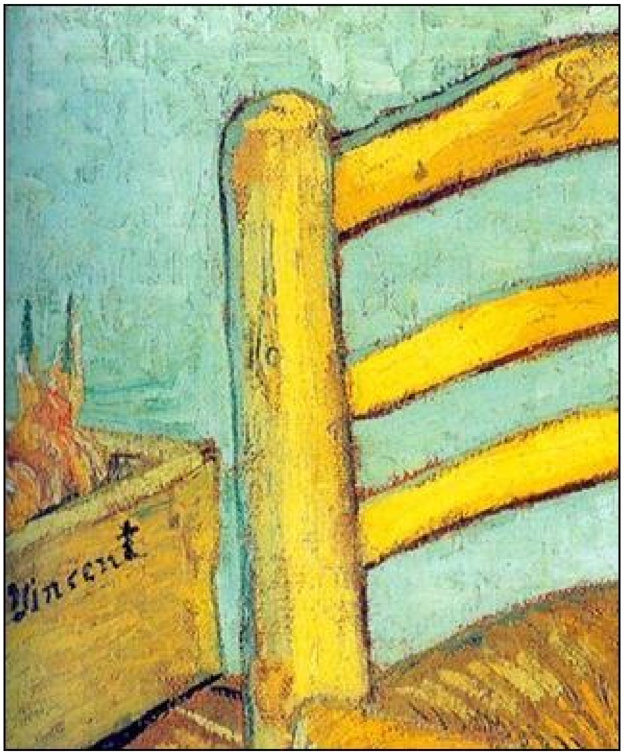
Completed in Arles late in 1888 and now housed in the National Gallery, London, this painting depicts the artist's humble chair and pipe. The work was completed shortly after Gauguin's departure from the Yellow House. The two artists had quarrelled bitterly, causing Gauguin to write to Theo, "The incompatibility of both our characters means that Vincent and I cannot live together peacefully. It is imperative that I leave."

Vincent was devastated, seeing his dreams of establishing an artists' commune with Gauguin shatter and disappear. In response, he painted his and Gauguin's empty chairs, symbolising the loneliness and isolation that he felt. Van Gogh's wooden chair is more modest, with the pipe and tobacco adding to its humble image; whilst Gauguin's more elaborate chair, holding a book and candle, suggests learning and ambition. Van Gogh's choice of colours for his chair include yellow and violet, hinting at daylight and a metaphorical idea of hope for the future. In contrast, Gauguin's chair is depicted in darker colours of red and green, which along with the candle, enforce the idea of night-time. Together, the pictures represent day and night, with the painting of Gauguin's chair suggesting that the absent friend had brought light and happiness to van Gogh's evenings.

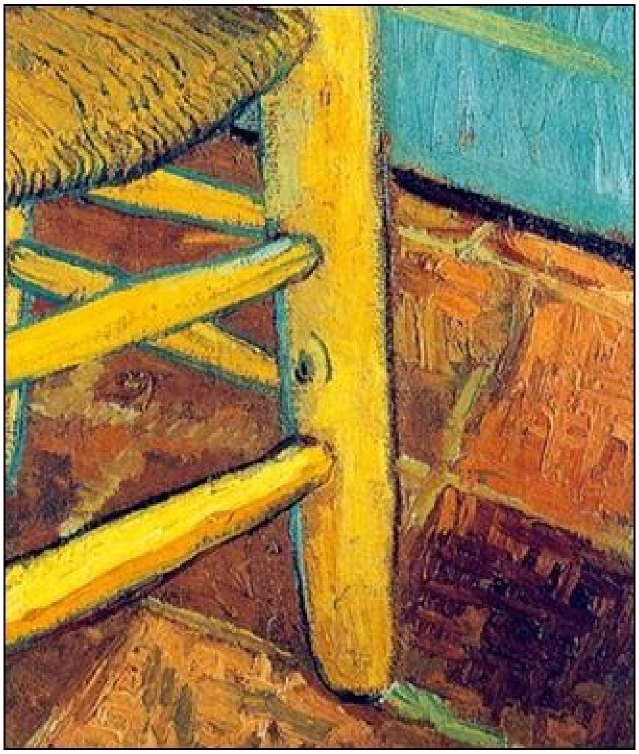

Vincent



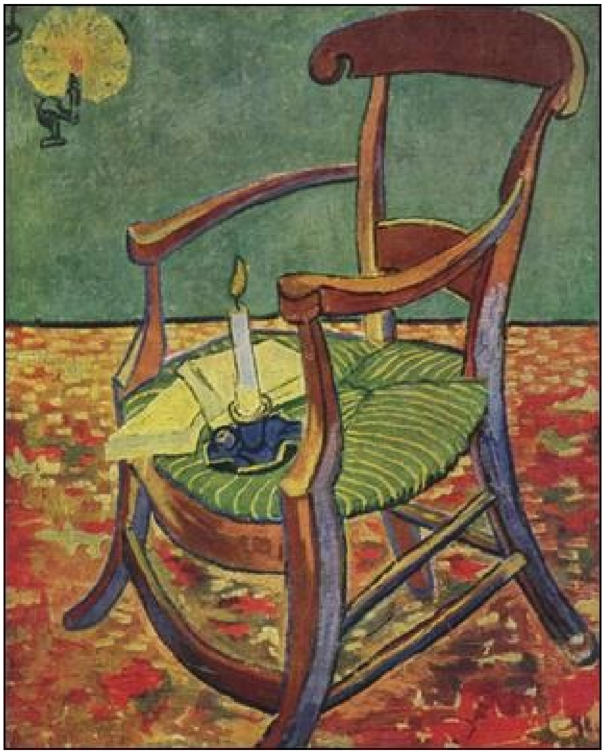
Detail



Detail



Detail

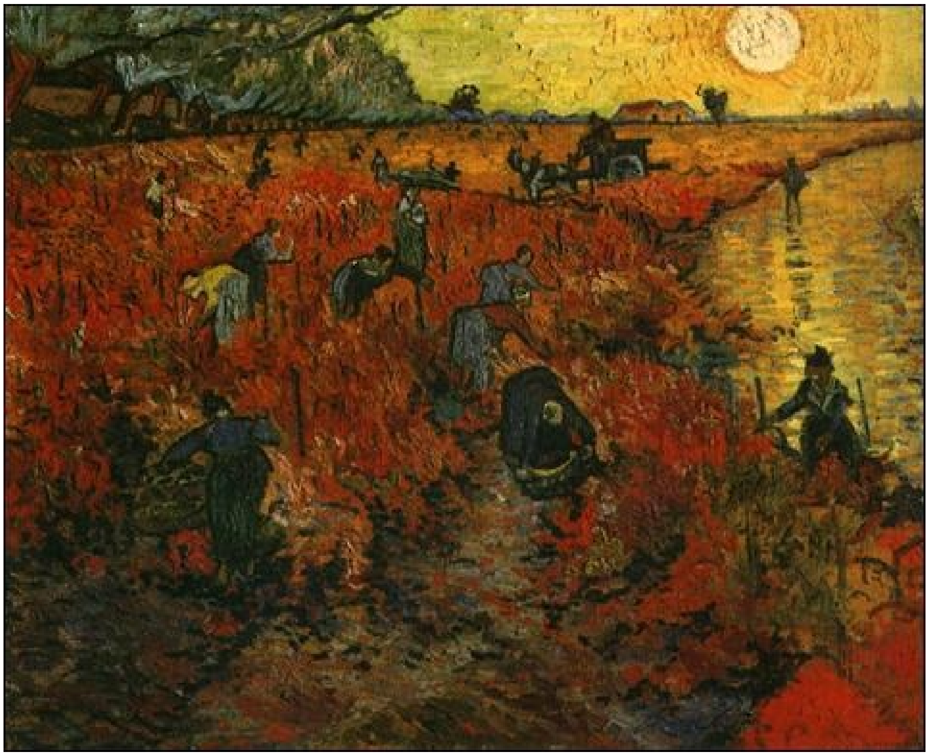


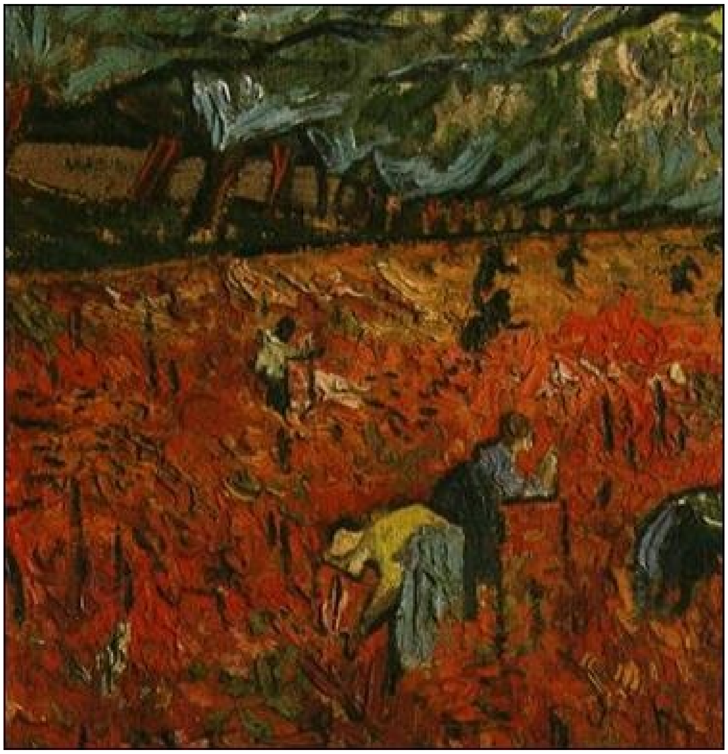
Gauguin’s chair, completed close to the same time

THE RED VINEYARD

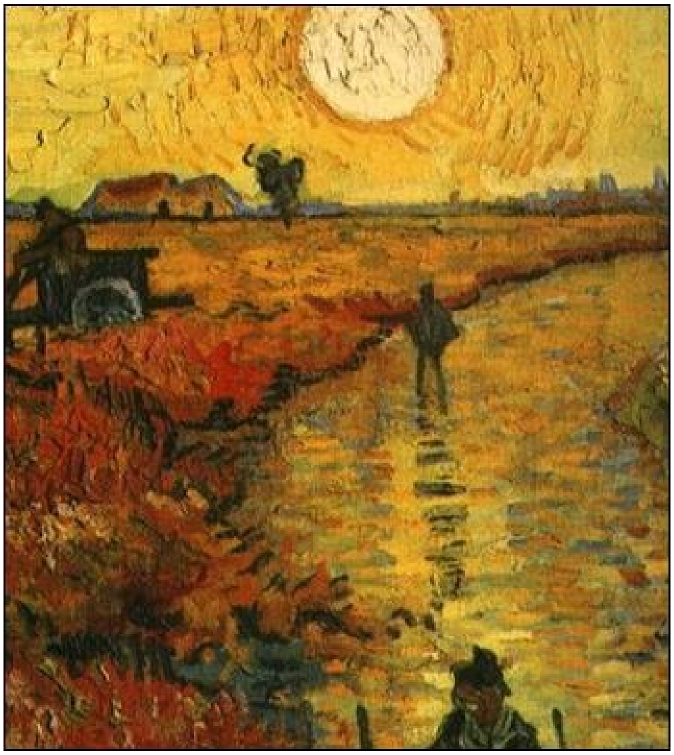
Completed in early November 1888 in Arles, this painting is supposedly the only work sold by van Gogh during his lifetime. *The Red Vineyard* was exhibited for the first time at the annual exhibition of Les XX, 1890 in Brussels, and sold for 400 Francs to Anna Boch, an impressionist painter, member of Les XX and art collector from Belgium. Anna was the sister of Eugène Boch, another impressionist painter and a friend of van Gogh, too, who had painted Boch's portrait in Arles in the autumn of 1888.

The Red Vineyard was acquired by the famous Russian collector Sergei Shchukin. It was then nationalised by the Bolsheviks with the rest of his collection and eventually passed over to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow.





Detail



Detail

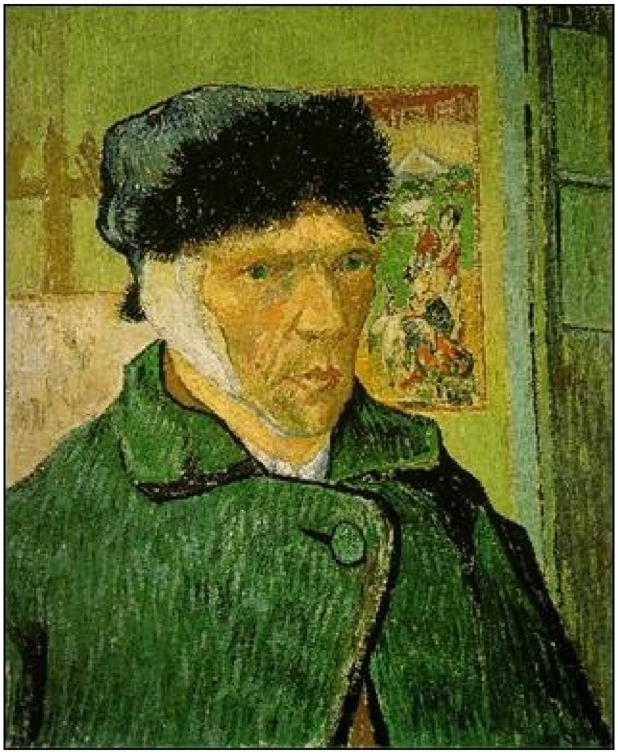
Anna Boch in her studio

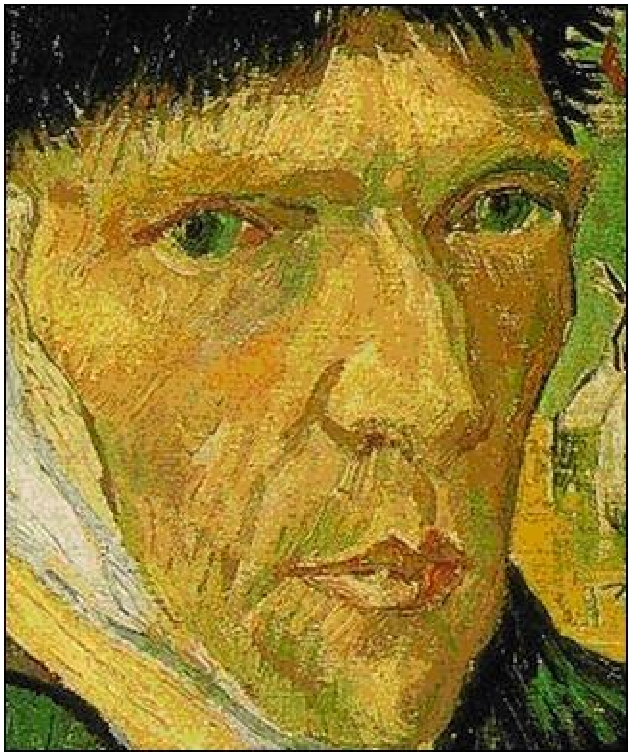
SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BANDAGED EAR

This haunting portrait was completed in January 1889 and is housed in the Courtauld Institute Galleries, London. On 23 December 1888, frustrated and ill, van Gogh confronted Gauguin with a razor blade, but in panic, left and fled to a local brothel. Intensely lonely at the time, he often visited the prostitutes at a brothel on Rue du Bout d'Aeles as his single point of sensuous contact with other people. While there, he cut off his left ear, which he wrapped in newspaper and handed to a prostitute named Rachel, asking her to “keep this object carefully.” He staggered home, where he was later found by Gauguin lying unconscious, his head covered in blood.

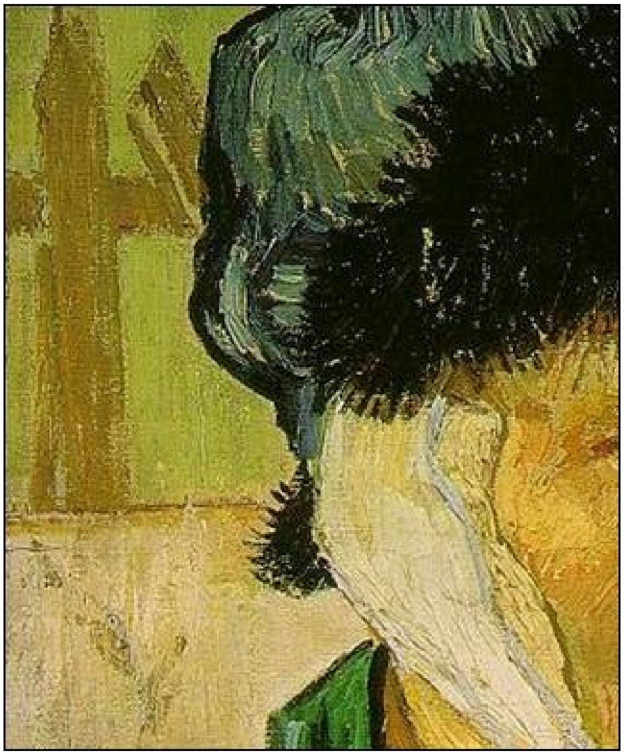
Van Gogh was taken to a hospital and remained in a critical state for several days. He asked for Gauguin continually, but the Frenchman stayed away. Gauguin told one of the policeman attending the case, “Be kind enough, Monsieur, to awaken this man with great care, and if he asks for me tell him I have left for Paris; the sight of me might prove fatal for him.” Gauguin wrote to Theo, “His state is worse; he wants to sleep with the patients, chase the nurses, and washes himself in the coal bucket. That is to say, he continues the biblical mortifications.” Gauguin left Arles and never saw van Gogh again.

In January 1889, van Gogh returned to the Yellow House, but spent the following month between the hospital and home, suffering from hallucinations and delusions that he was being poisoned. In March, the police closed his house after a petition by 30 townspeople, who called him the ‘redheaded madman’. At this difficult time van Gogh painted this self-portrait, clearly emphasising the bandaged ear, which covers the left side of his face, contrasting strongly with the bright, vivid colours of the Japanese woodcut on the wall. The thick coat covering the artist might suggest that he seeks protection from the outside world, if not the horrors in his mind.

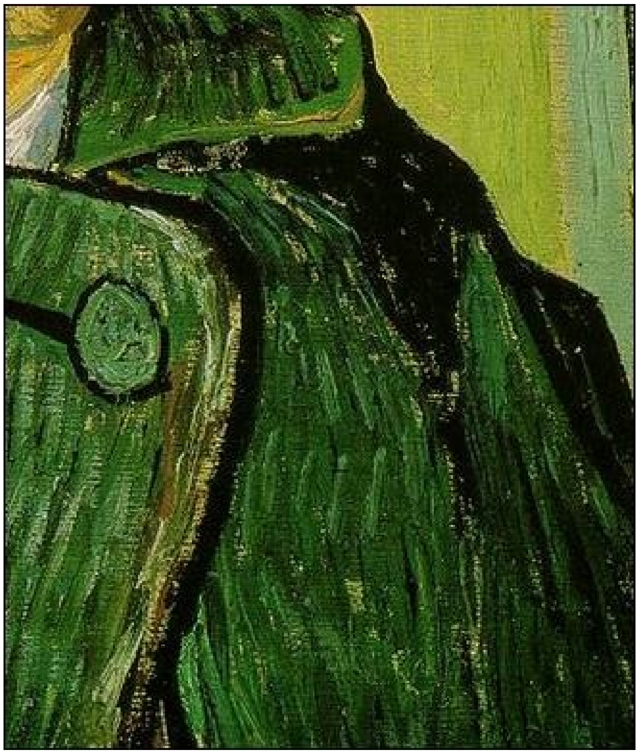




Detail



Detail



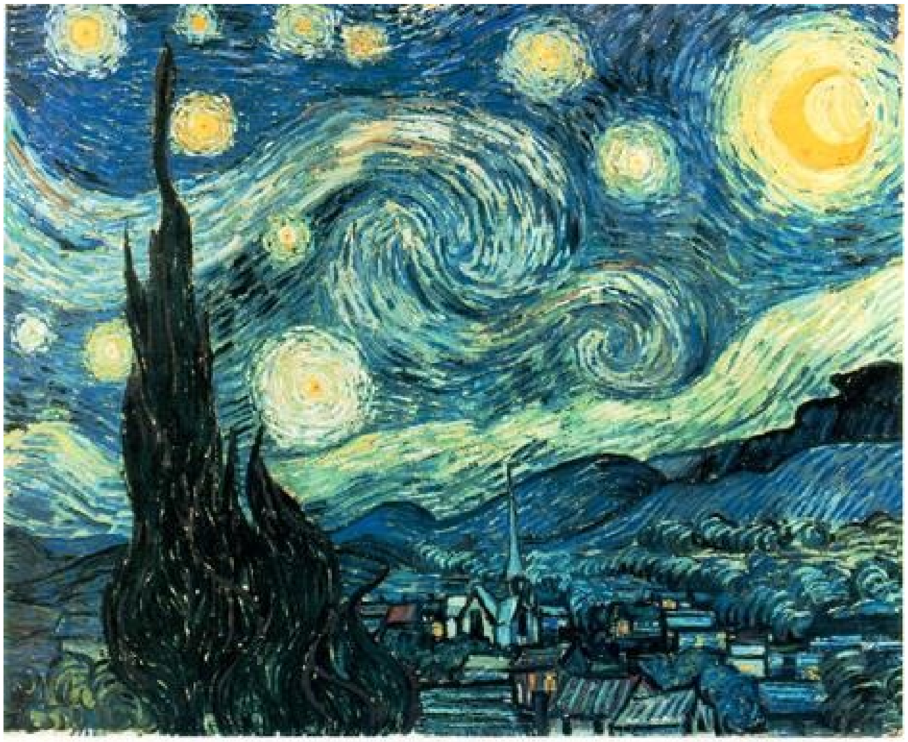
Detail

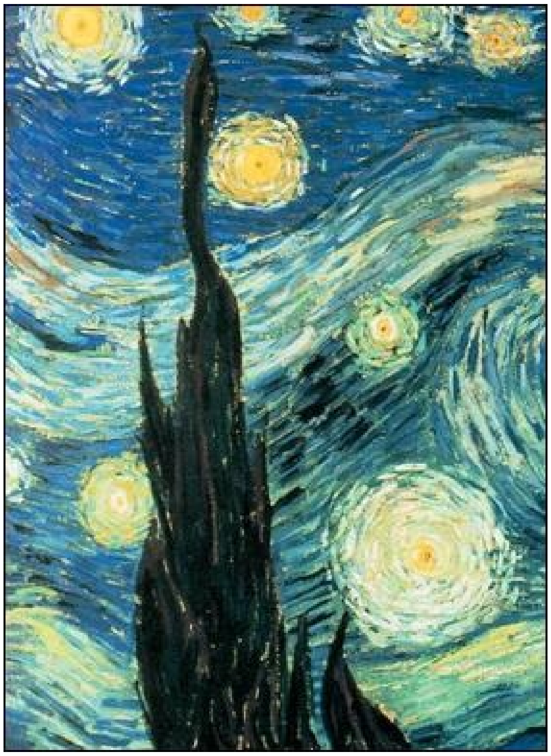
THE STARRY NIGHT

Housed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, this is one of the most famous paintings ever created and considered by many to be van Gogh’s masterpiece. Painted in September 1888, it depicts the view outside van Gogh’s sanatorium room window at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence at night, though it would have been painted from memory during the day.

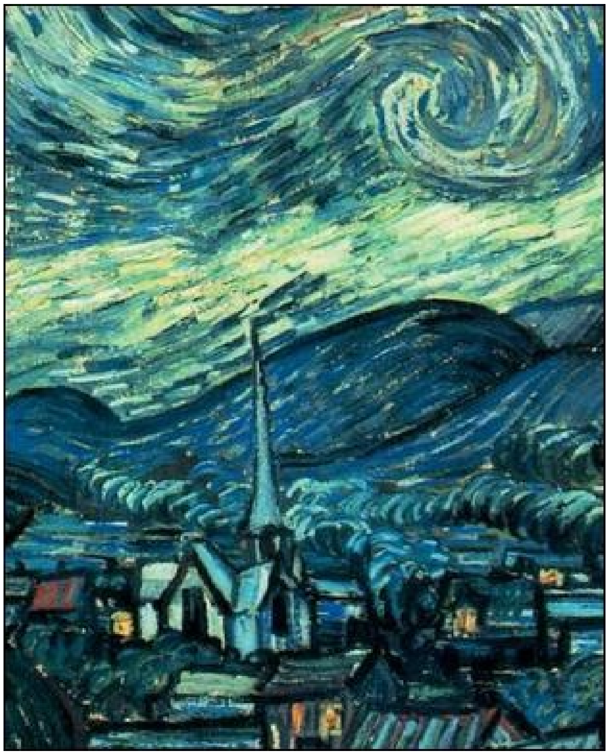
In a letter to Theo, van Gogh explained, “it does me good to do what’s difficult. That doesn’t stop me having a tremendous need for, shall I say the word — for religion — so I go outside at night to paint the stars” In mid-September 1889, following a heavy crisis which lasted from mid-July to the last days of August, he thought to include the painting in the next batch of works to be sent to Theo in Paris. In order to reduce the shipping costs, he withheld three of the paintings, including The Starry Night, revealing his own critical view of the work.

The famous painting depicts the village of Saint-Rémy under a swirling sky, in a view from the asylum towards the north. The Alpilles far to the right fit to this view, but there is little rapport of the actual scene with the intermediary hills which seem to be derived from a different part of the surroundings, south of the asylum. The cypress tree to the left was added into the composition.

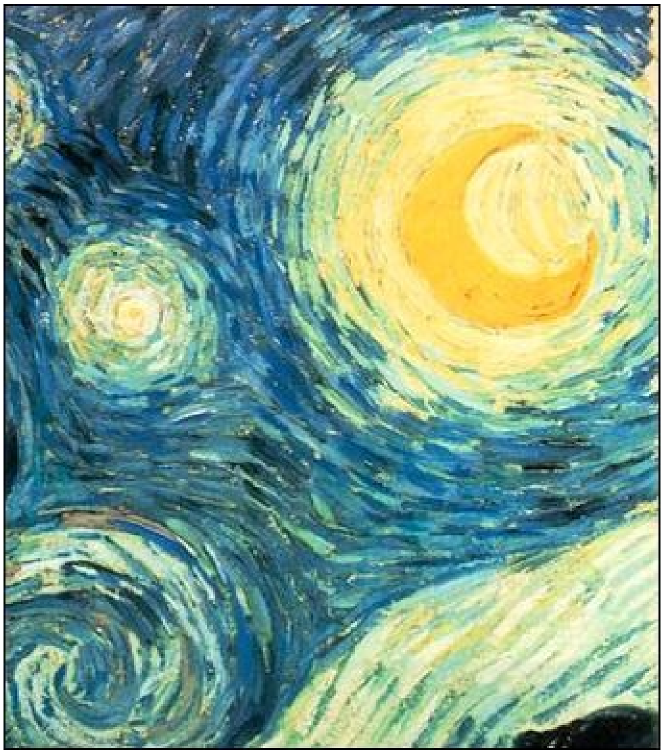




Detail



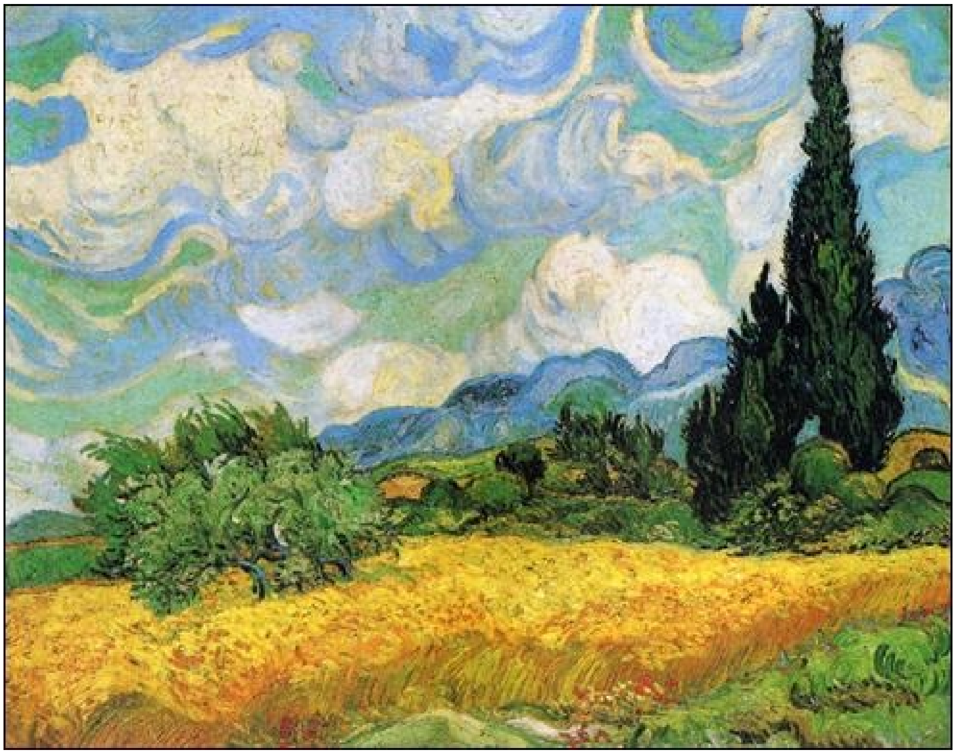
Detail

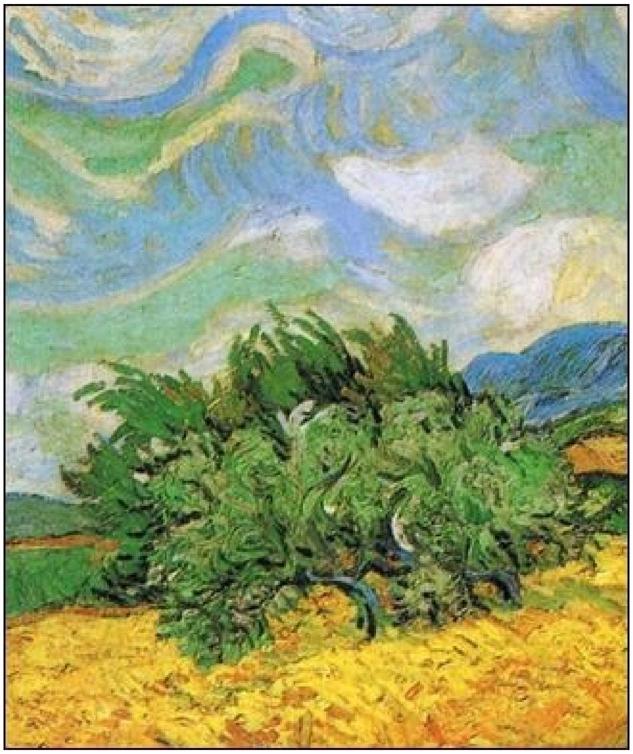


Detail

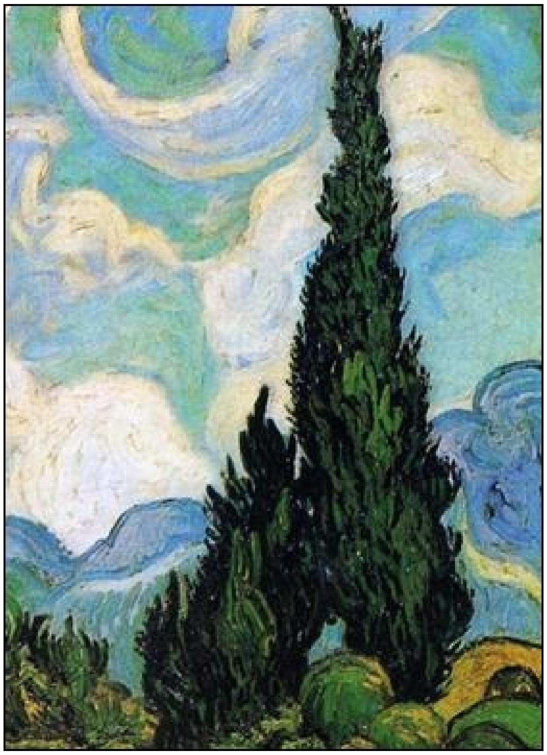
WHEAT FIELD WITH CYPRESSES

This painting was completed in 1889 and is housed in the National Gallery, London. One of the most popular and widely known series of van Gogh's paintings contains those works that depict cypresses. During the Summer of 1889, at his sister Wil's request, he made several smaller versions of *Wheat Field with Cypresses*. The works are characterised by swirls and densely painted impasto, which was later used to such dramatic effect in *The Starry Night*.

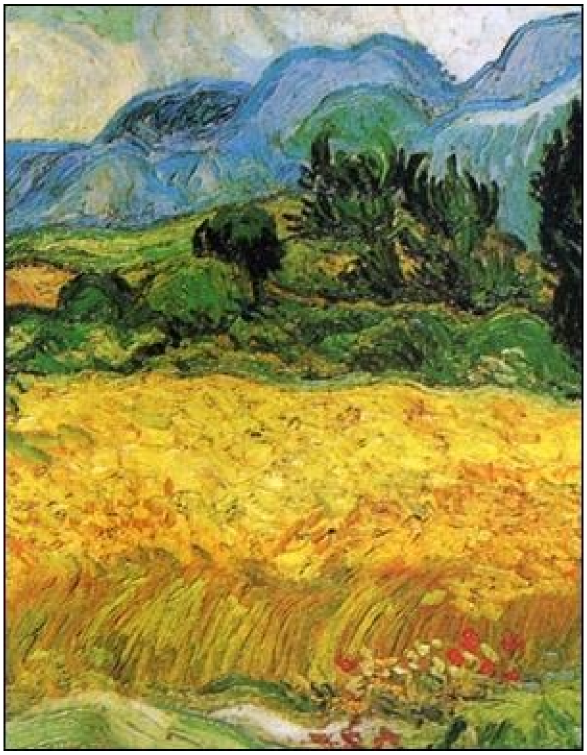




Detail



Detail



Detail

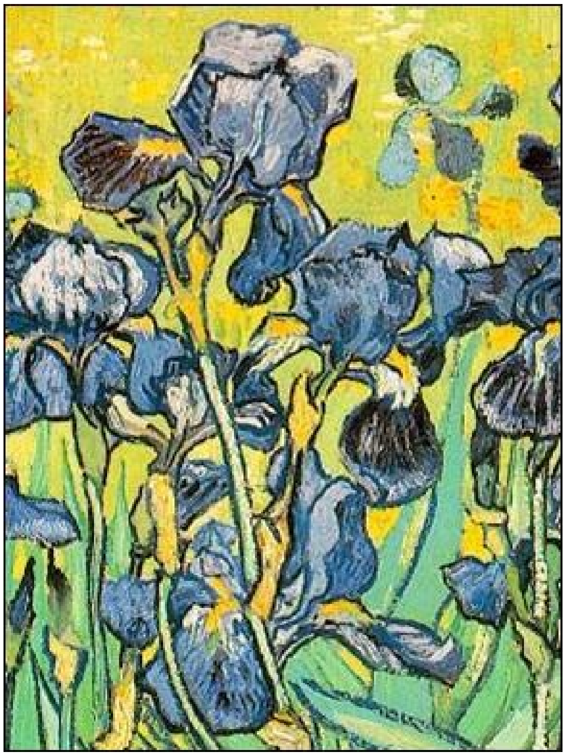
IRISES

This painting was created by van Gogh while he was living at the asylum at Saint Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, in the year before his death in 1890. There is a lack of the high tension in the piece, which characterises many of his later works. The artist himself called the painting “the lightning conductor for my illness”, because he felt that he could prevent his insanity by continuing to paint.

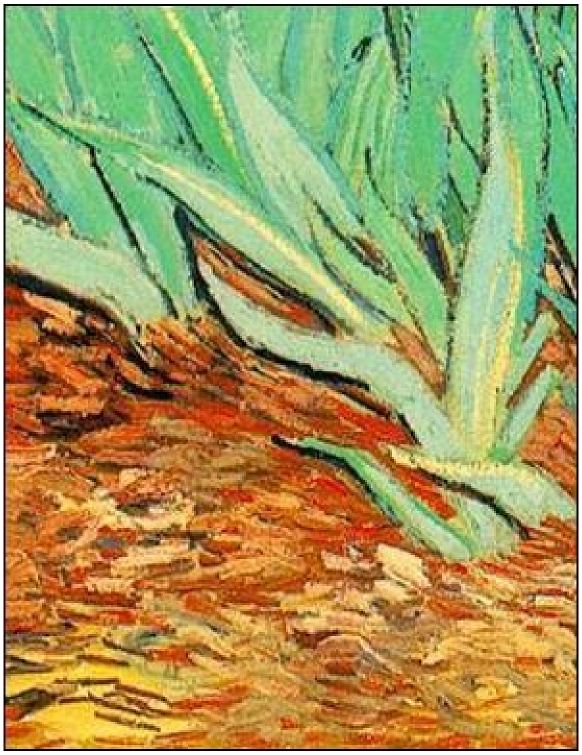
The painting reveals the strong influence of Japanese woodblock prints, of which he and his brother Theo had a large collection. Many similarities occur between Japanese prints and van Gogh’s works, including pronounced outlines and unusual angles, with close-up views and flattish local colour.

Van Gogh considered this painting a study, which explains why there are no known drawings for it, although Theo clearly thought better of it, quickly submitting the painting to the annual exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants in September 1889.

Irises was initially owned by the French art critic Octave Mirbeau, one of van Gogh's first supporters, who paid 300 francs for the work. In 1987, *Irises* became the most expensive painting ever sold, breaking a two and a half year record, when it was sold for $53.9 million to Alan Bond.



Detail



Detail

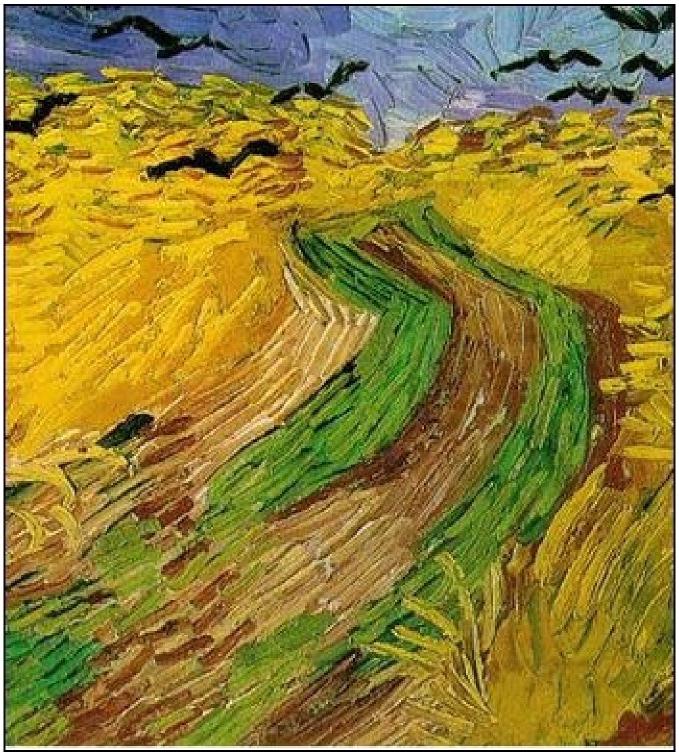
WHEAT FIELD WITH CROWS

Completed in 1890 and housed in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, this painting is often mistakenly believed to be van Gogh's last work, due to the tragic undertones of the piece.

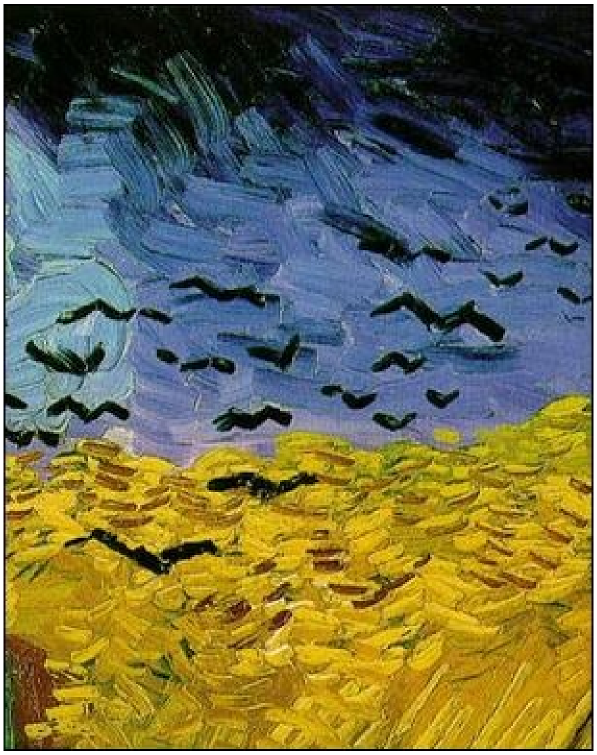
Created on an elongated canvas, it depicts a dramatic, cloudy sky filled with crows over a wheat field. The turbulent wheat field fills two thirds of the canvas. Many critics believe van Gogh uses the crows as a symbol of death or his approaching insanity. The road, in contrasting colours of red and green, is said to represent the ‘journey of life’.

In July 1890, van Gogh wrote to Theo van Gogh and Jo Bonger, explaining he had painted another three large canvases at Auvers since visiting them in Paris on July 6. Two of these are described as immense stretches of wheatfields under storm-ridden skies, thought to be *Wheatfield under Clouded Sky* and *Wheatfield with Crows*, and the third is *Daubigny's Garden*. He wrote that he had made a point of expressing sadness, later adding “extreme loneliness”, but also says he believes the canvases depict what he considers healthy and fortifying about the countryside.

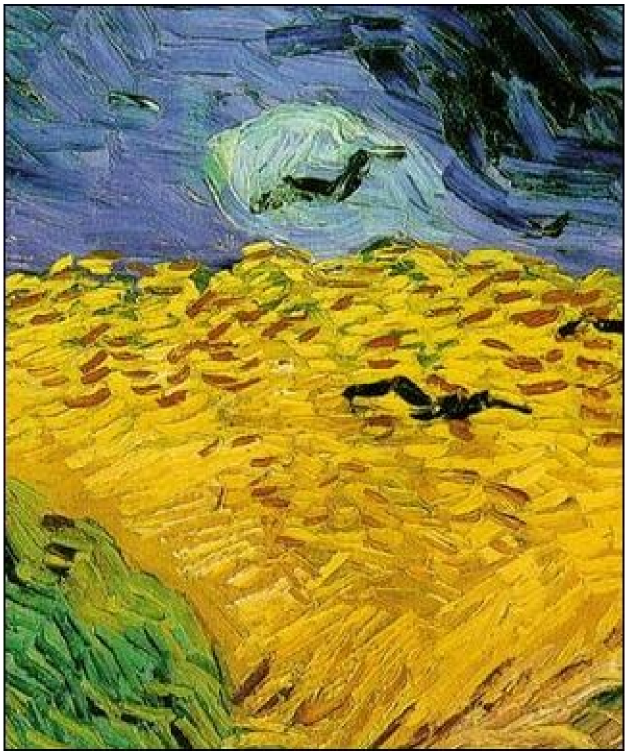
The painting is regarded by some critics as being a precursor of modern art, illustrating how its freedom of brushwork and the haunting meaning it can evoke has influenced artists across the world.



Detail



Detail



Detail

The Paintings

The house where van Gogh stayed in Cuesmes in 1880, when he decided to become an artist

THE COMPLETE PAINTINGS

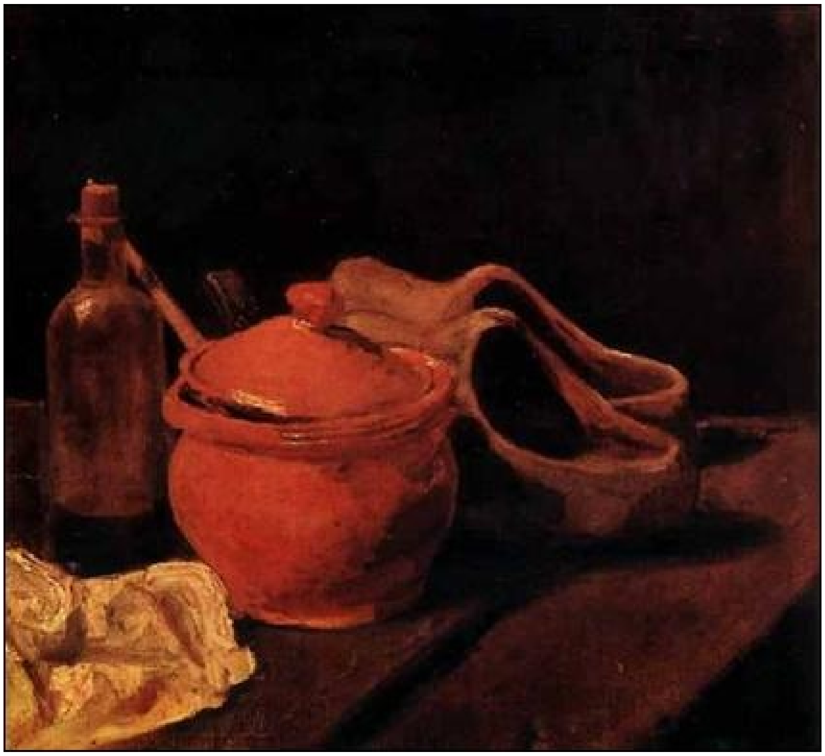
The paintings are collected in chronological order and organised into sections relating to where van Gogh was living at the time of composition.

CONTENTS

Early Works
Nuenen Works
Antwerp Works
Paris Works
Arles Works
Saint-Rémy Works
Auvers-sur-Oise Works
Index of Paintings

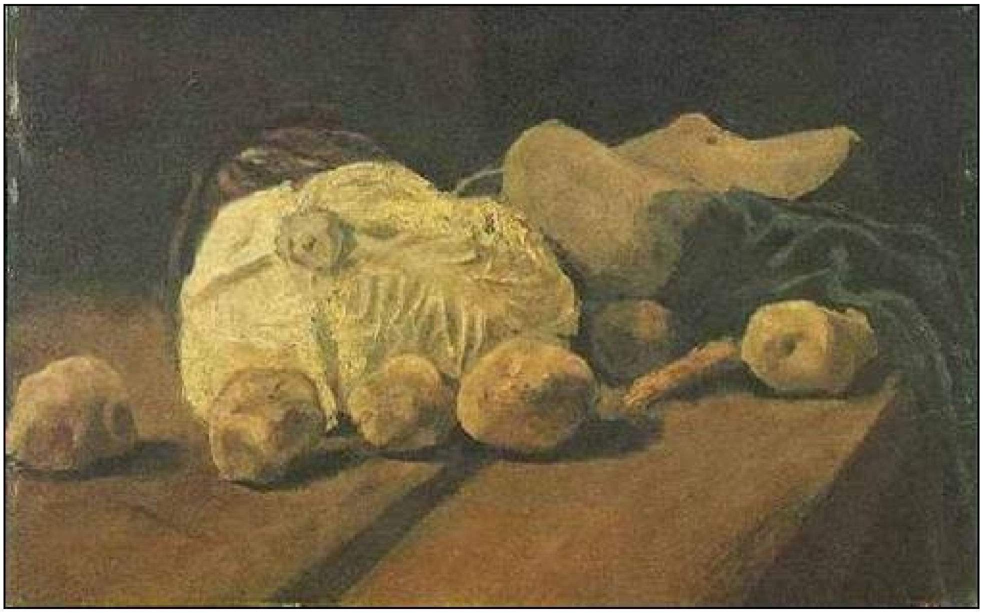
Please note: some paintings are now lost, with several having been destroyed during World War II, and so they appear in this collection in black in white.

Early Works

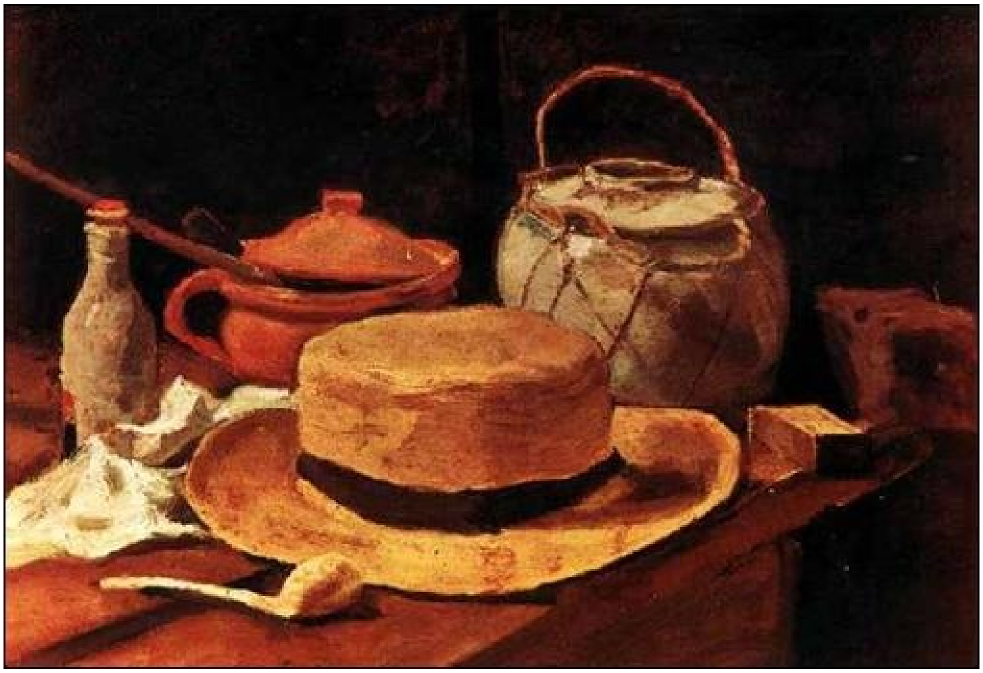


Still Life with Earthenware, Bottle and Clogs

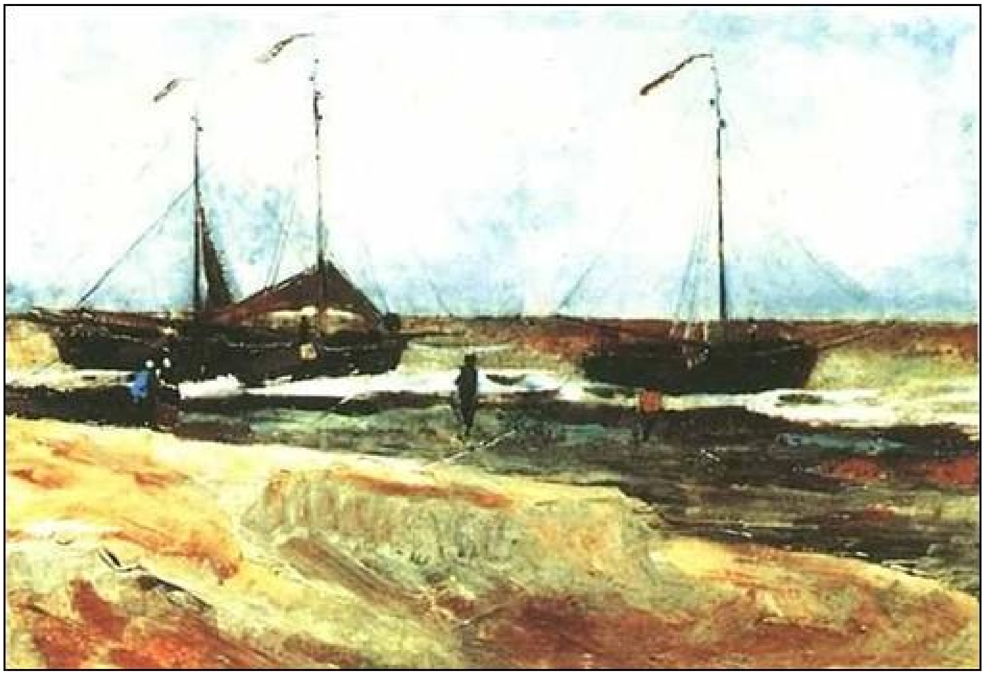
Oil on canvas on panel
39.0 x 41.5 cm.
The Hague: Late November-mid-December, 1881



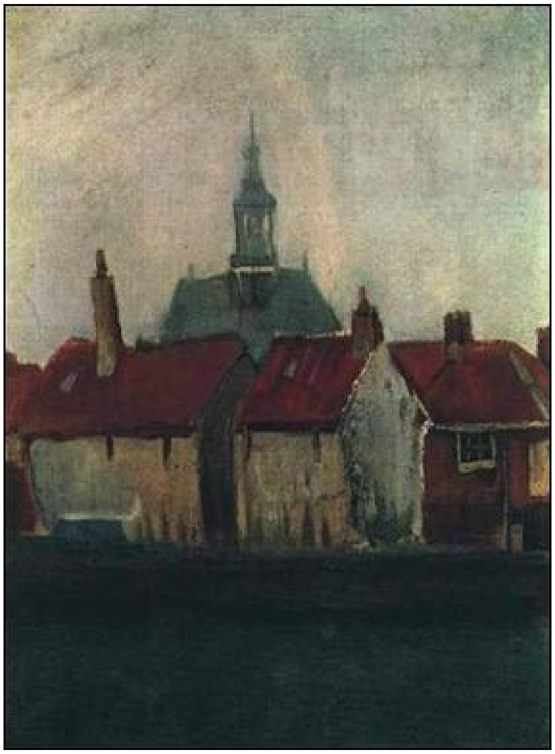
Still Life with Cabbage and Clogs
Oil on paper on panel
34.0 x 55.0 cm.
The Hague: late November-mid December, 1881



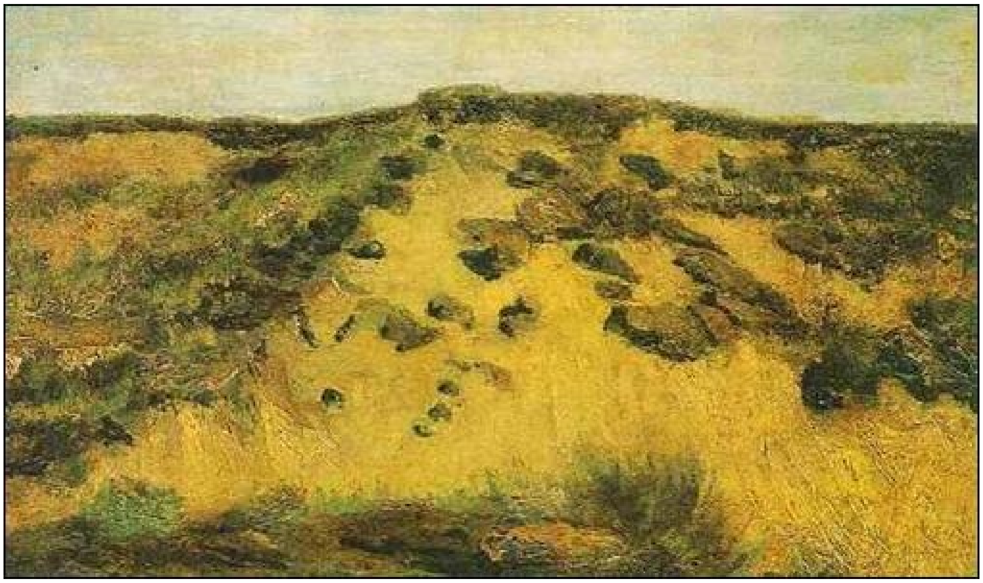
Still Life with Yellow Straw Hat
Oil on canvas
36.5 x 53.5 cm.
The Hague: Late November-mid-December, 1881



Beach at Scheveningen in Calm Weather
Oil on paper on panel
35.5 x 49.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882

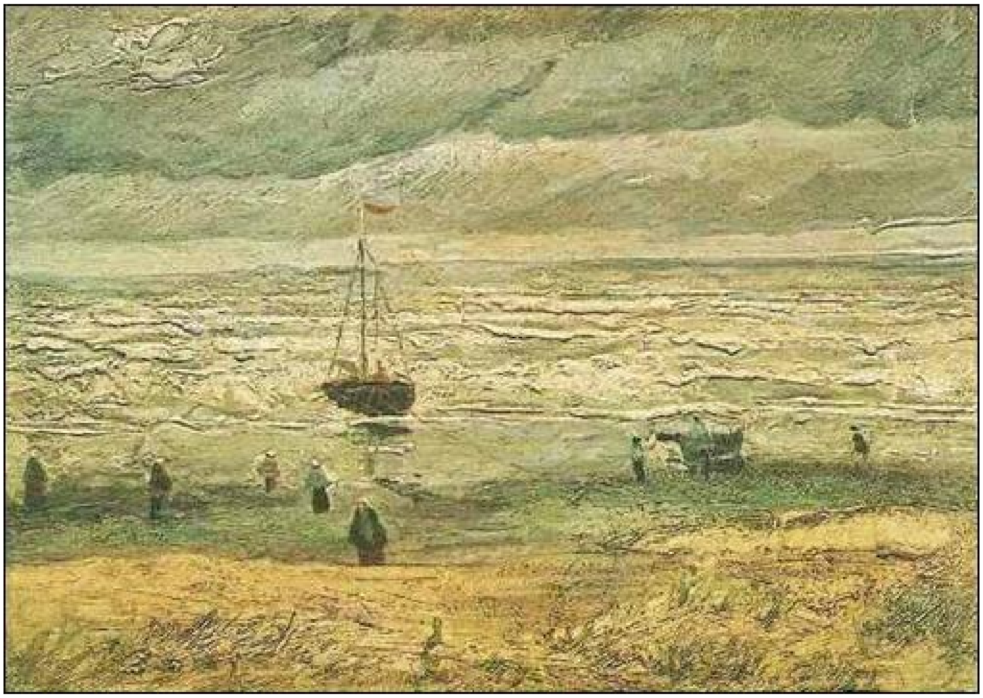


Cluster of Old Houses with the New Church in The Hague
Oil on canvas on cardboard
34.0 x 25.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882

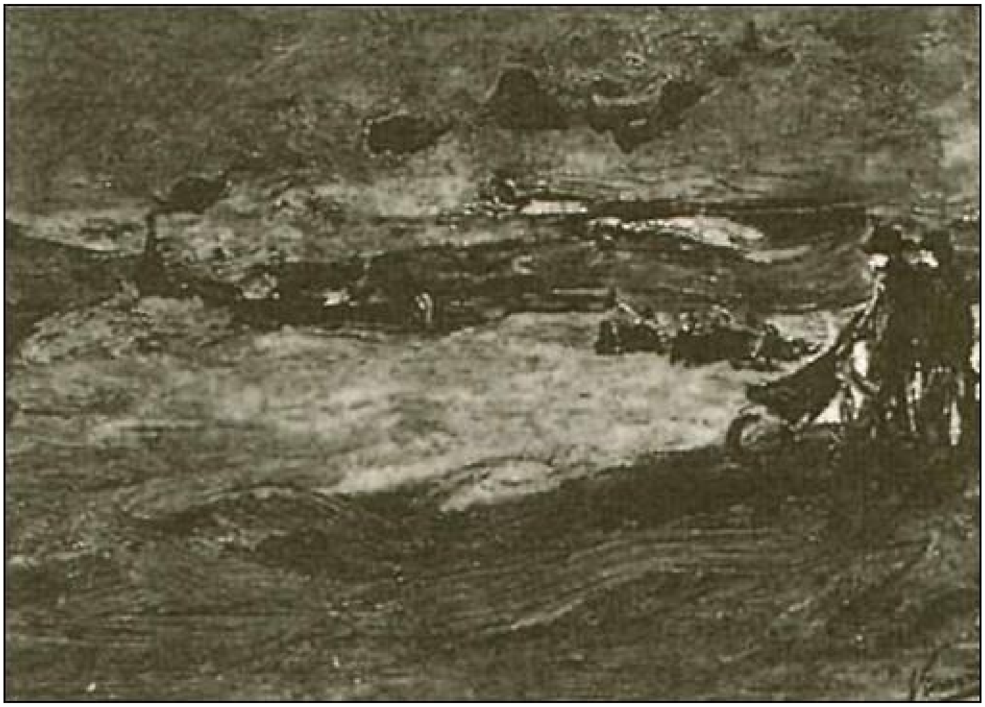


Dunes

Oil on panel
36.0 x 58.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882

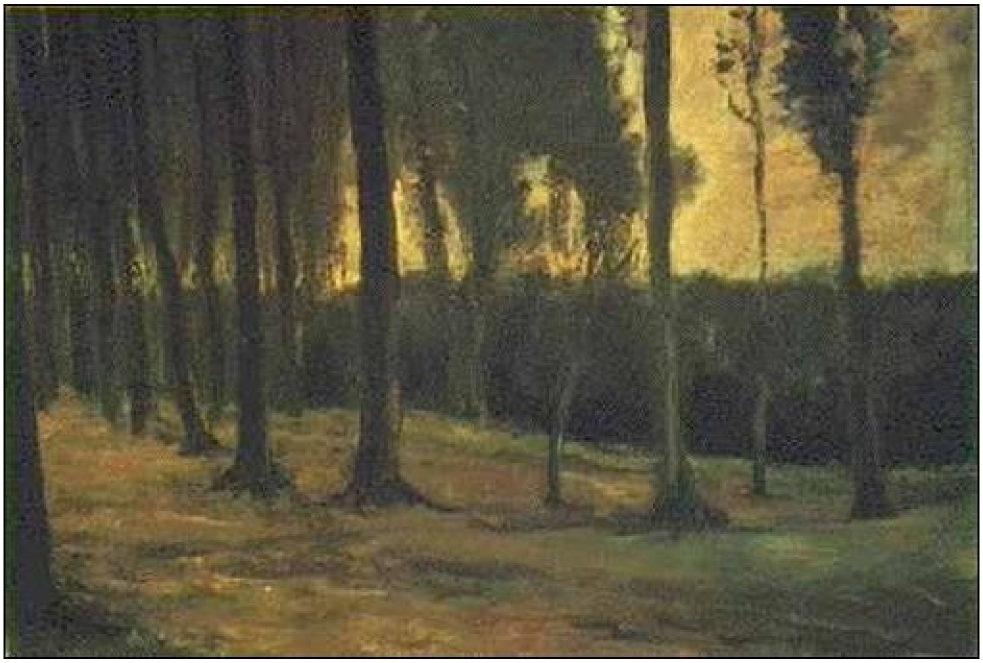


View of the Sea at Scheveningen
Oil on canvas
34.5 x 51.0 cm.
Scheveningen: 21 or 22 August 1882



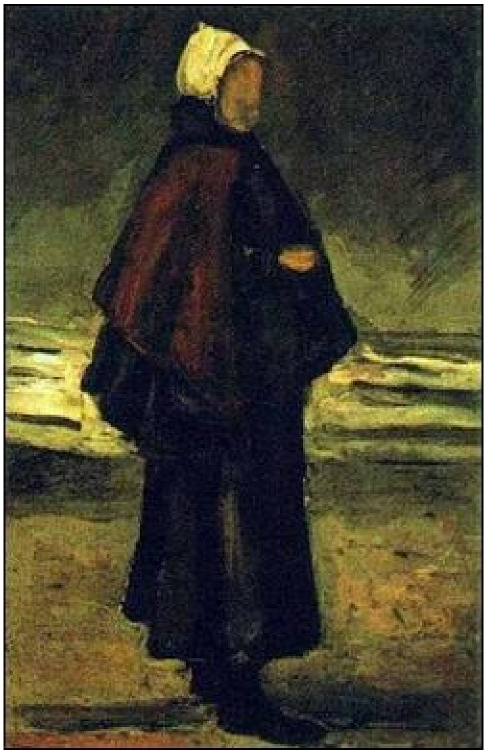
Dunes with Figures

Oil on canvas on panel
24.0 x 32.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882

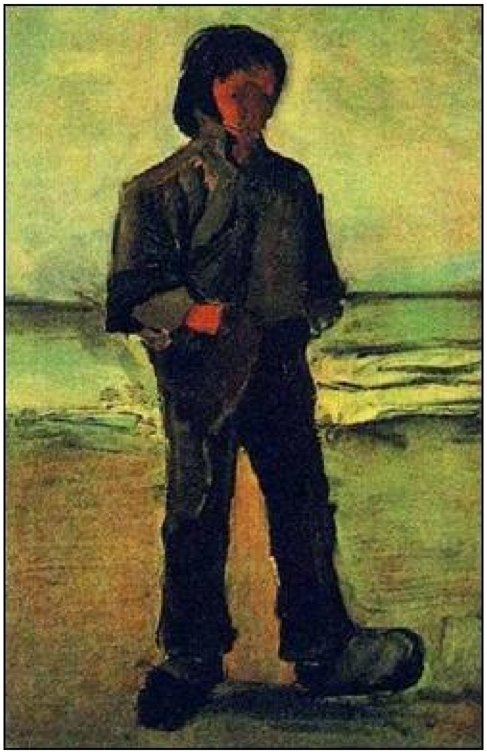


Edge of a Wood

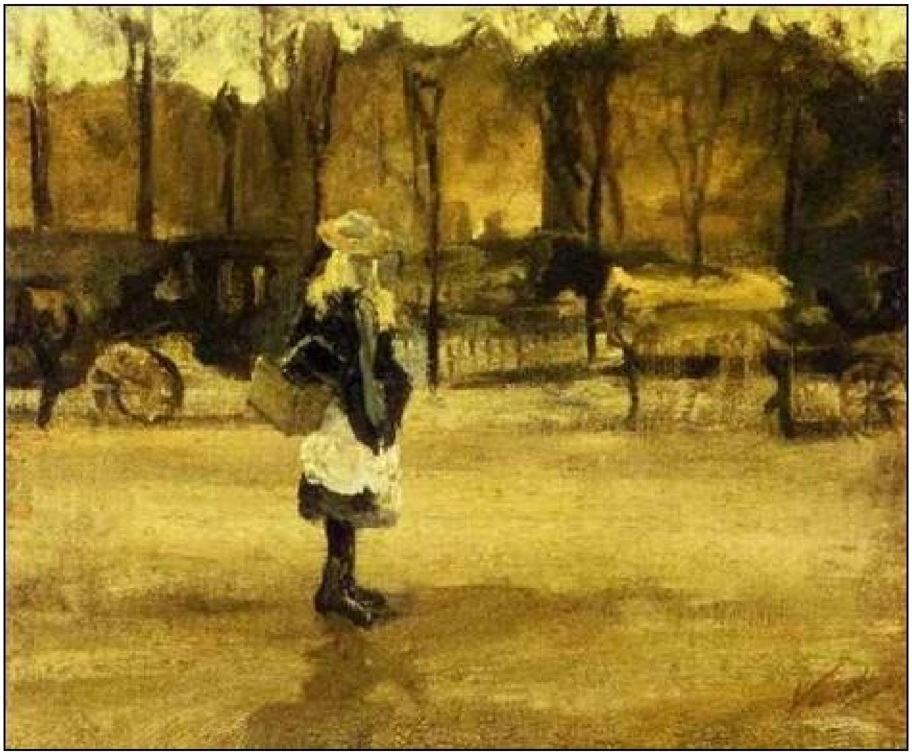
Oil on canvas on panel
34.5 x 49.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



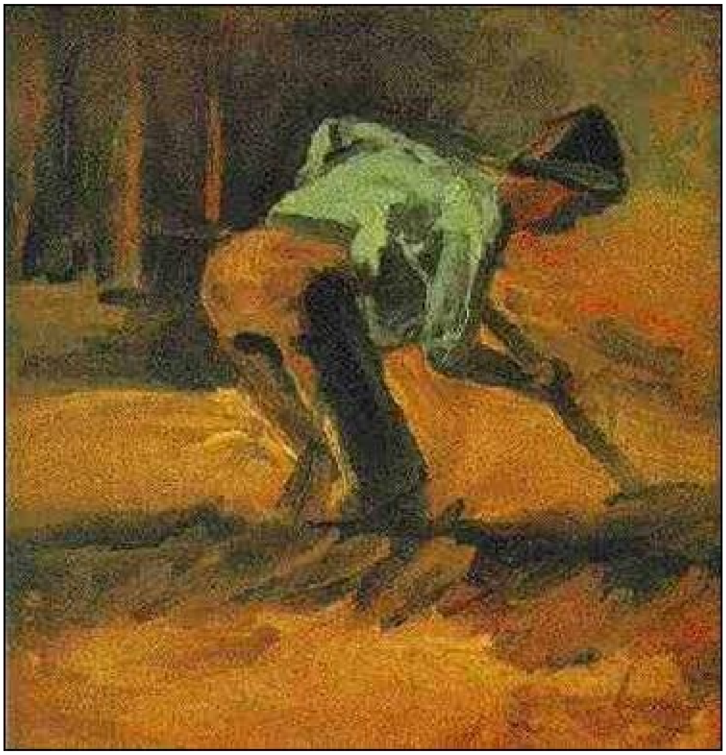
Fisherman's Wife on the Beach
Oil on canvas on panel
52.0 x 34.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



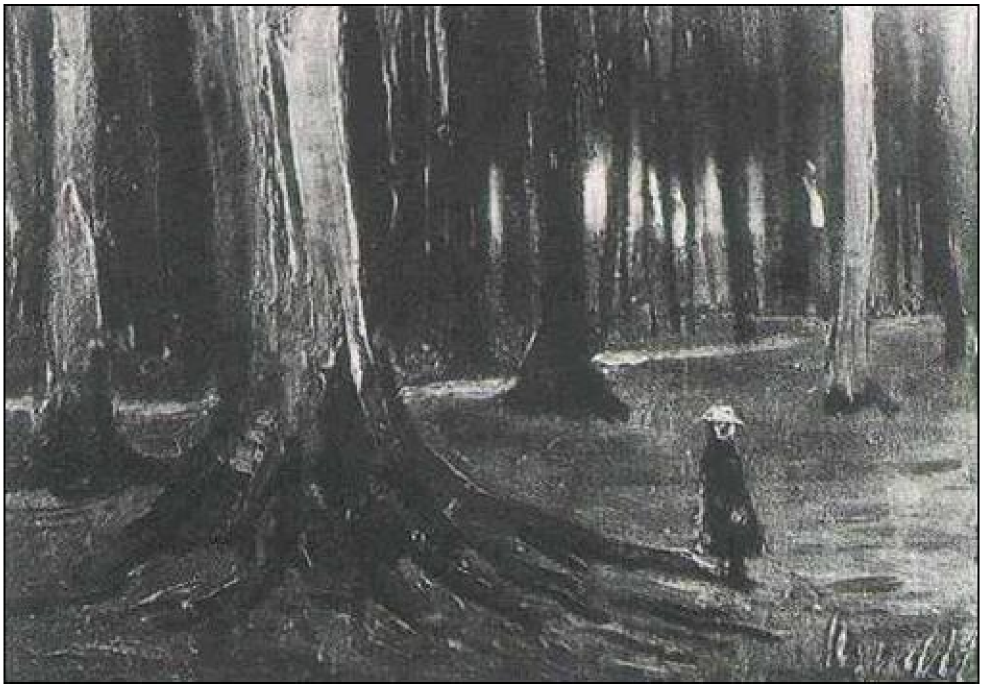
Fisherman on the Beach
Oil on canvas on panel
51.0 x 33.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



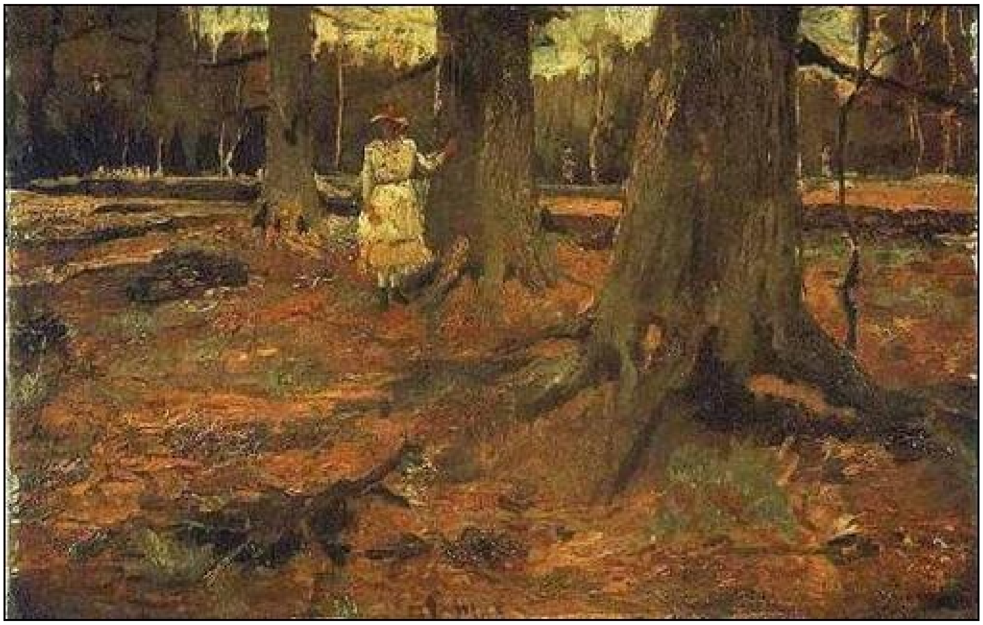
Girl in the Street, Two Coaches in the Background, A
Oil on canvas on panel
42.0 x 53.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



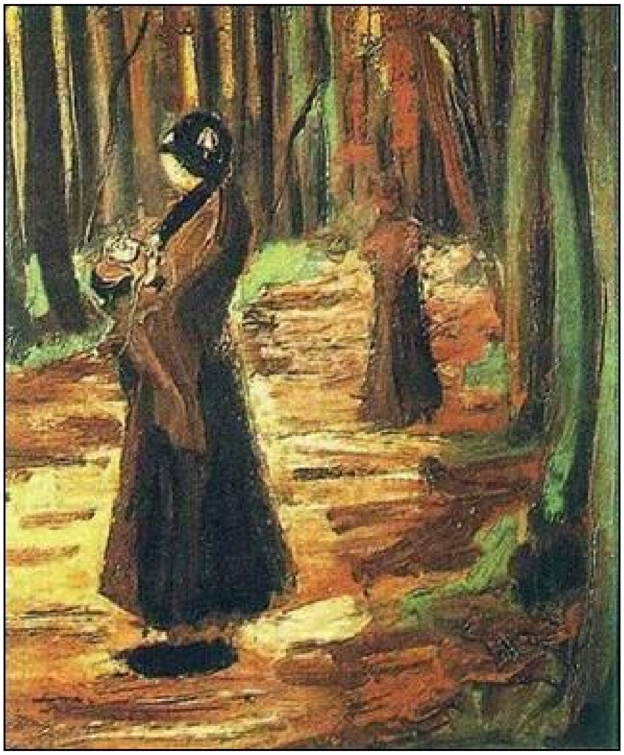
Man Stooping with Stick or Spade
Oil on paper on panel
31.0 x 29.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



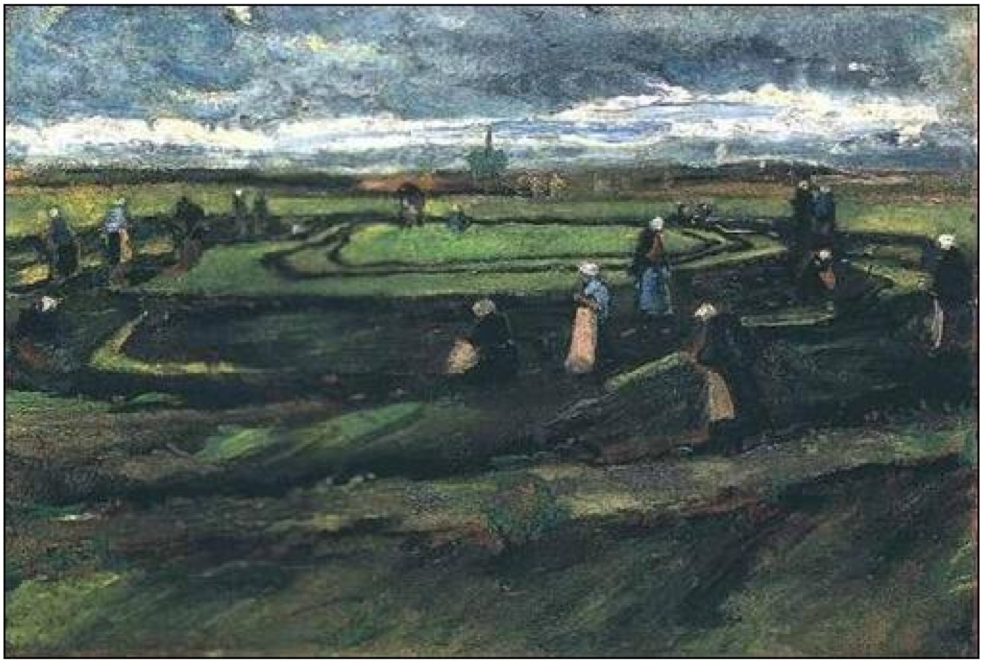
Girl in the Woods
Oil on panel
35.0 x 47.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



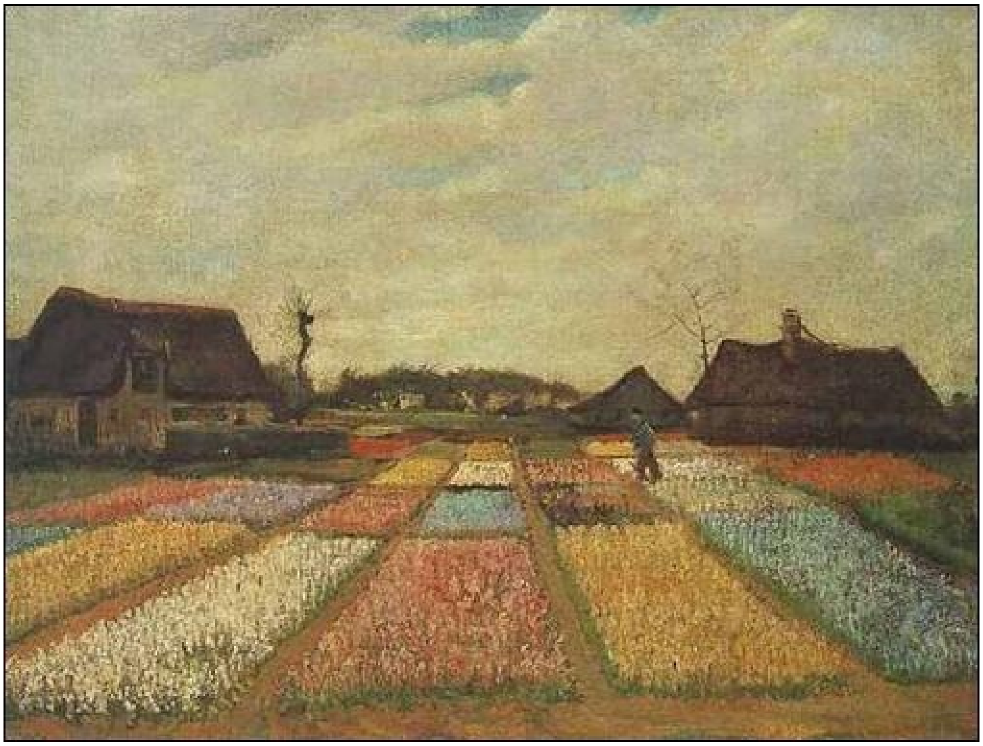
Girl in White in the Woods
Oil on canvas
39.0 x 59.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



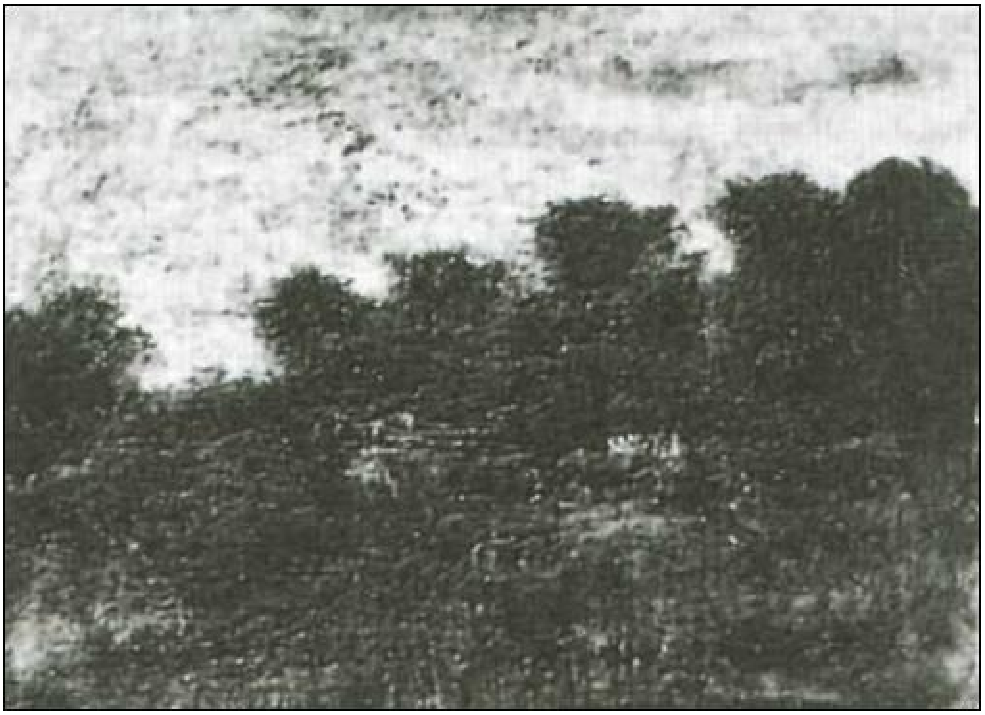
Two Women in the Woods
Oil on paper on panel
35.0 x 24.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



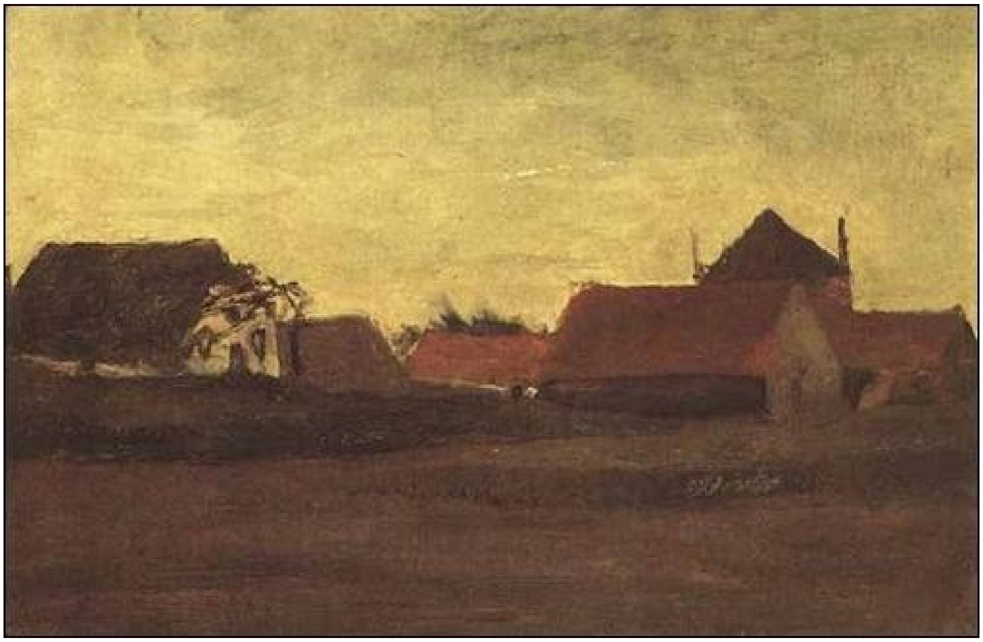
Women Mending Nets in the Dunes
Oil on paper on panel
42.0 x 62.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1882



Bulb Fields
Oil on canvas on panel
48.0 x 65.0 cm.
The Hague: April, 1883

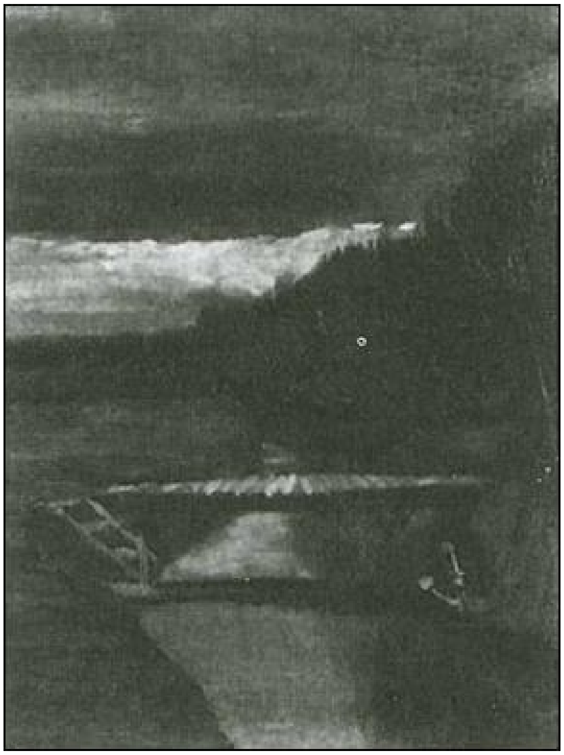


Cows in the Meadow
Oil on canvas on panel
31.5 x 44.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883



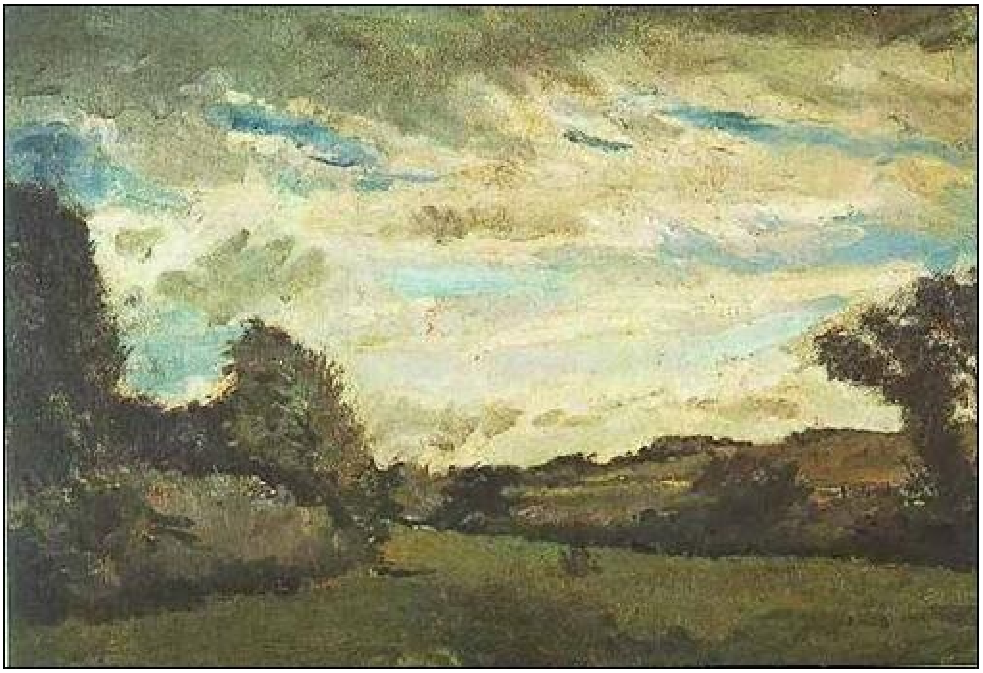
Farmhouses in Loosduinen near The Hague at Twilight

Oil on canvas on panel
33.0 x 50.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883

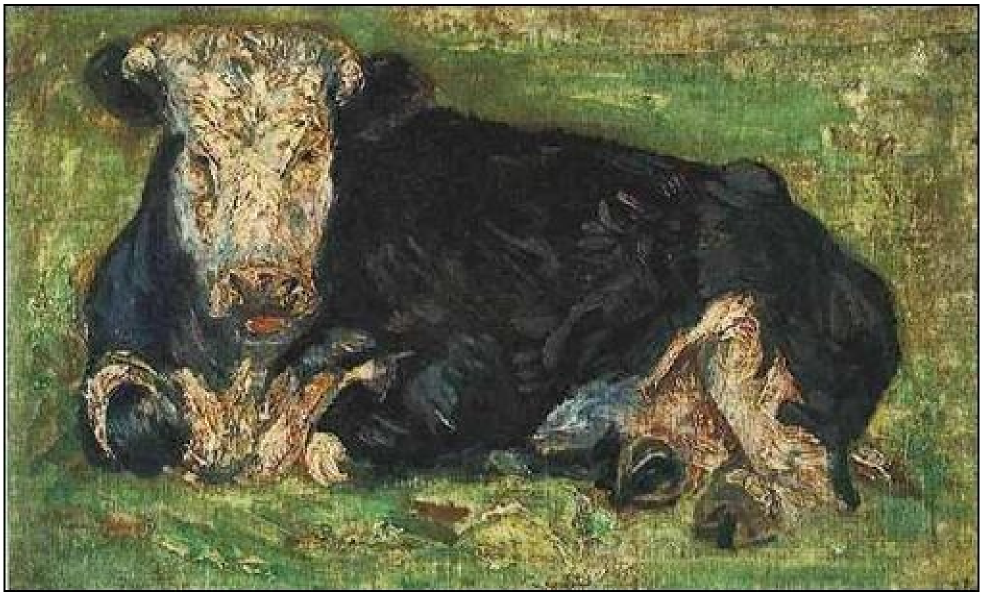


Footbridge across a Ditch

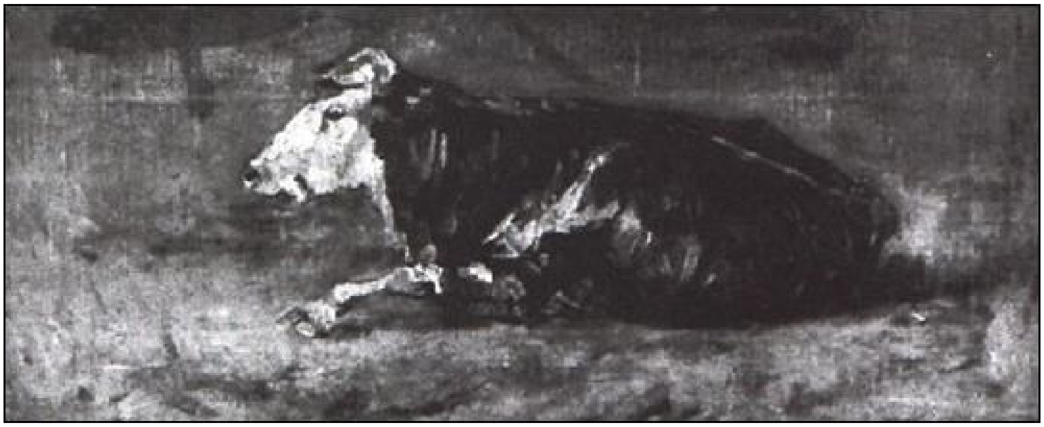
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 45.8 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883



Landscape with Dunes
Oil on panel
33.5 x 48.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883

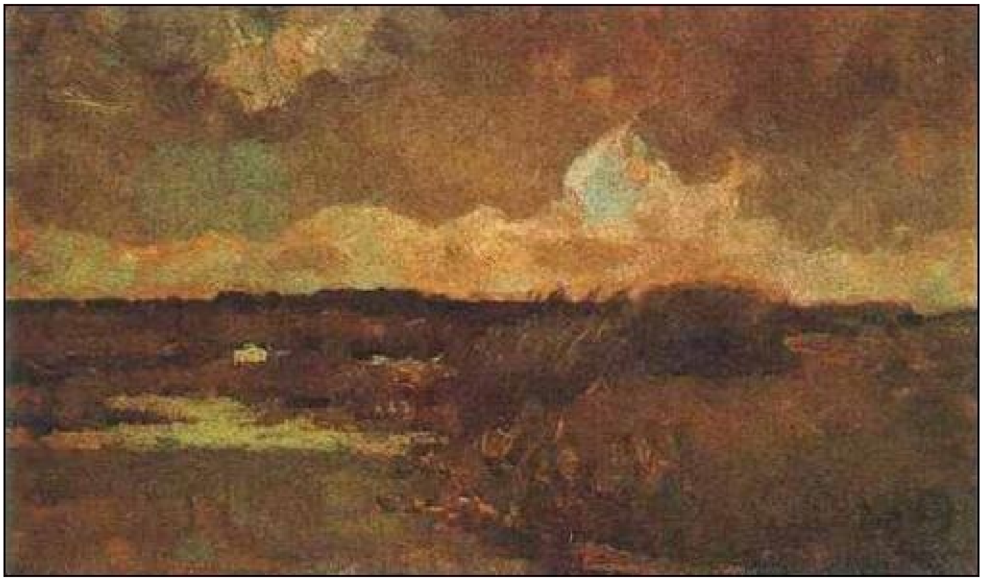


Lying Cow
Oil on canvas
30.0 x 50.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883

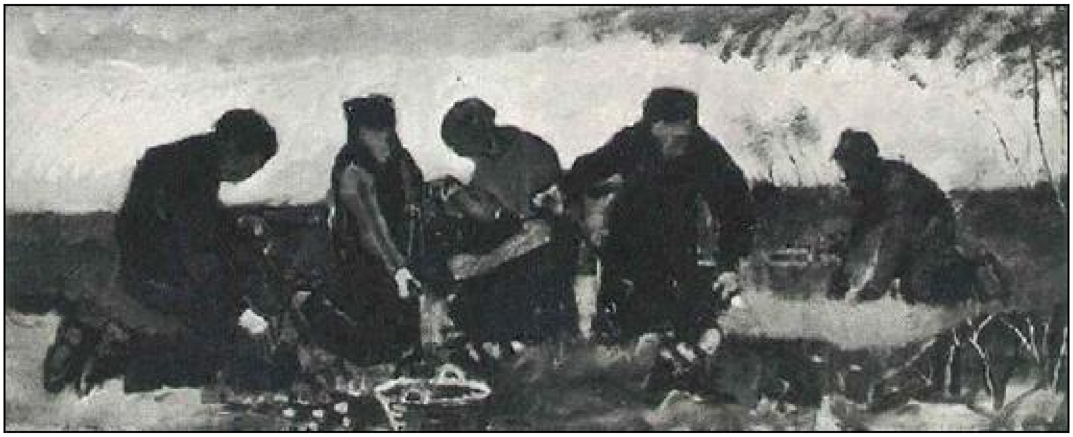


Lying Cow

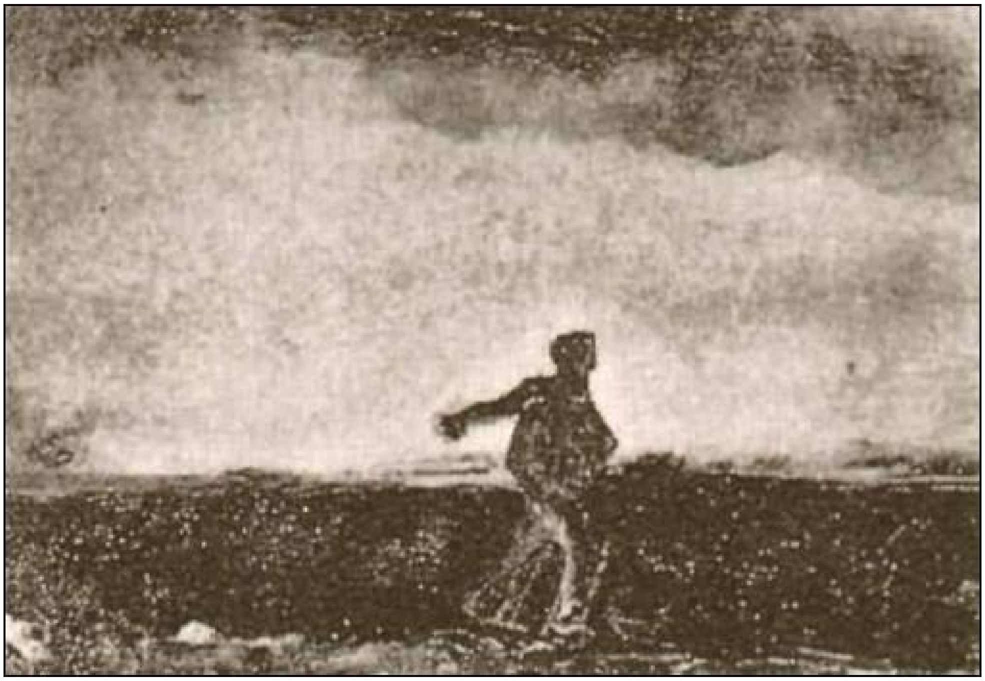
Oil on canvas
19.0 x 47.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883



Marshy Landscape
Oil on canvas
25.0 x 45.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883

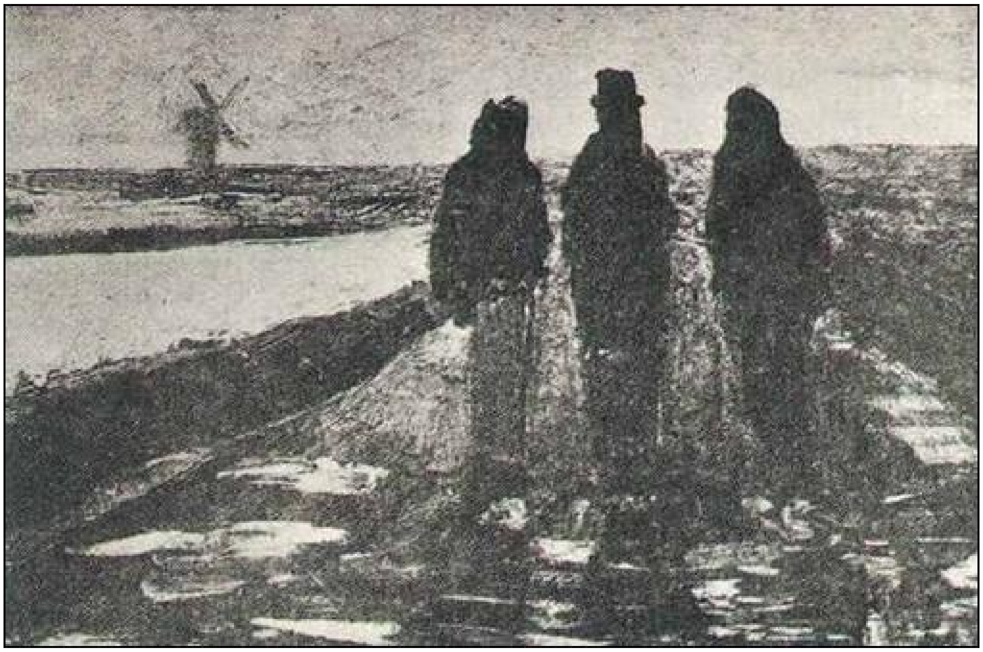


Potato Digging
Oil on canvas
39.5 x 94.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883

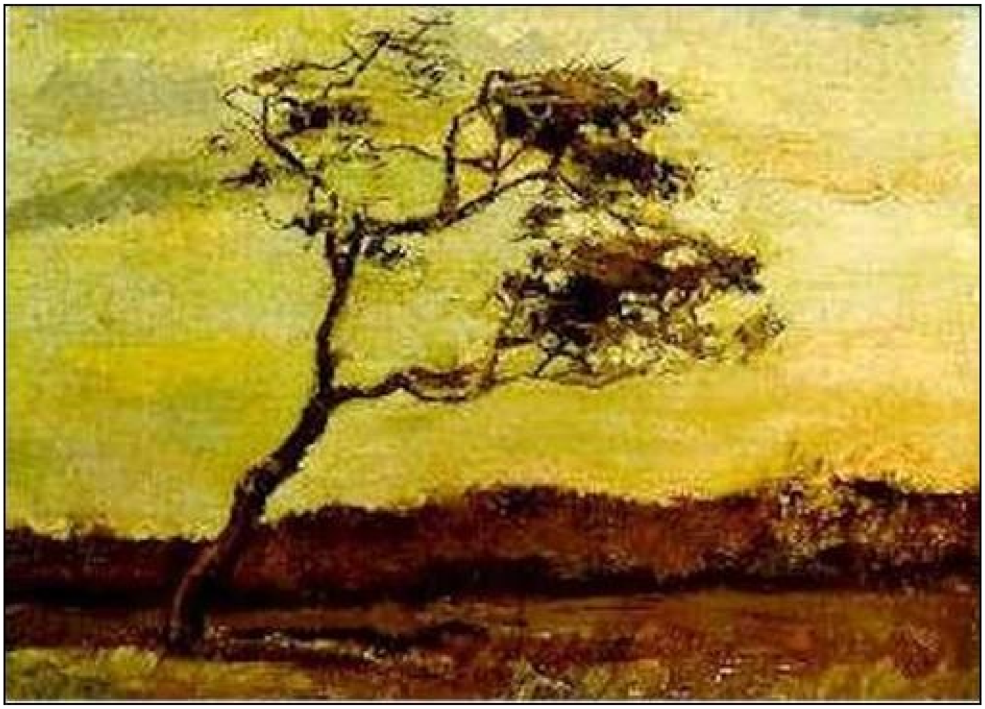


Sower (study), The

Oil on canvas
19.0 x 27.5 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883

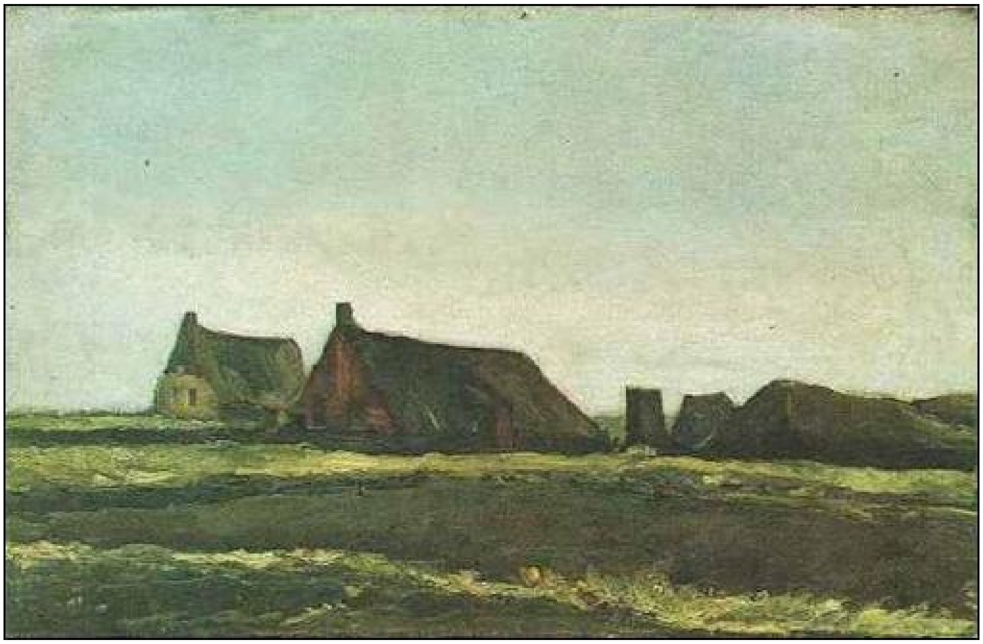


Three Figures near a Canal with Windmill
The Hague: August (?), 1883

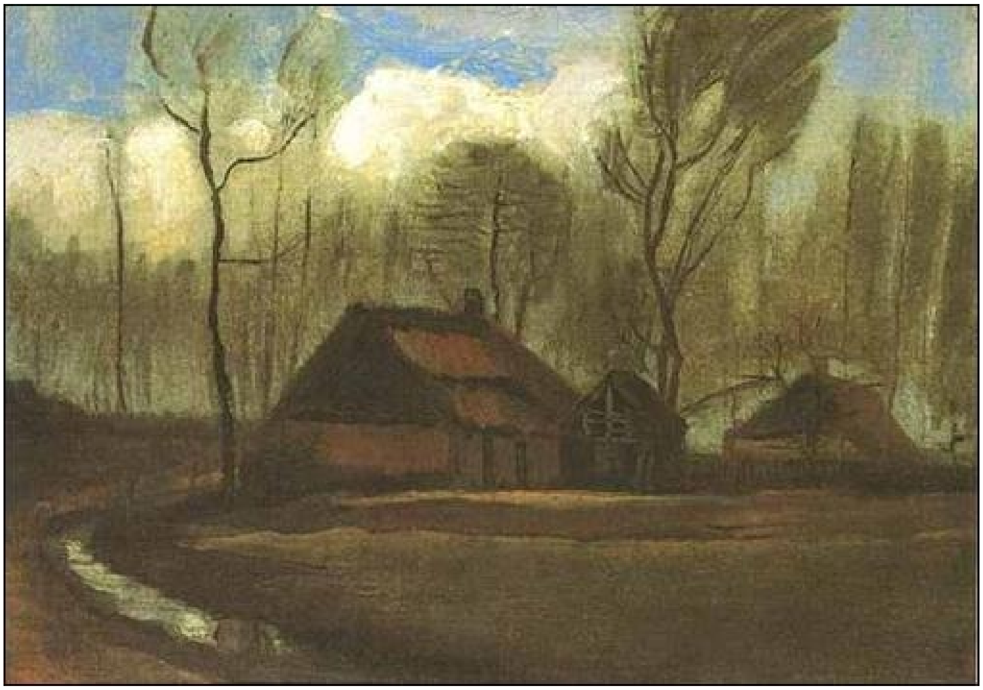


Wind-Beaten Tree, A

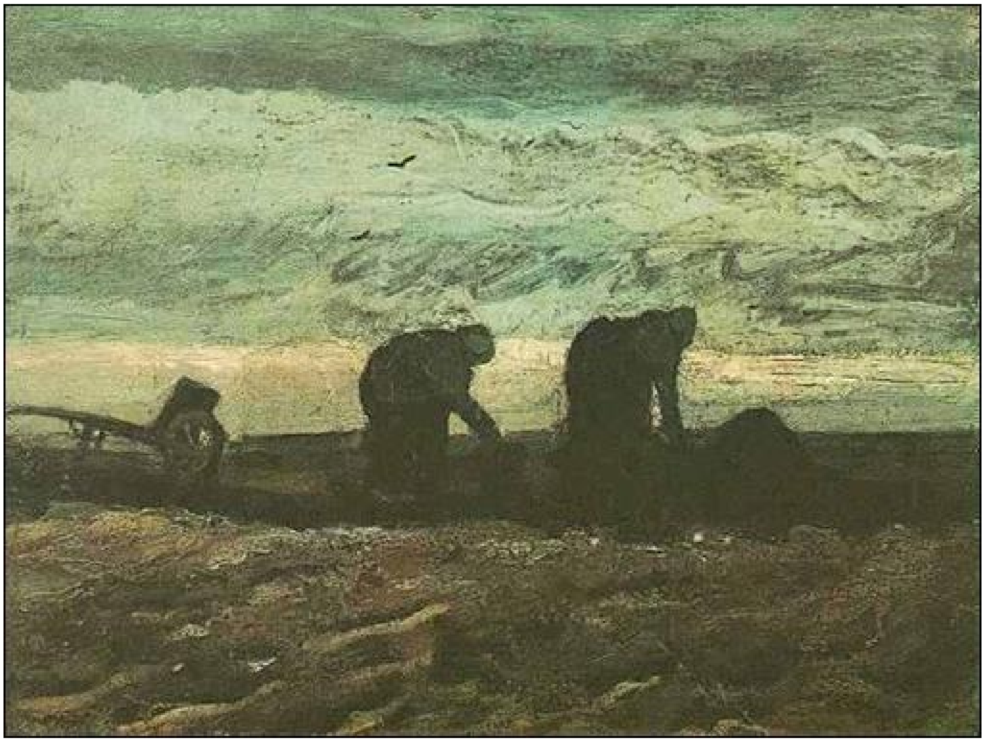
Oil on canvas
35.0 x 47.0 cm.
The Hague: August, 1883



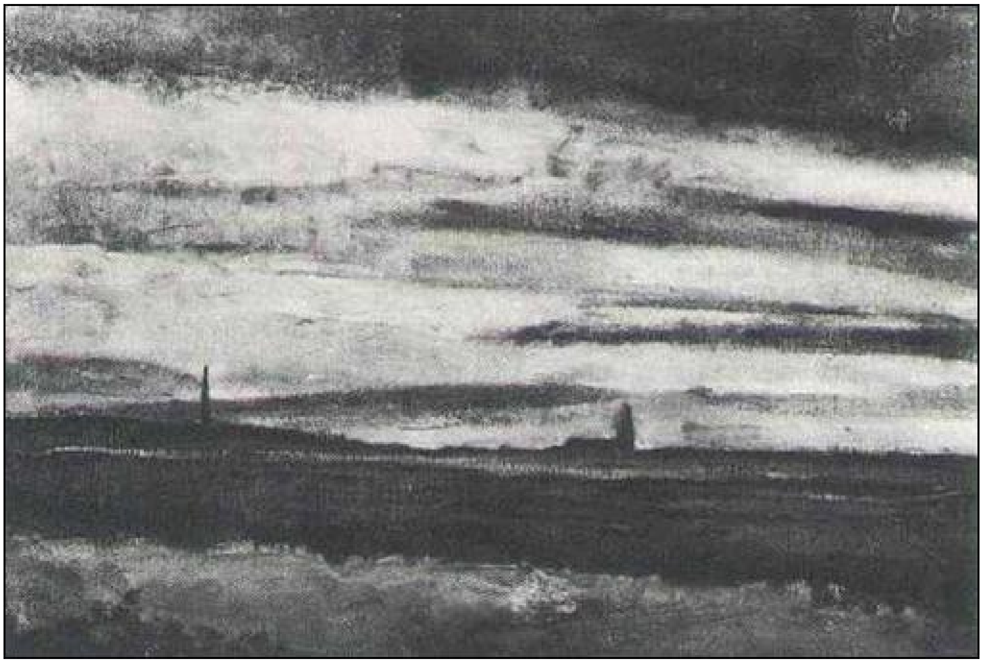
Cottages
Oil on canvas
35.5 x 55.5 cm.
Nieuw-Amsterdam: mid September-mid November, 1883



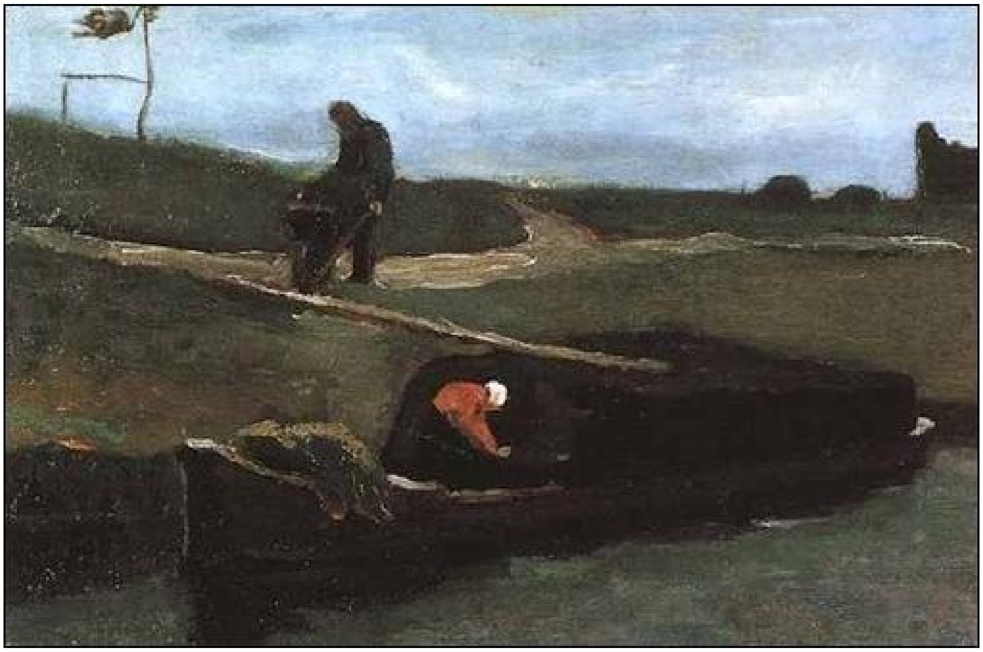
Farmhouses Among Trees
Oil on canvas on panel
28.5 x 39.5 cm.
The Hague: September, 1883



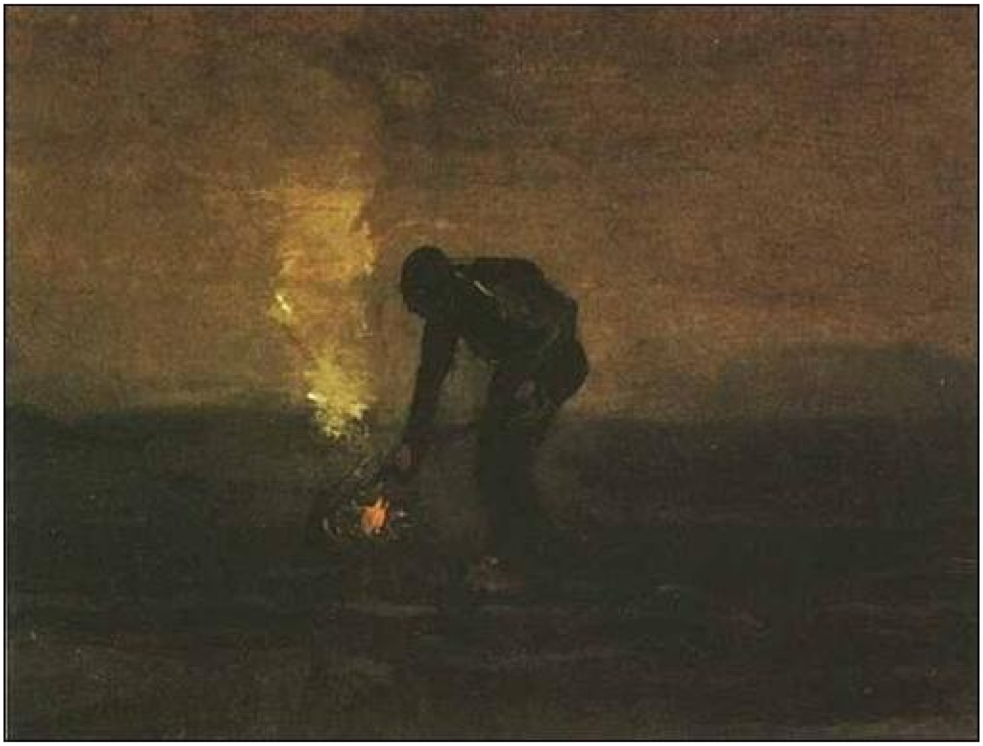
Two Women in the Moor
Oil on canvas
27.8 x 36.5 cm.
Nieuw-Amsterdam: October, 1883



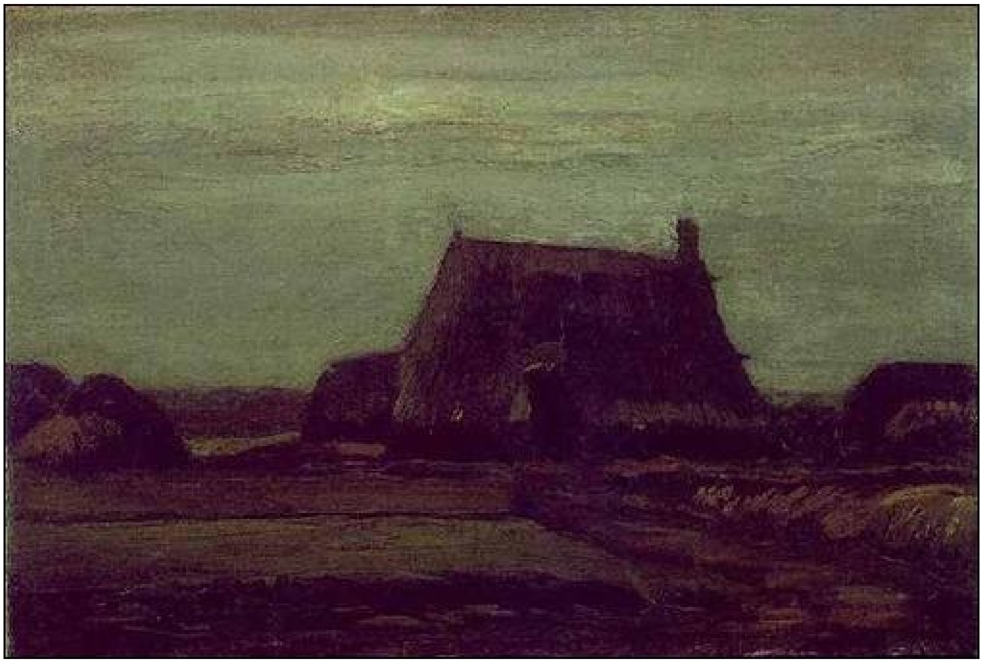
Landscape with a Church at Twilight
Oil on cardboard on panel
36.0 x 53.0 cm.
Drente: October, 1883



Peat Boat with Two Figures
Oil on canvas on panel
37.0 x 55.5 cm.
Drente: October, 1883

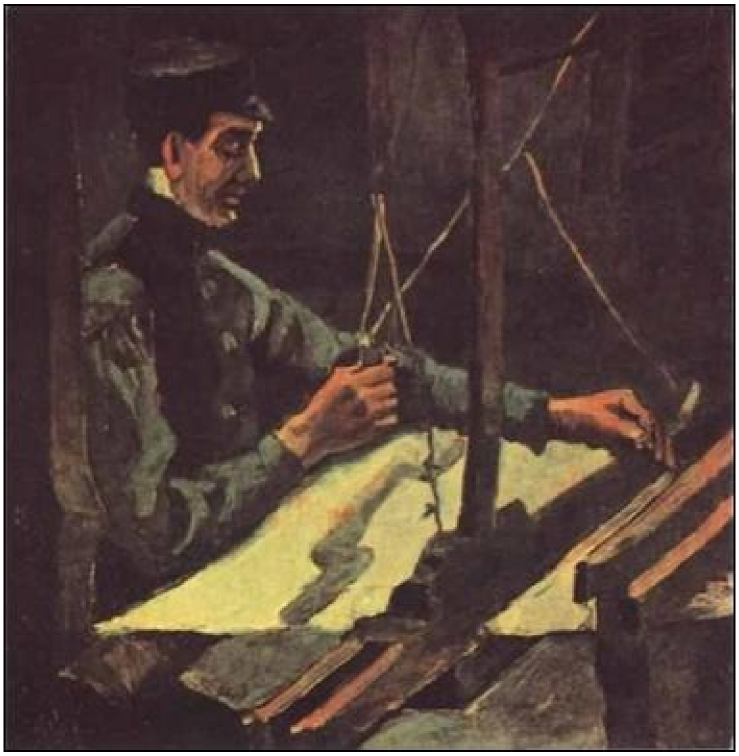


Peasant Burning Weeds
Oil on panel
30.5 x 39.5 cm.
Drente: October, 1883

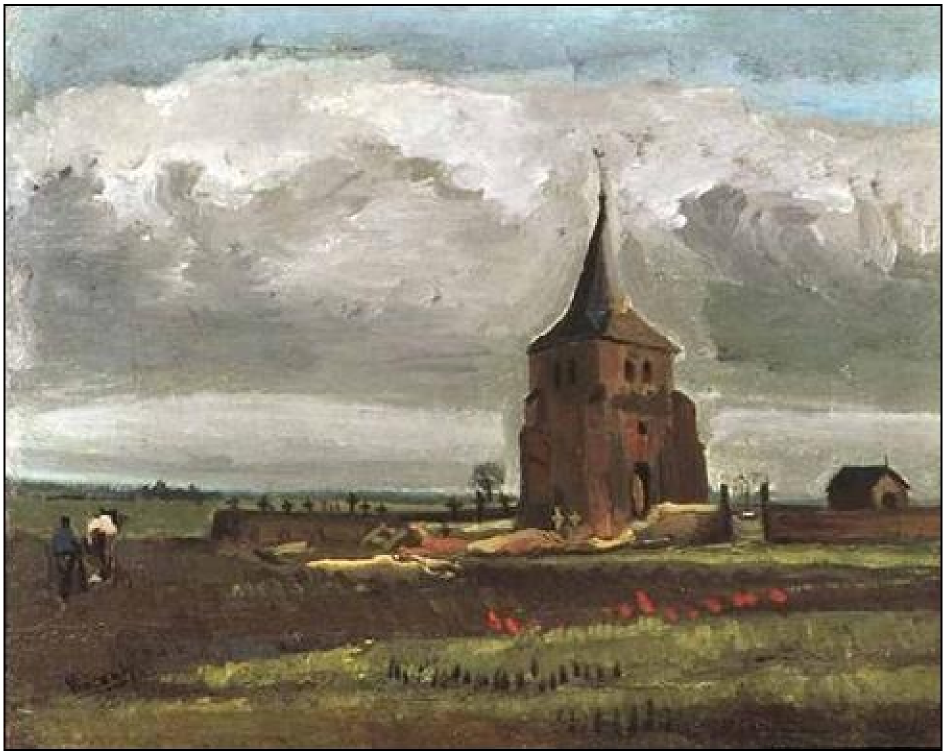


Farm with Stacks of Peat
Oil on canvas
37.5 x 55.0 cm.
Nieuw-Amsterdam: mid November, 1883

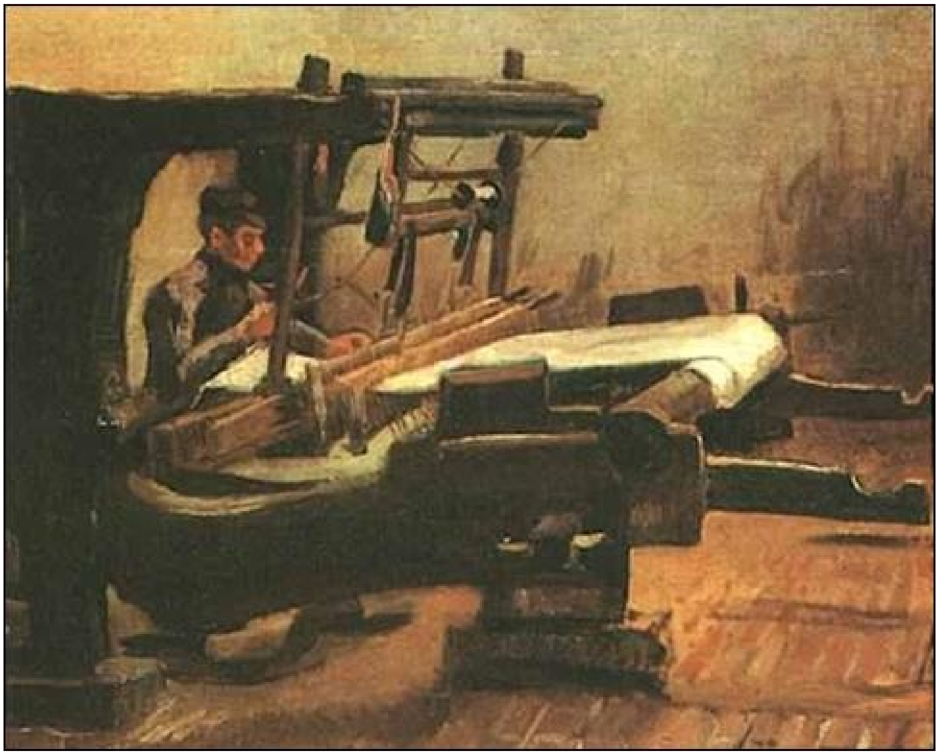
Nuenen Works



Weaver Facing Right (Half-Figure)
Oil on canvas
48.0 x 46.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1884

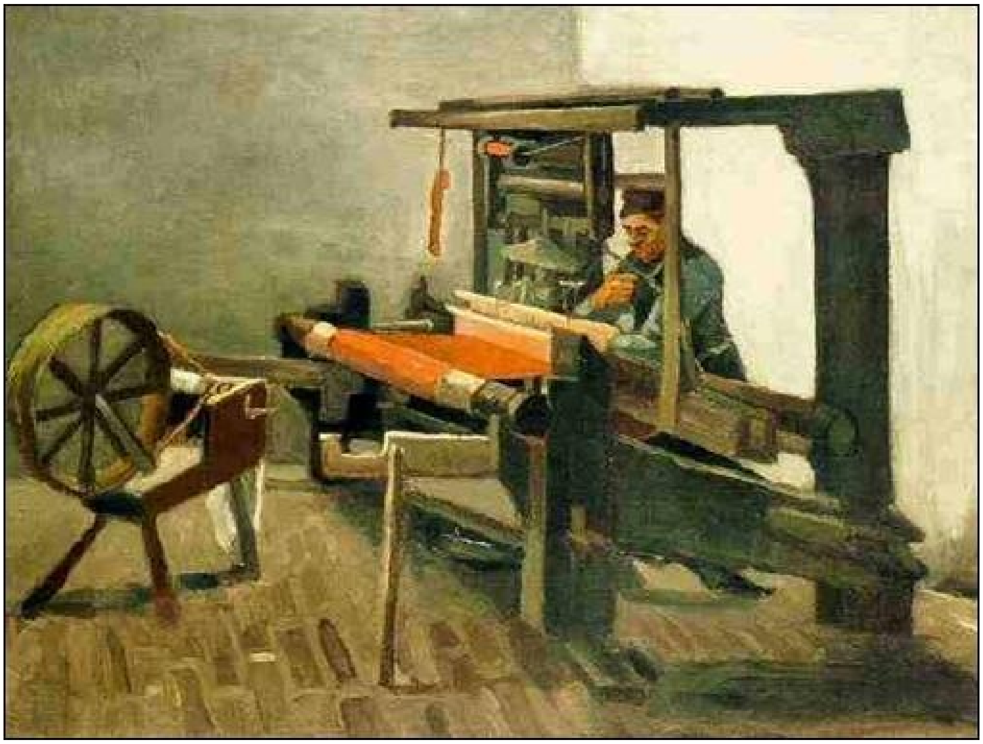


Old Tower at Nuenen with a Ploughman, The
Oil on canvas
34.5 x 42.0 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1884

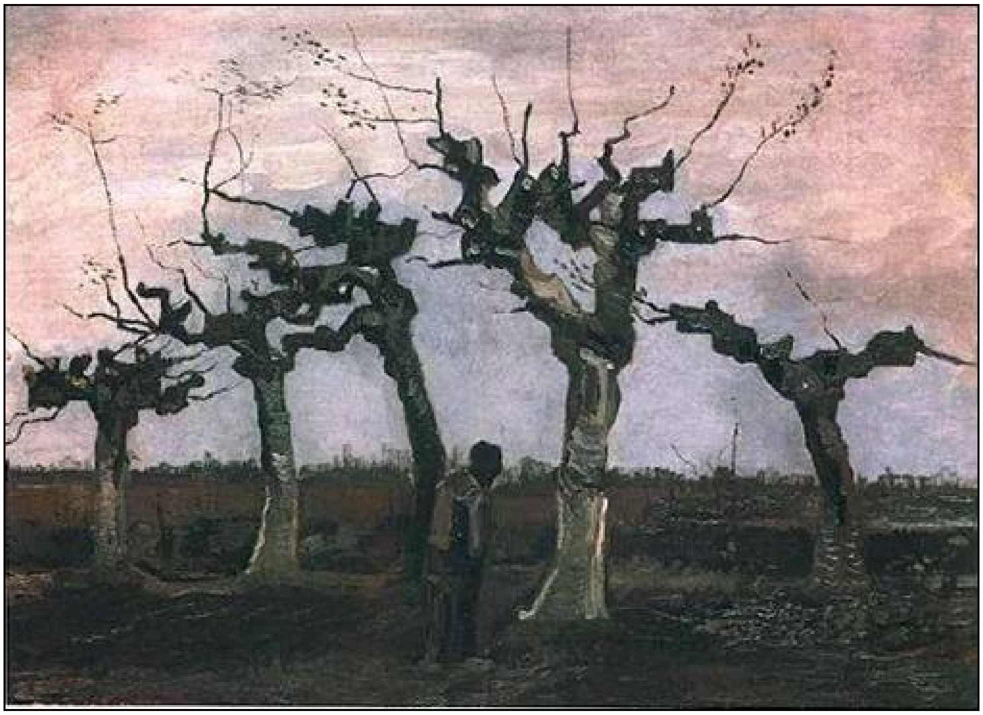


Weaver Facing Right

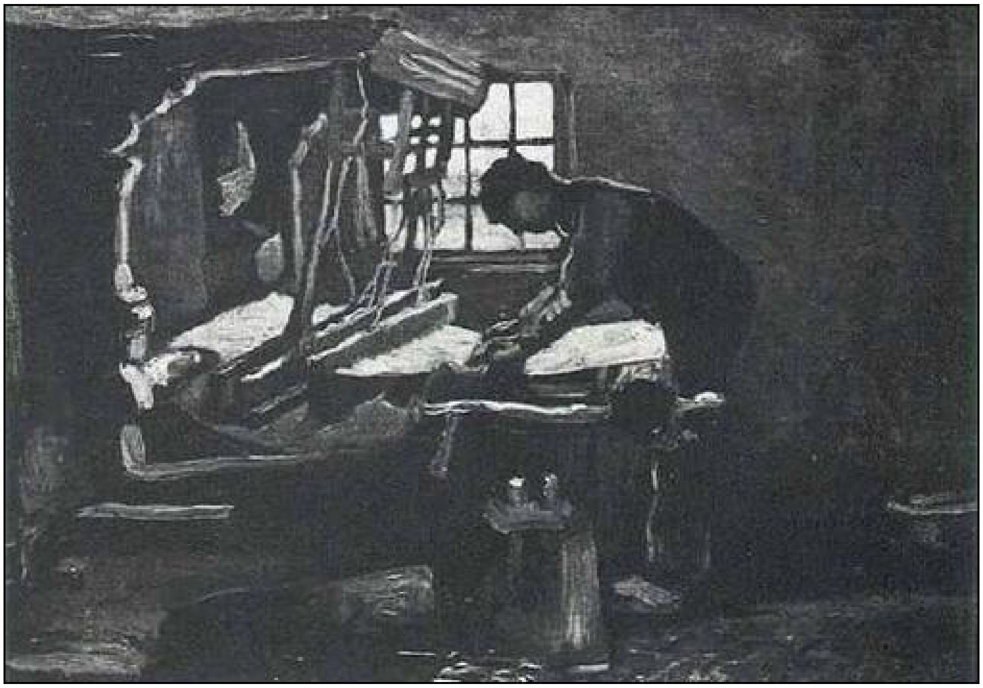
Oil on canvas on panel
37.0 x 45.0 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1884



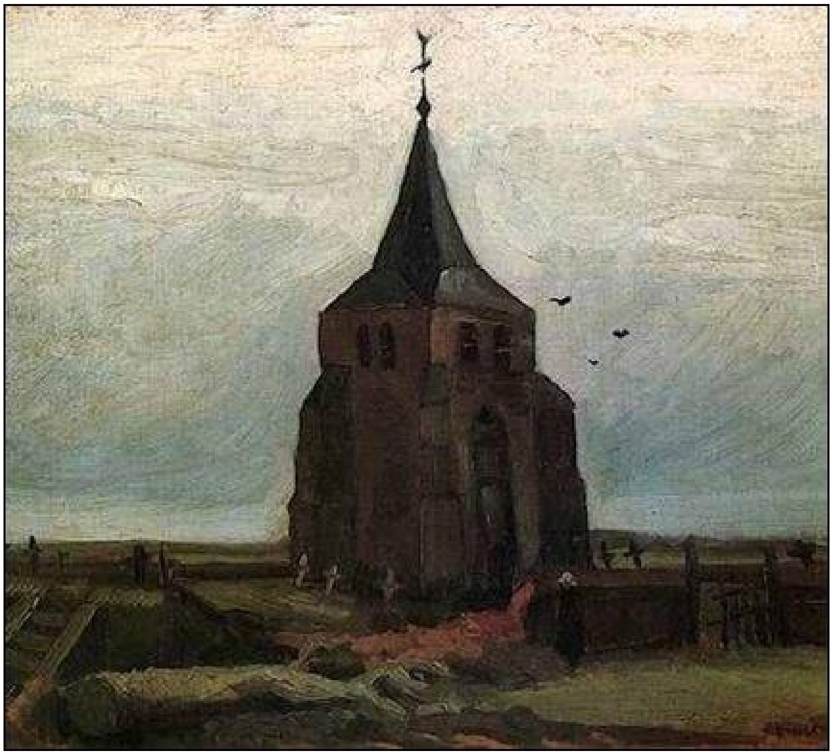
Weaver Facing Left with Spinning Wheel
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 85.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1884



Landscape with Pollard Willows
Oil on canvas on panel
43.0 x 58.0 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1884

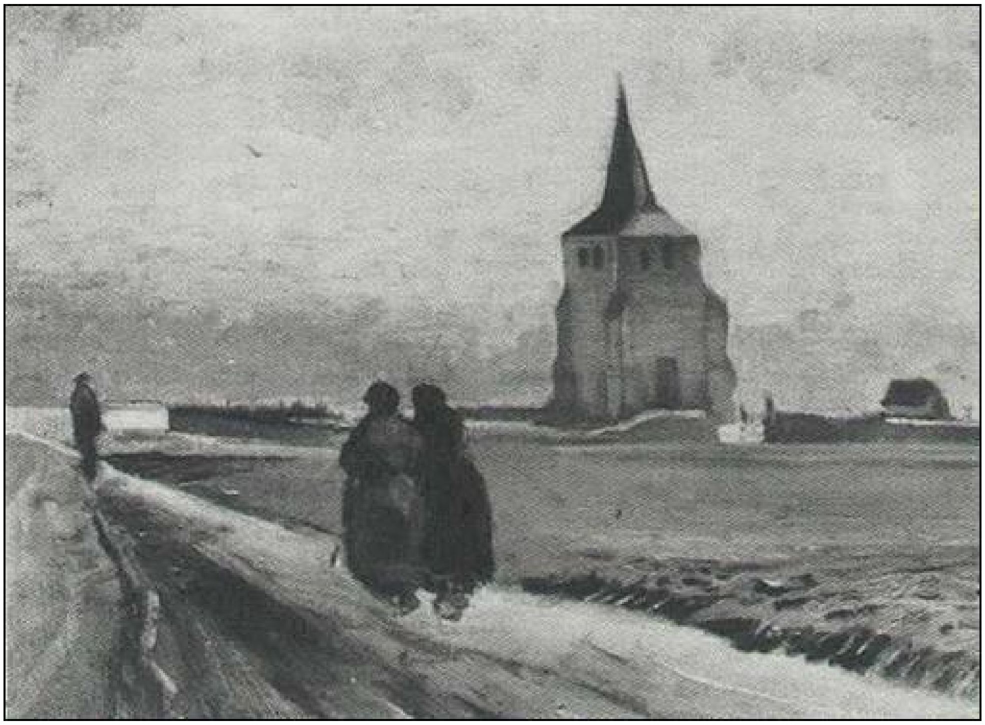


Weaver Arranging Threads
Oil on canvas on panel
41.0 x 57.0 cm.
Nuenen: April-May, 1884



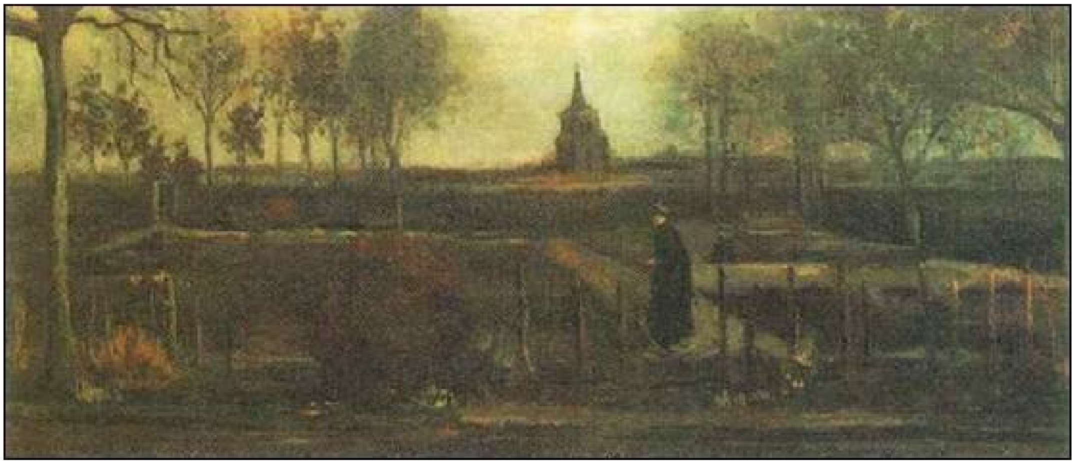
Old Church Tower at Nuenen, The

Oil on canvas on panel
47.5 x 55.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1884



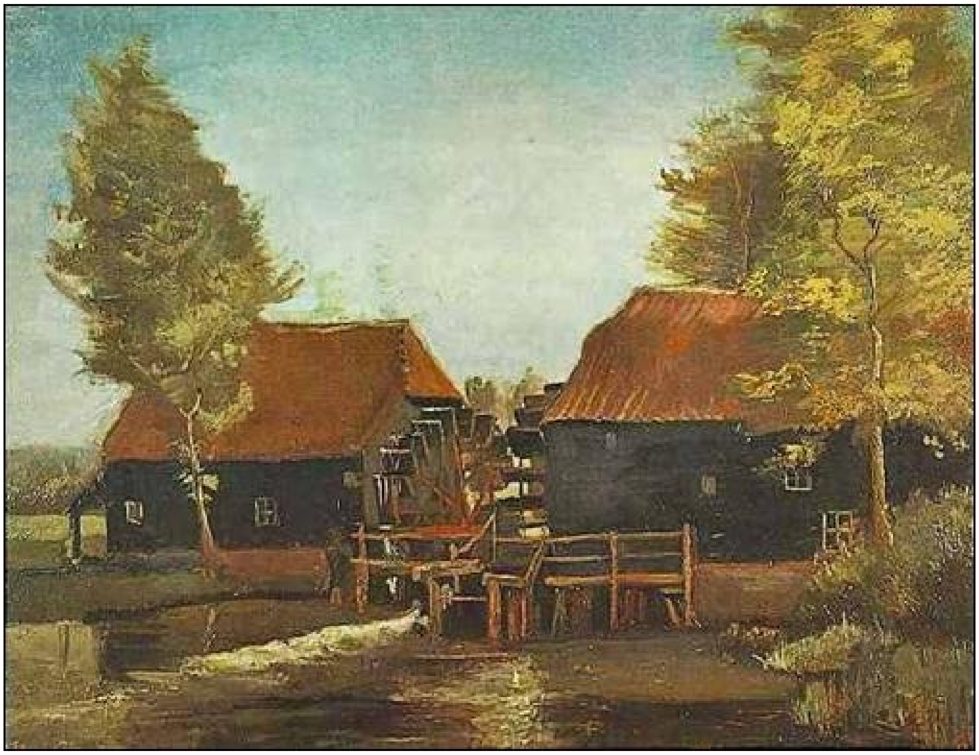
Old Tower of Nuenen with People Walking, The

Oil on canvas on panel
33.5 x 44.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1884

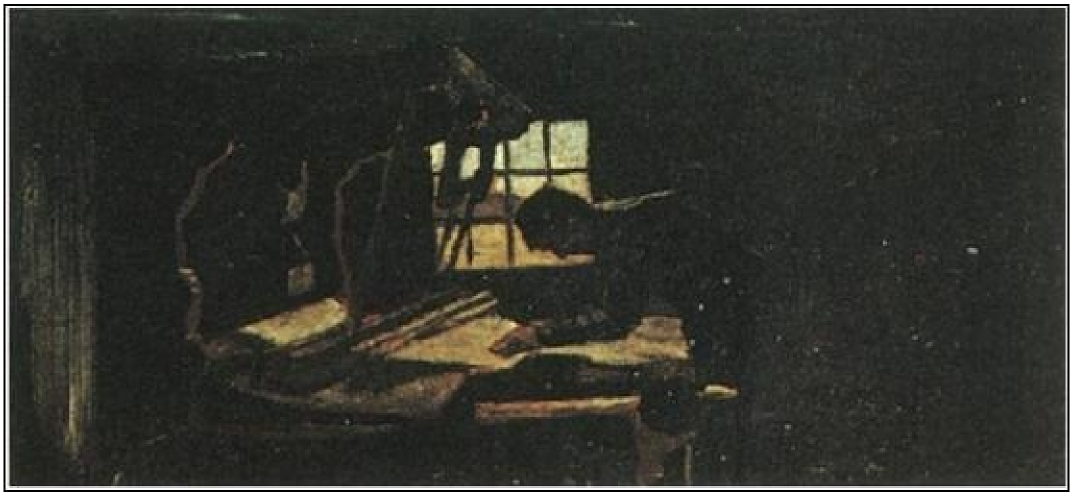


Parsonage Garden at Nuenen, The

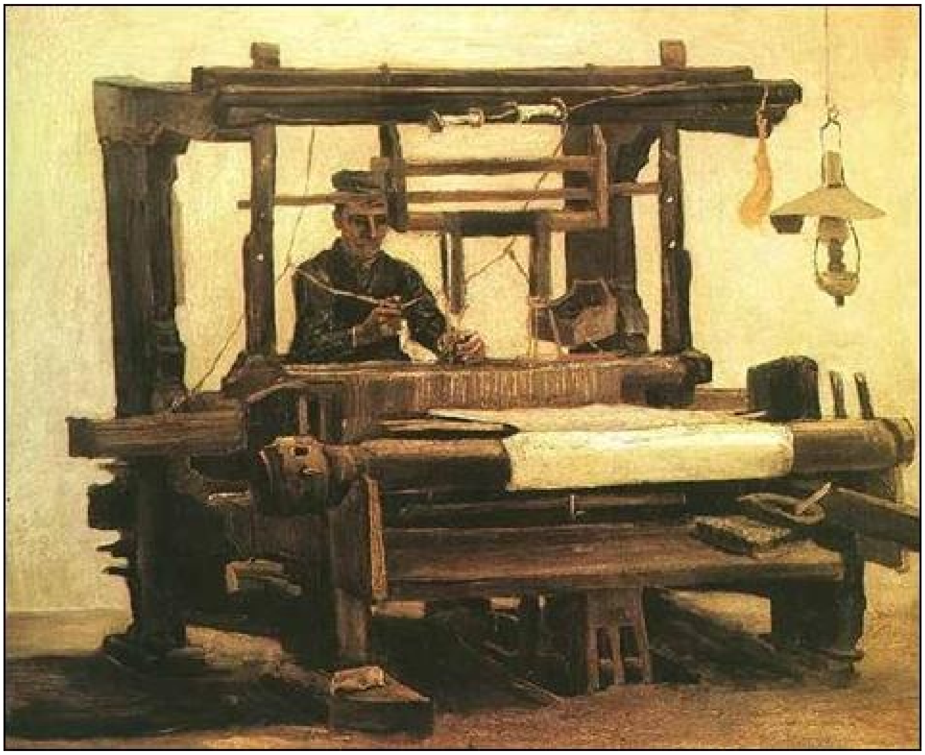
Oil on paper on panel
25.0 x 57.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1884



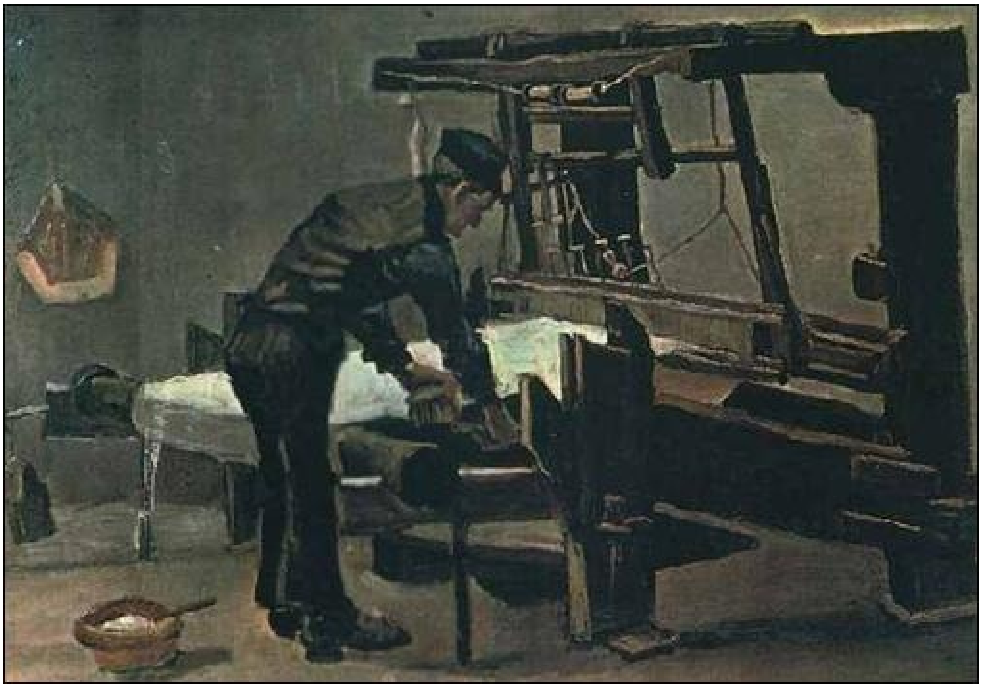
Water Mill at Kollen Near Nuenen
Oil on canvas on cardboard
57.5 x 78.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1884



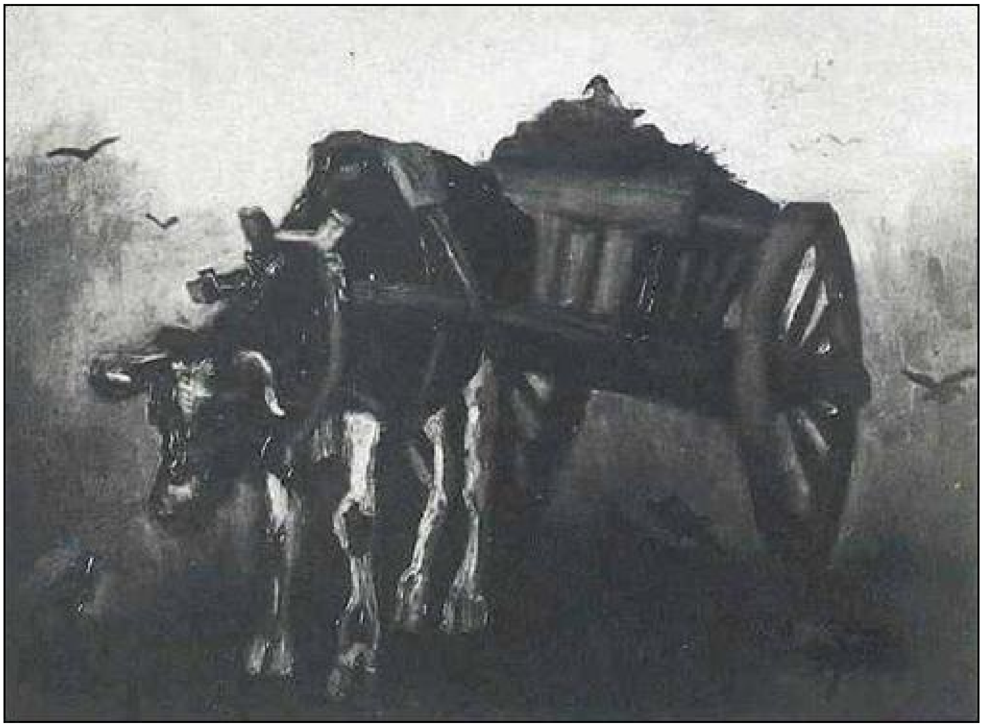
Weaver Arranging Threads
Oil on panel
19.0 x 41.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1884



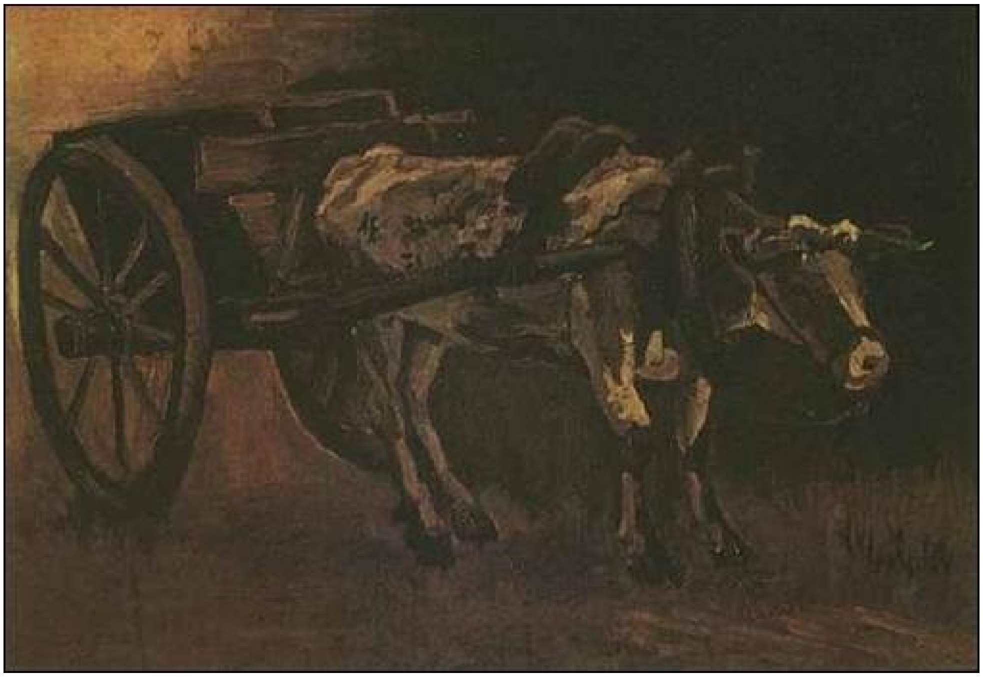
Weaver, Seen from the Front
Oil on canvas
70.0 x 85.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1884



Weaver Standing in Front of a Loom
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 79.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1884

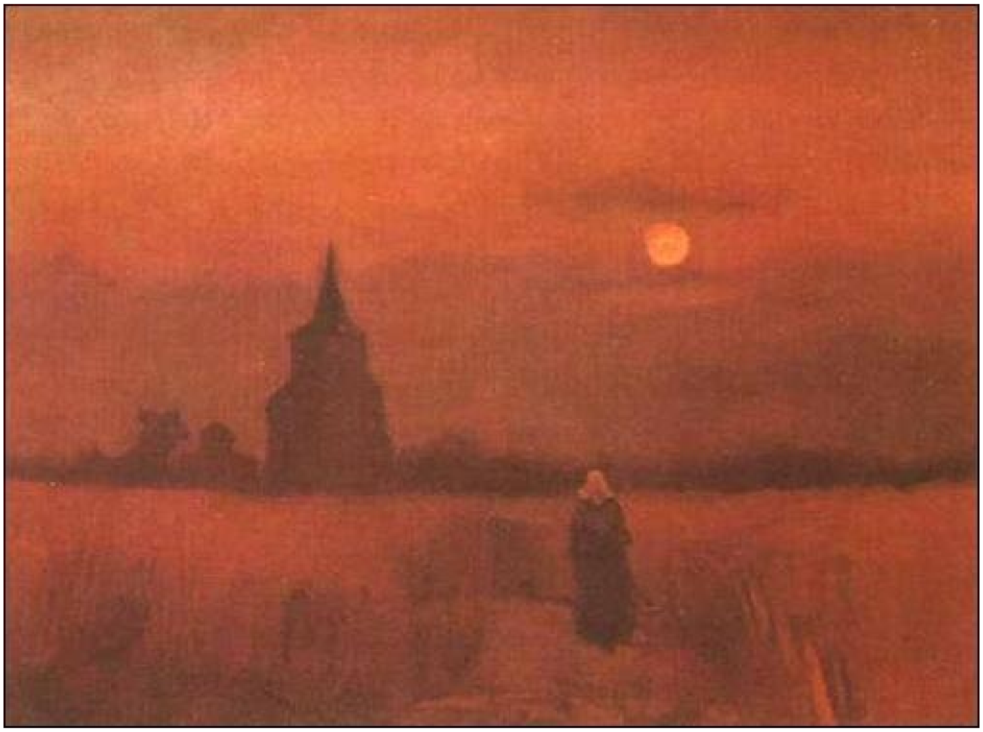


Cart with Black Ox
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 80.0 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1884



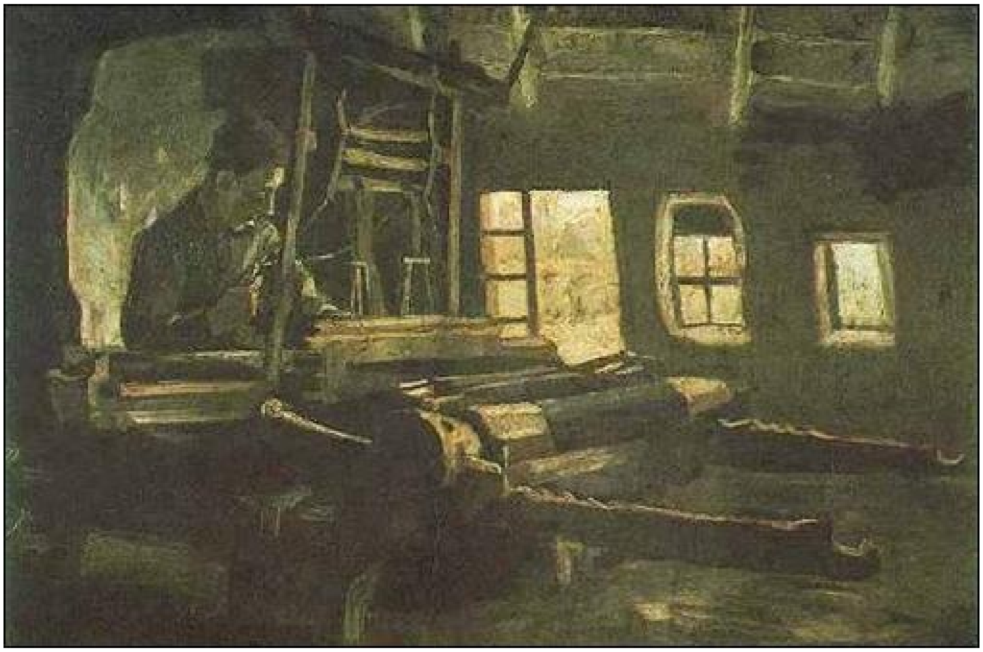
Cart with Red and White Ox

Oil on canvas on panel
57.0 x 82.5 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1884

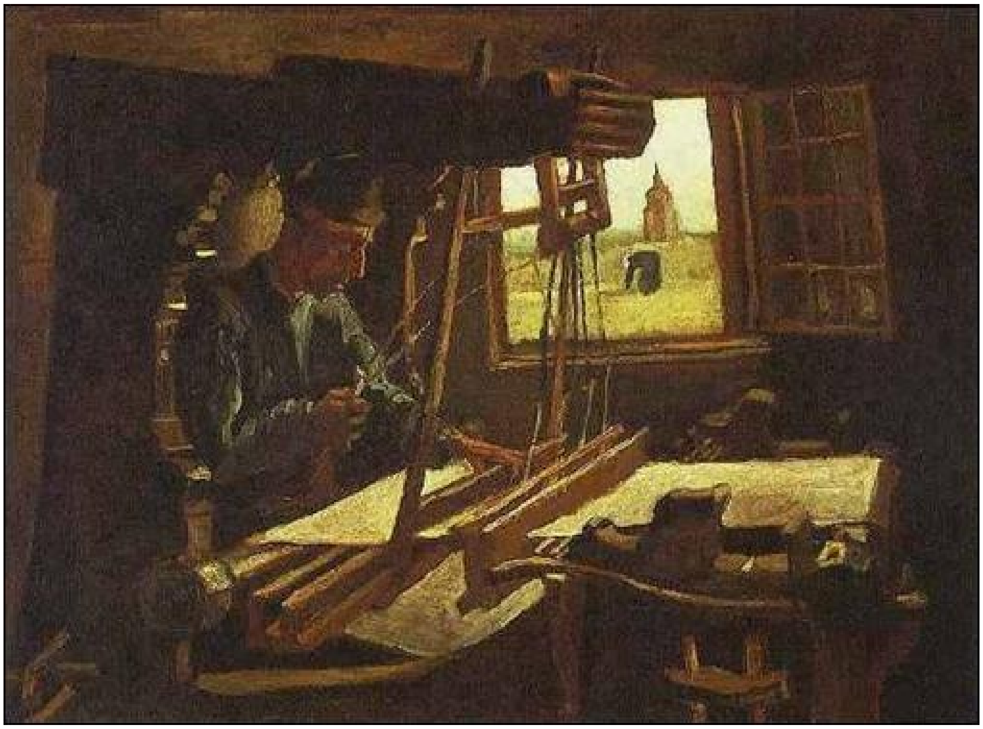


Old Tower in the Fields, The

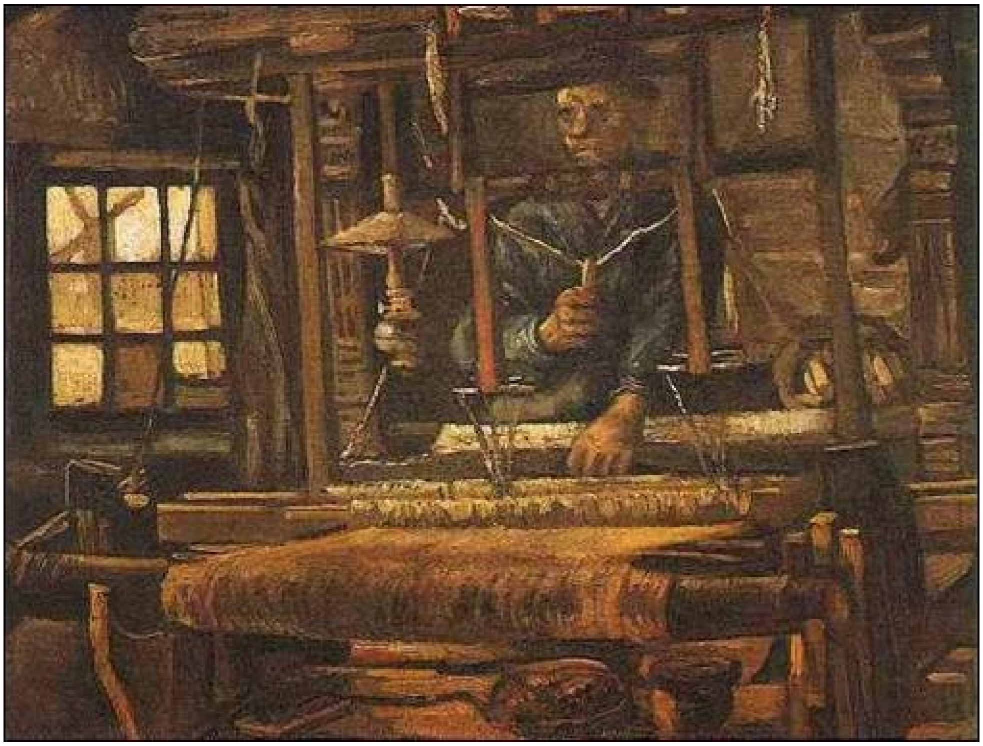
Oil on canvas on cardboard
35.0 x 47.0 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1884



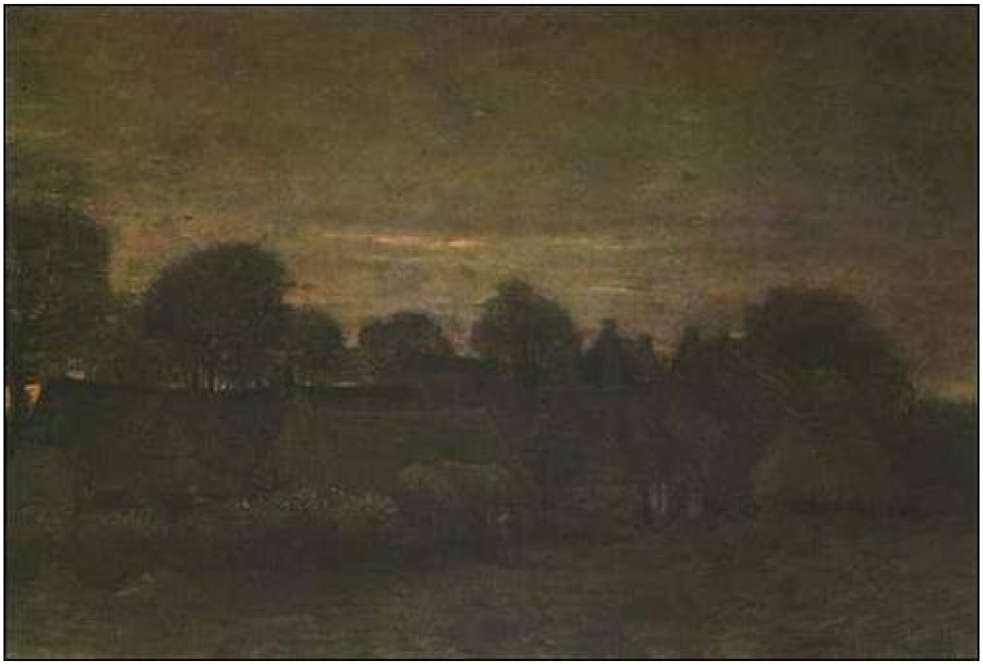
Weaver, Interior with Three Small Windows
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 93.0 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1884



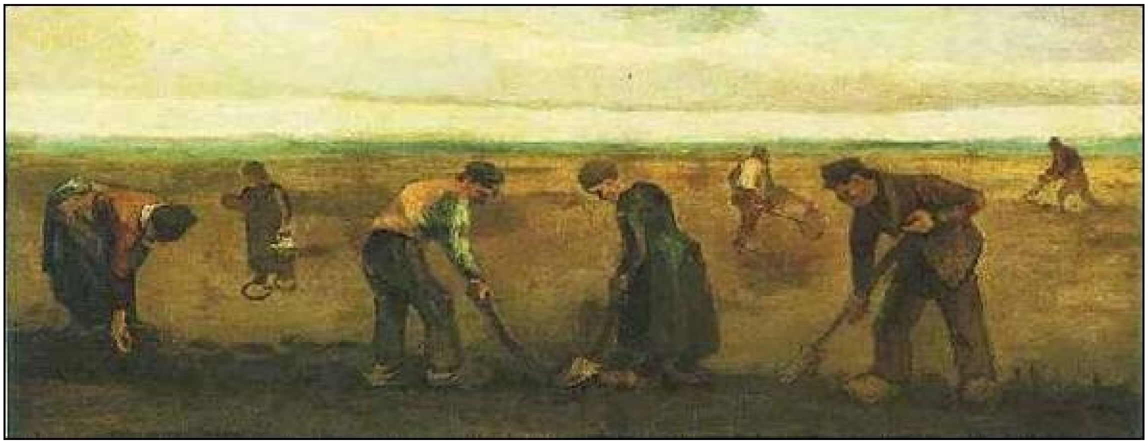
Weaver Near an Open Window
Oil on canvas
67.7 x 93.2 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1884



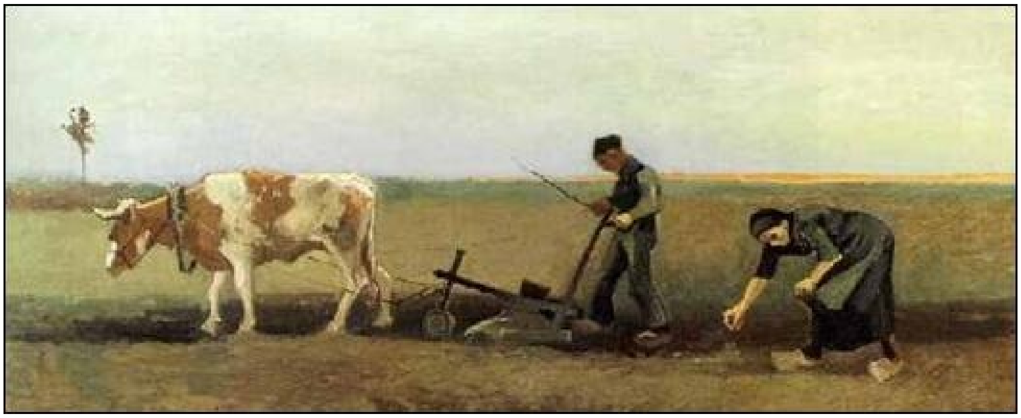
Weaver, Seen from the Front
Oil on canvas on panel
47.0 x 61.3 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1884



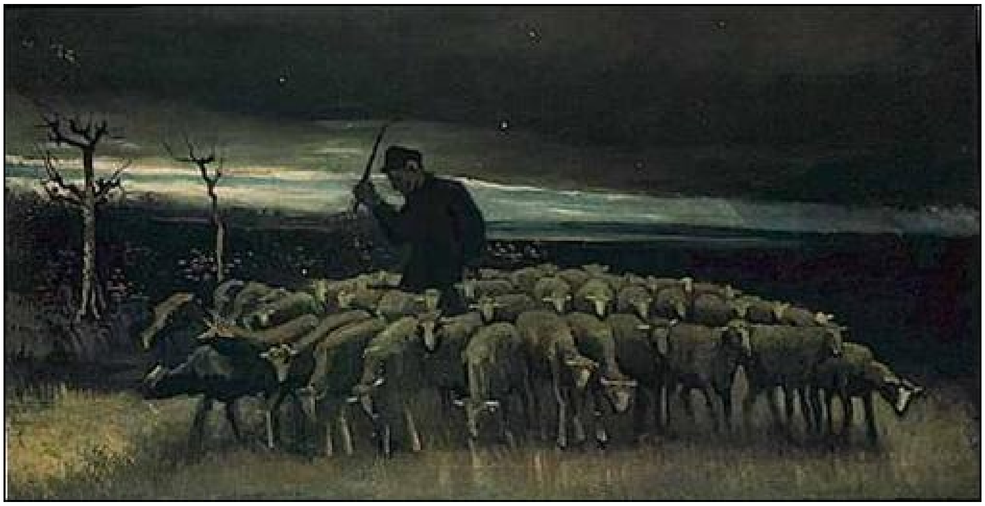
Village at Sunset
Oil on paper on cardboard
57.0 x 82.0 cm.
Nuenen: Summer, 1884



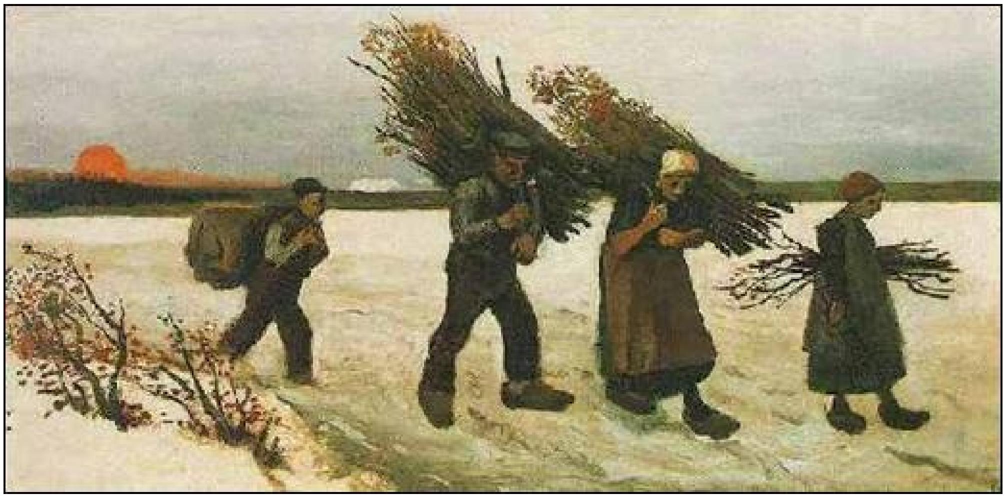
Farmers Planting Potatoes
Oil on canvas
66.0 x 149.0 cm.
Nuenen: August-September, 1884



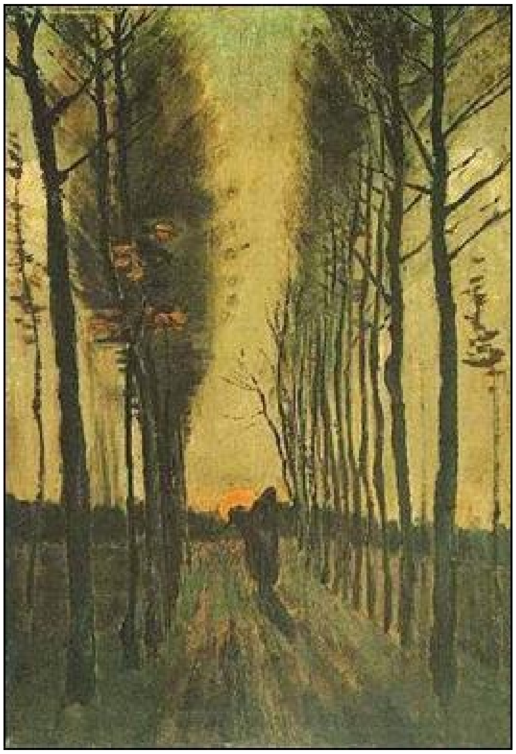
Potato Planting
Oil on canvas
70.5 x 170.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1884



Shepherd with a Flock of Sheep
Oil on canvas on cardboard
67.0 x 126.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1884

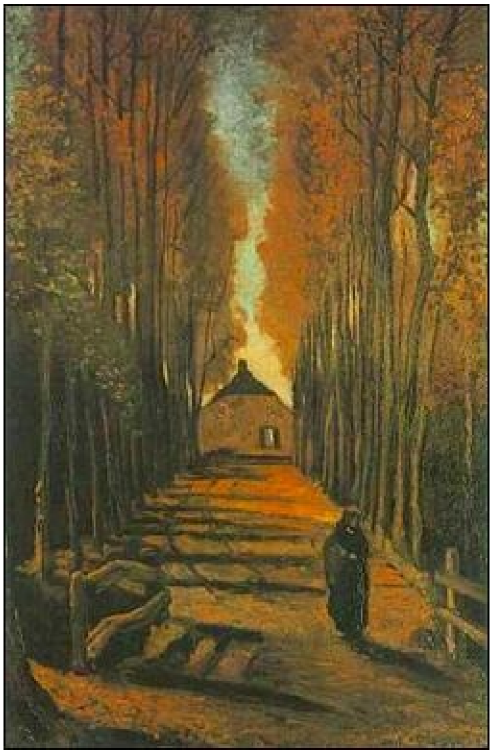


Wood Gatherers in the Snow
Oil on canvas on panel
67.0 x 126.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1884



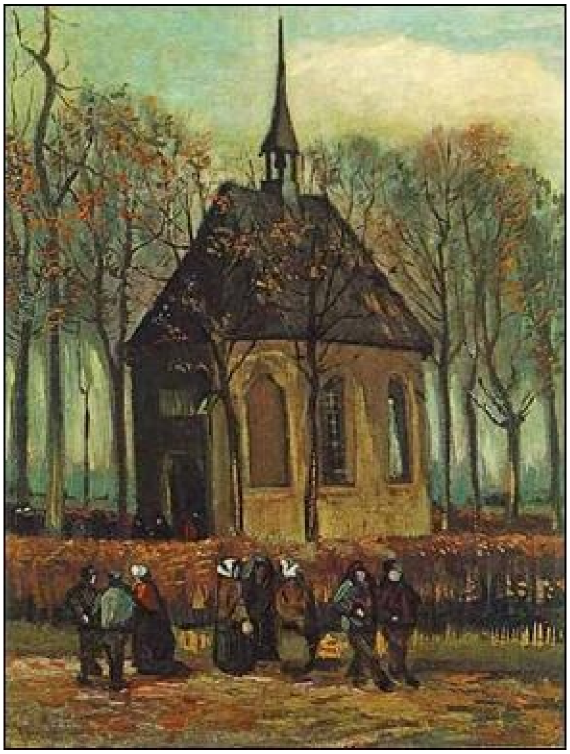
Avenue of Poplars at Sunset

Oil on canvas
45.5 x 32.5 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1884

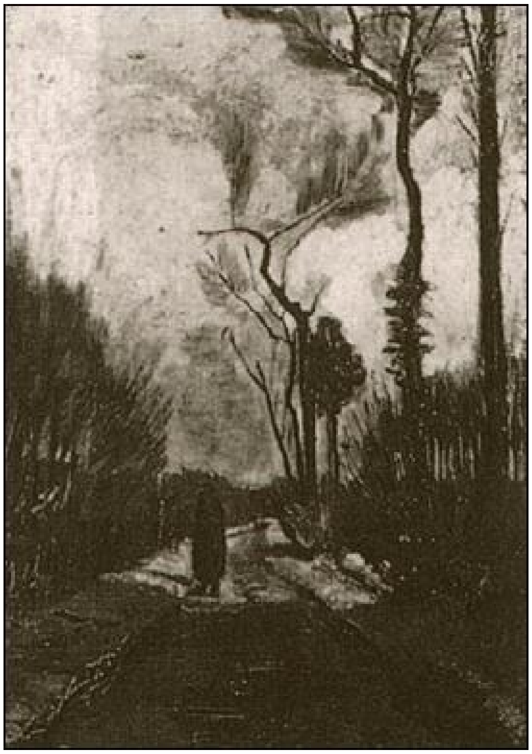


Avenue of Poplars in Autumn

Oil on canvas on panel
99.0 x 66.0 cm.
Nuenen: late October, 1884

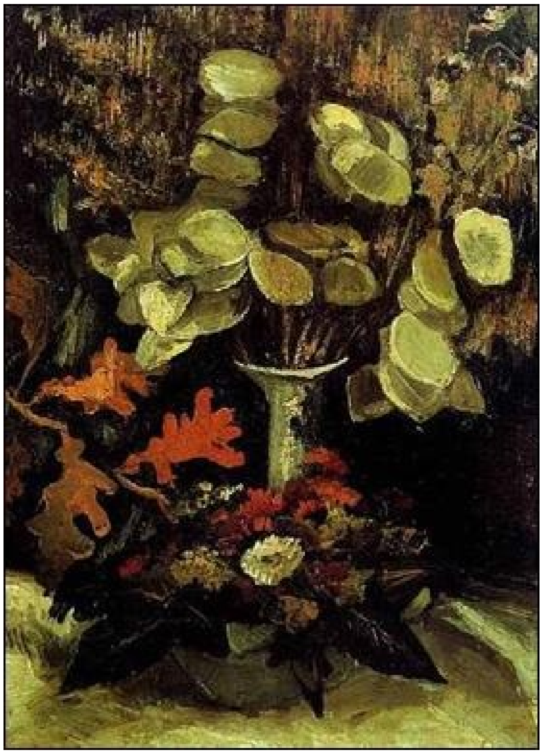


Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen
Oil on canvas
41.3 x 32.1 cm.
Nuenen: January-February, 1884 and Autumn, 1885



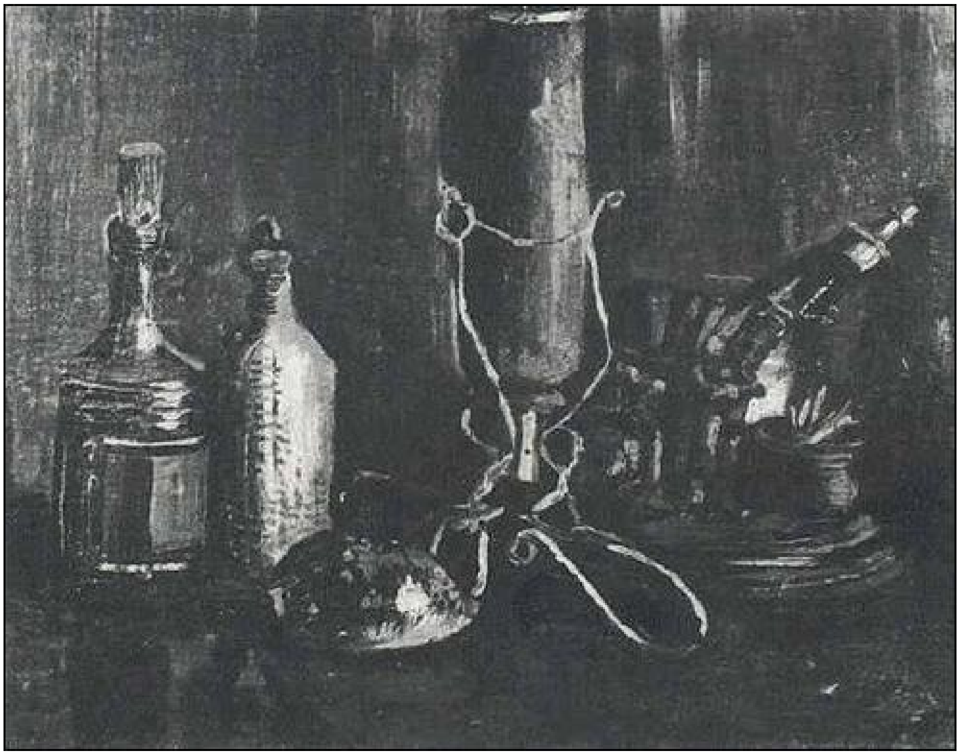
Lane in Autumn

Oil on canvas on panel
46.0 x 35.0 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1884

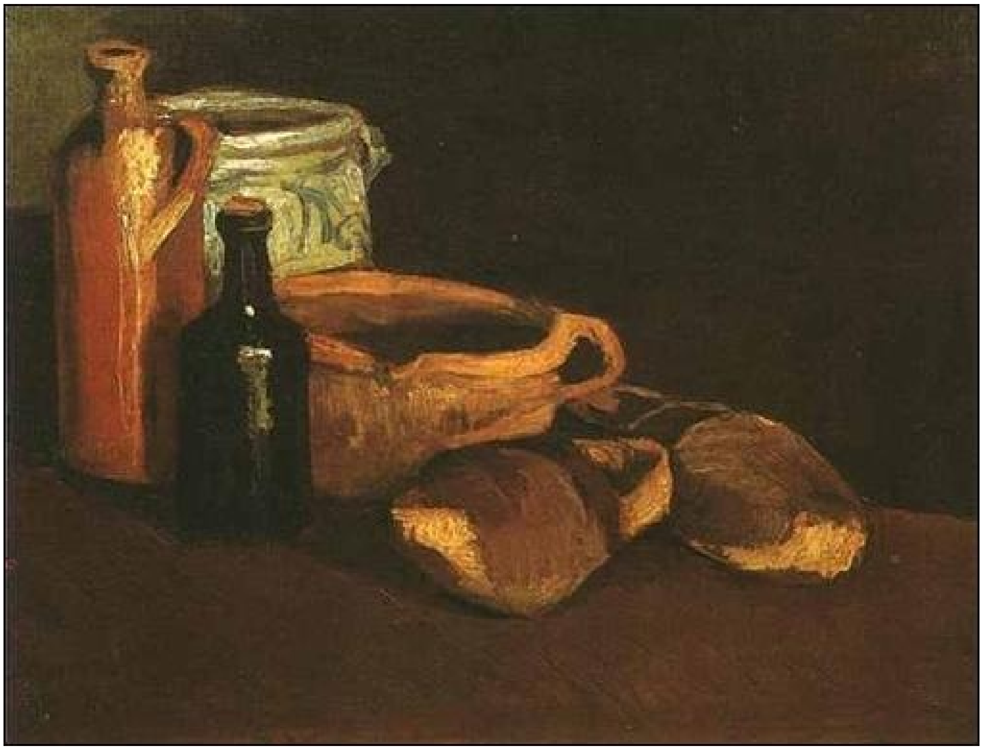


Vase with Honesty

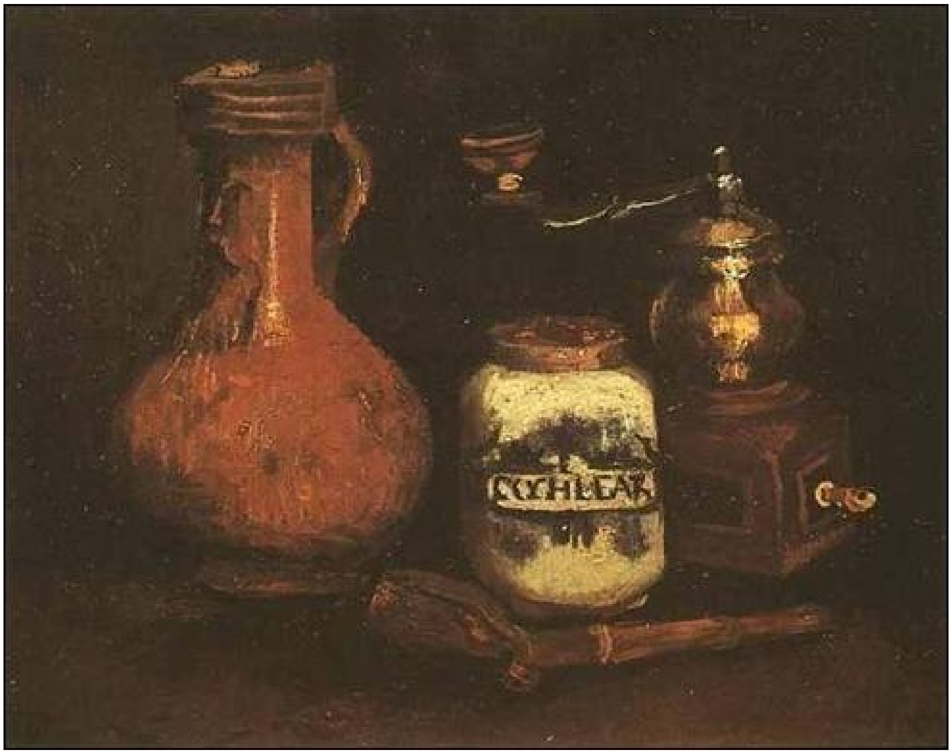
Oil on canvas
42.7 x 31.7 cm.
Nuenen: Autumn-Winter, 1884-85



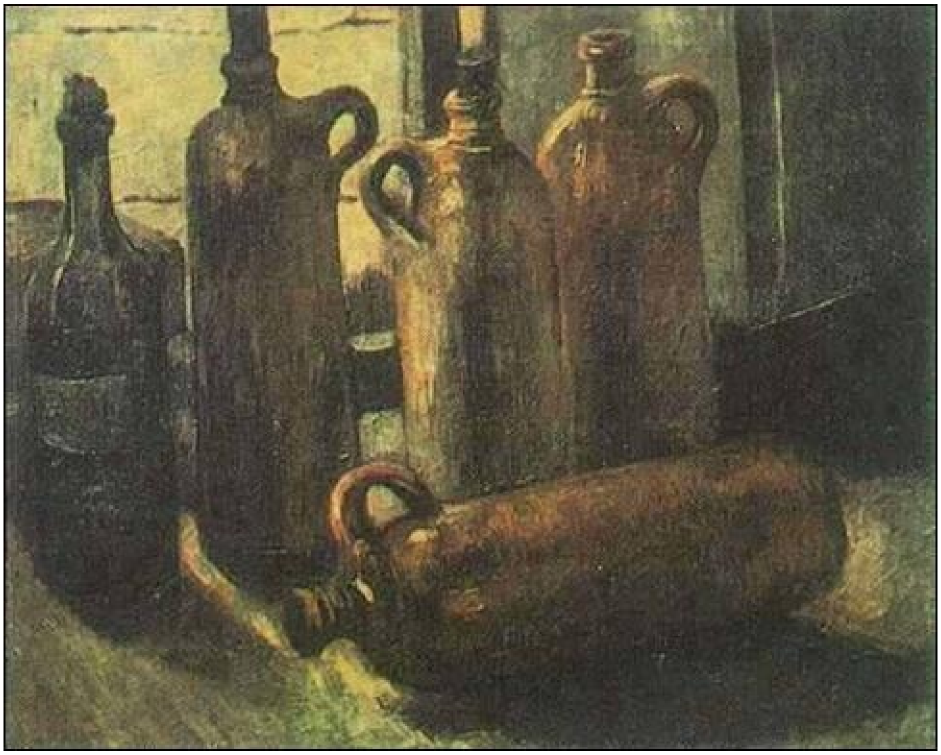
Still Life with Bottles and a Cowrie Shell
Oil on canvas on panel
30.5 x 40.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



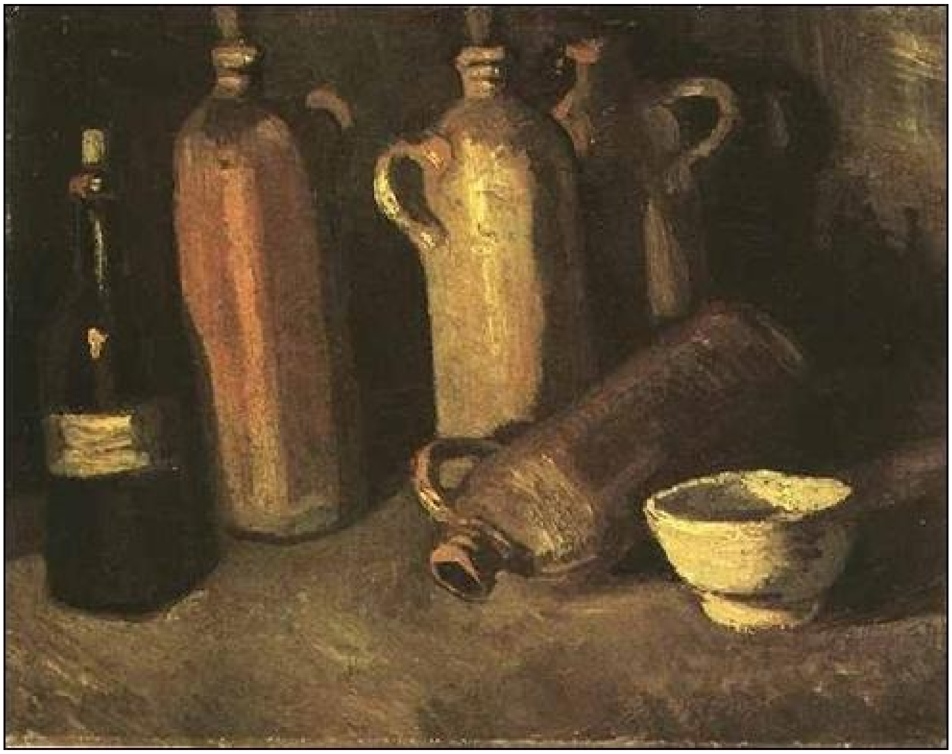
Still Life with Clogs and Pots
Oil on canvas on panel
42.0 x 54.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



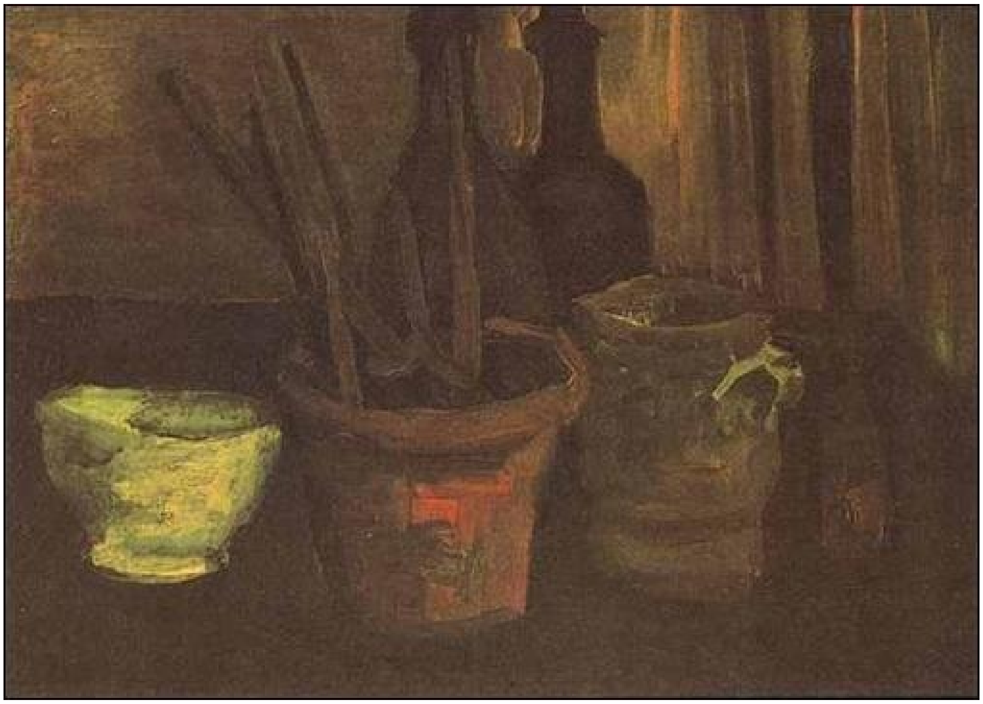
Still Life with Coffee Mill, Pipe Case and Jug
Oil on canvas
000 x 000 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



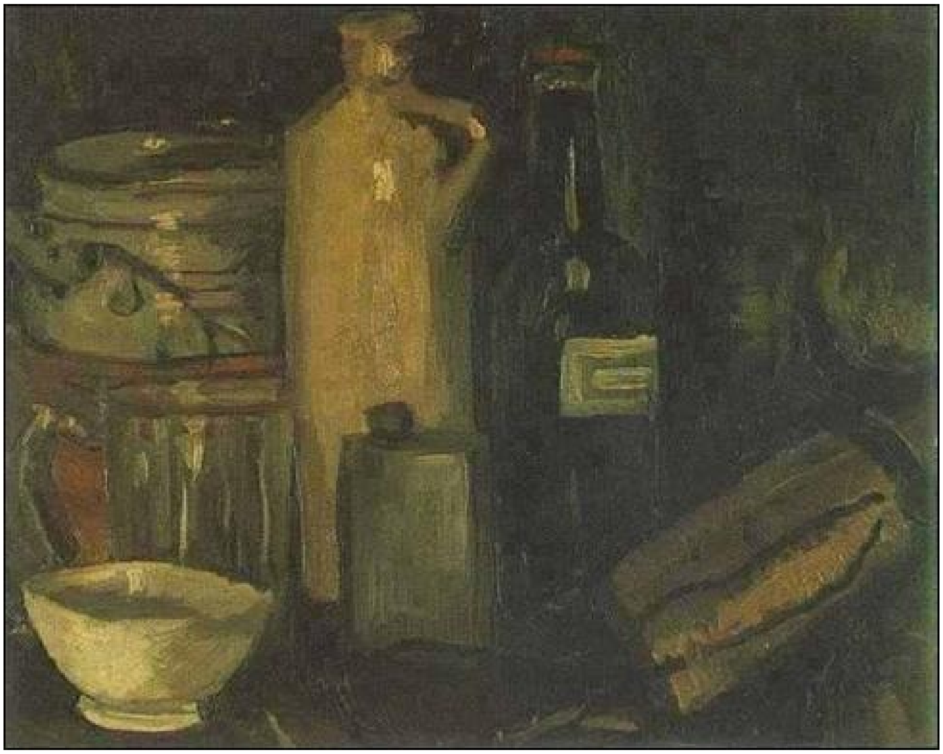
Still Life with Five Bottles
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 56.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



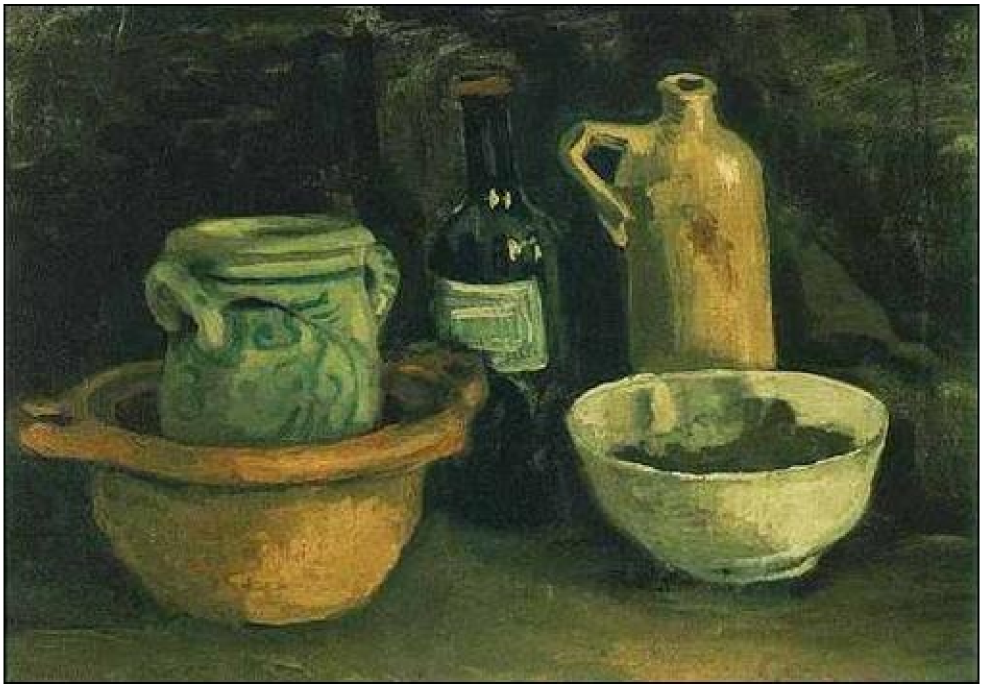
Still Life with Four Stone Bottles, Flask and White Cup
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



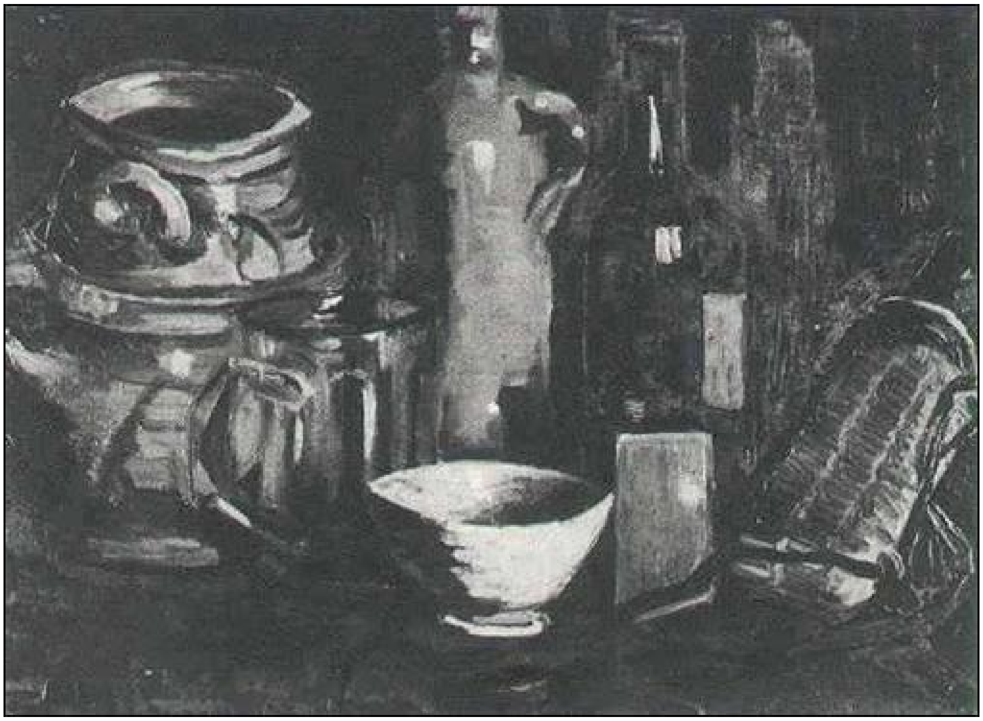
Still Life with Paintbrushes in a Pot
Oil on canvas on panel
31.5 x 41.5 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



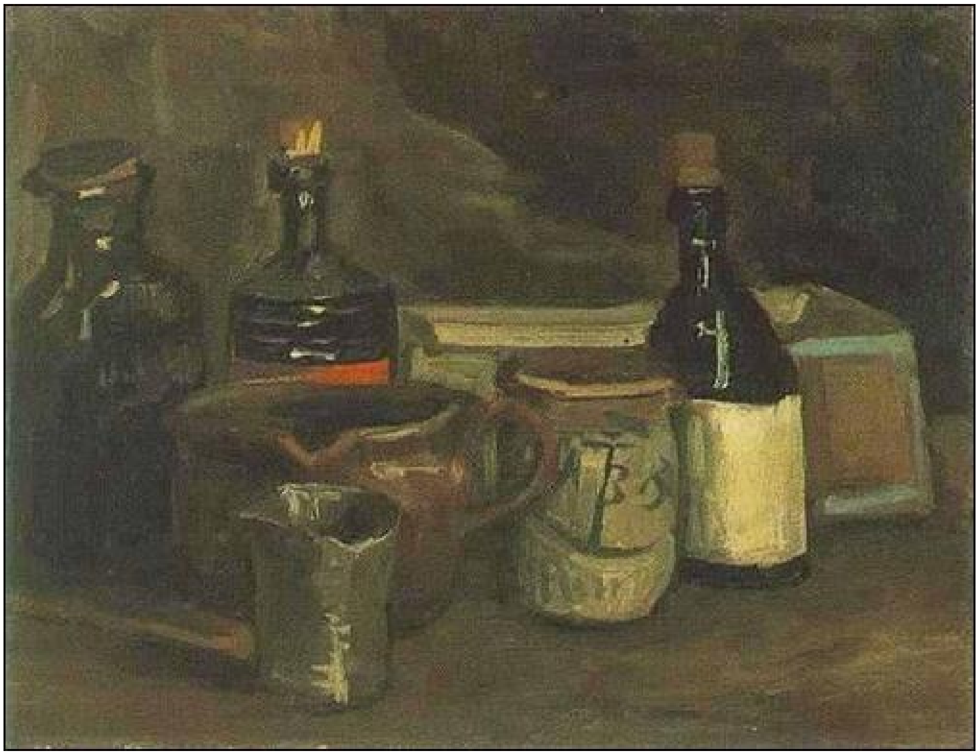
Still Life with Pots, Jar and Bottles
Oil on canvas
29.5 x 39.5 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



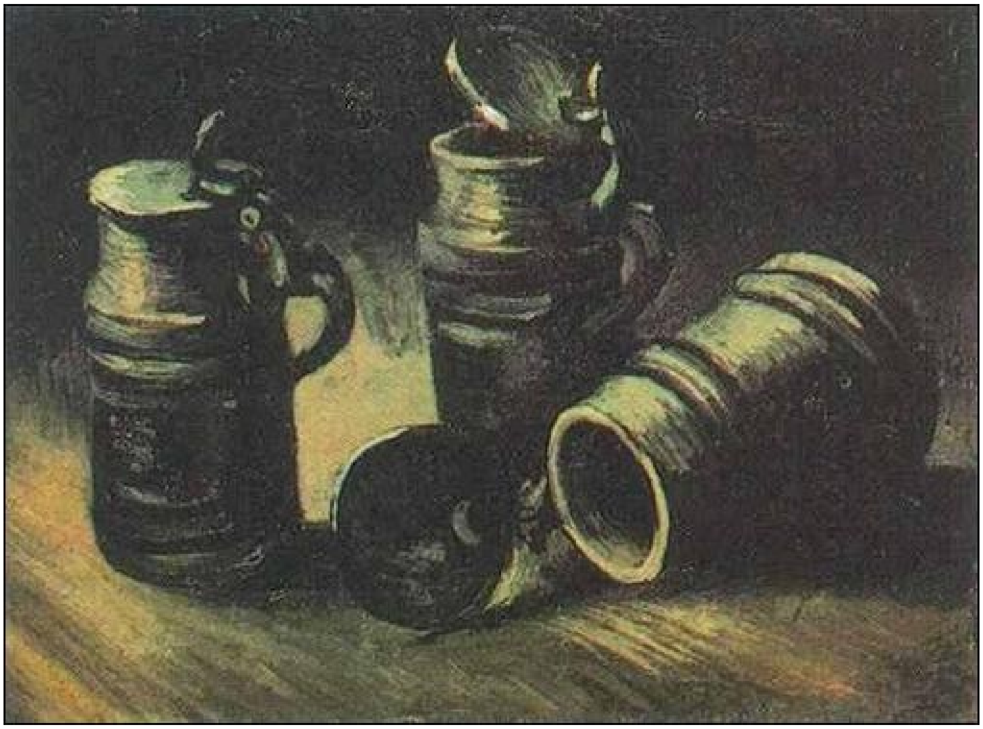
Still Life with Pottery and Two Bottles
Oil on canvas
40.0 x 56.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



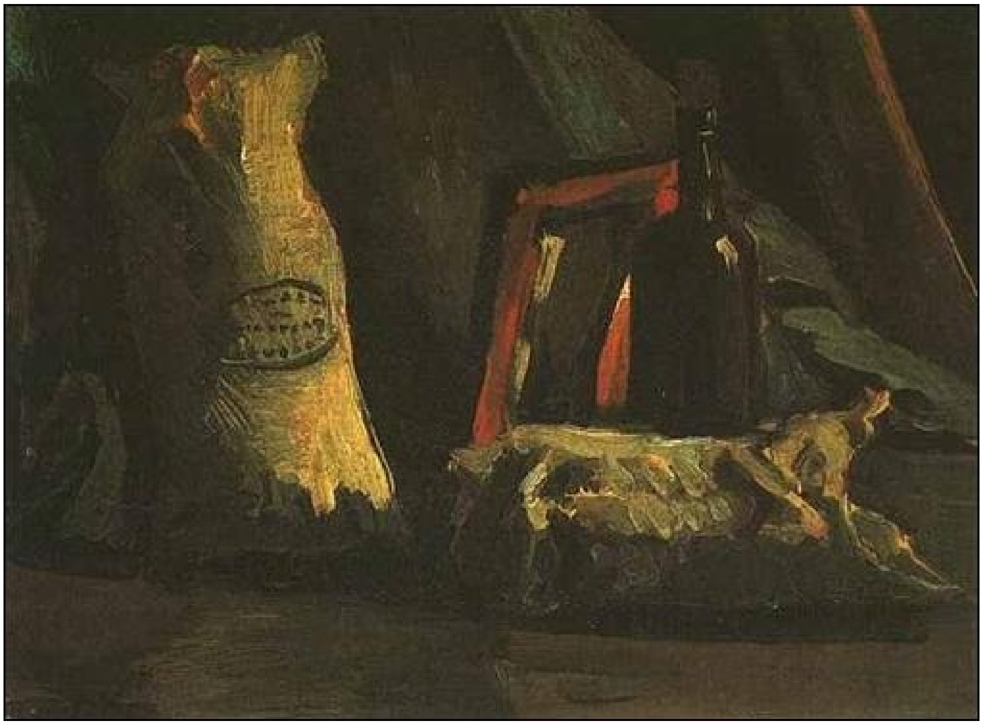
Still Life with Pottery, Beer Glass and Bottle
Oil on canvas on panel
31.0 x 41.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



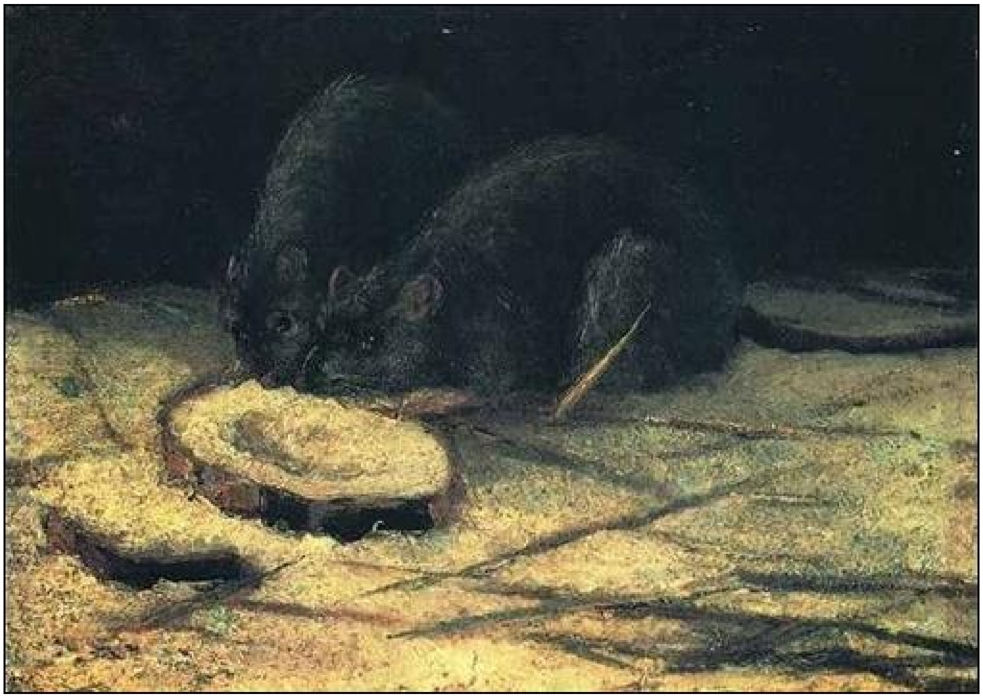
Still Life with Bottles and Earthenware
Oil on canvas
31.5 x 41.7 cm.
Nuenen: November-April, 1884-85



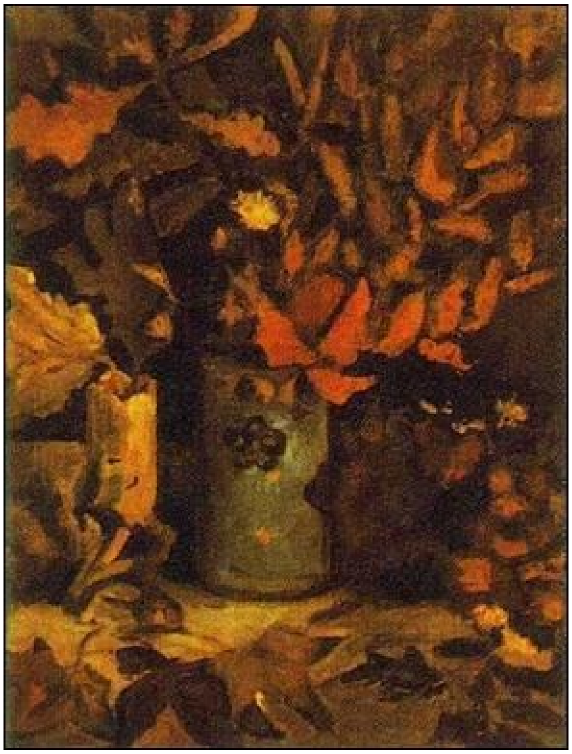
Beer Tankards
Oil on canvas
31.5 x 42.5 cm.
Nuenen: September-mid-October, 1885



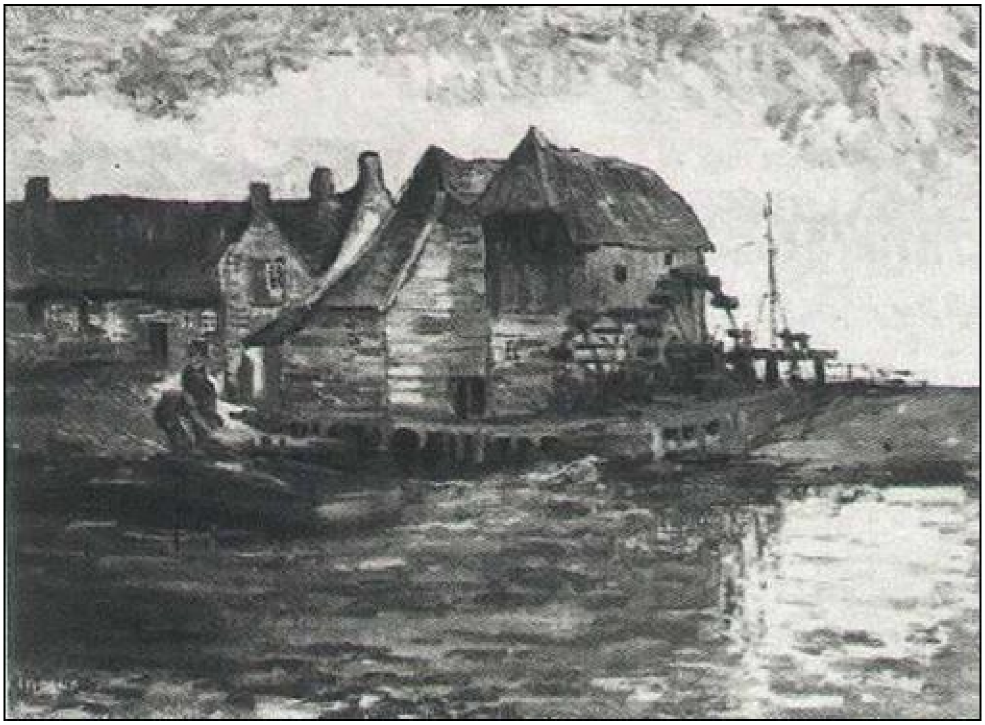
Still Life with Two Sacks and a Bottle
Oil on canvas on panel
31.7 x 42.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



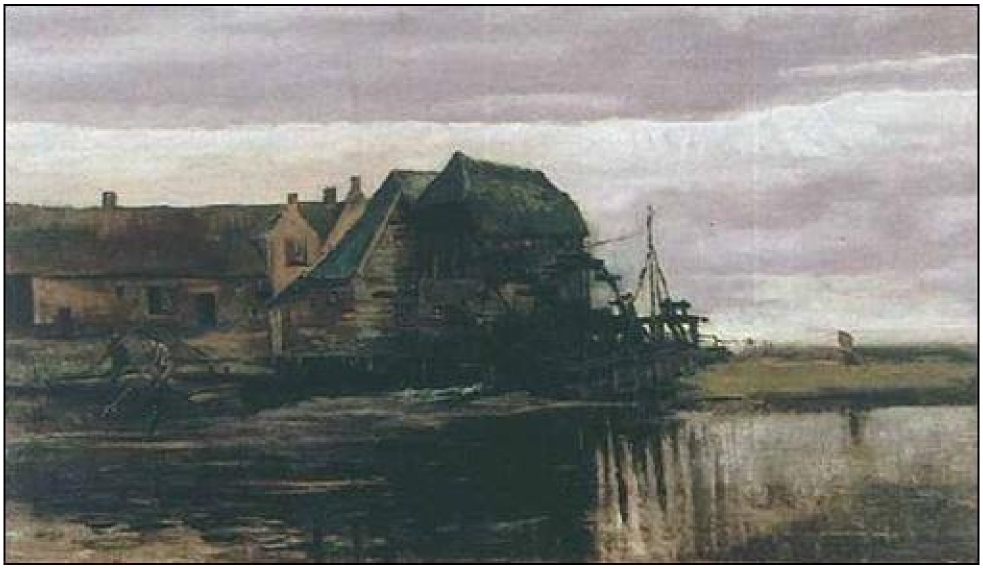
Two Rats
Oil on panel
29.5 x 41.5 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



Vase with Dead Leaves
Oil on canvas on panel
41.5 x 31.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884

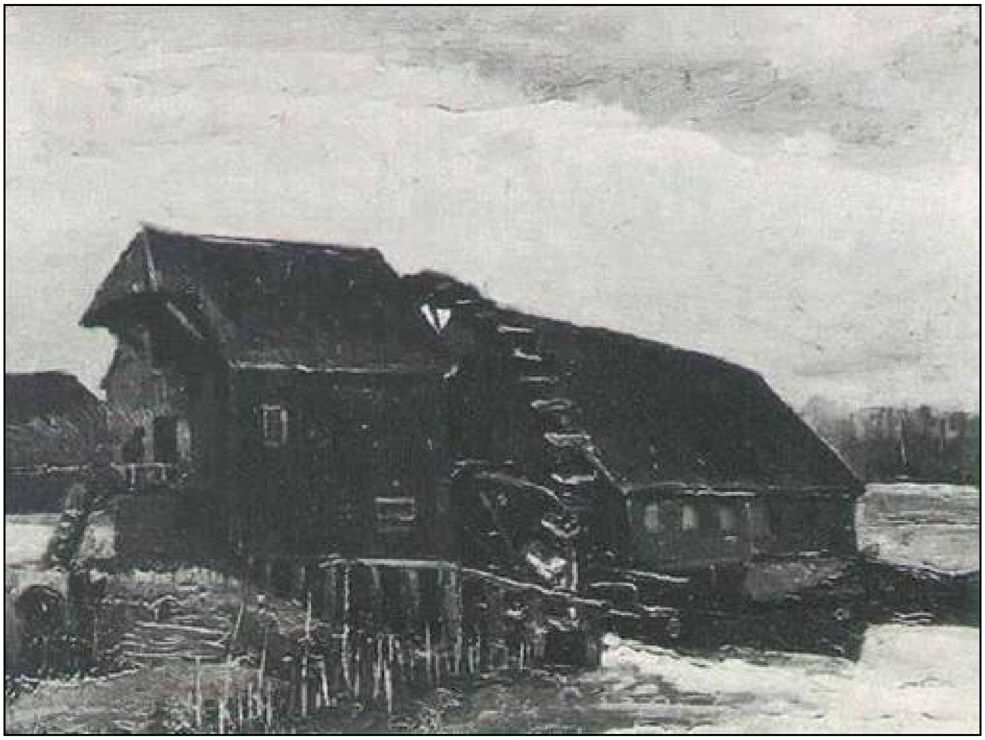


Water Mill at Gennep
Oil on cardboard
75.0 x 100.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884

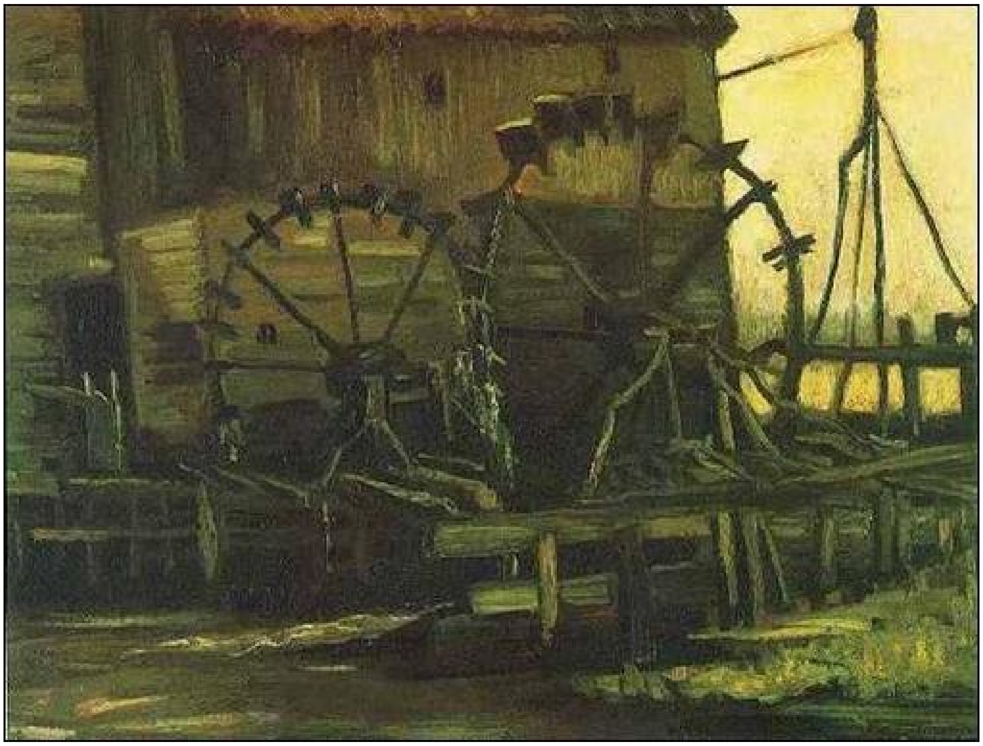


Water Mill at Gennep

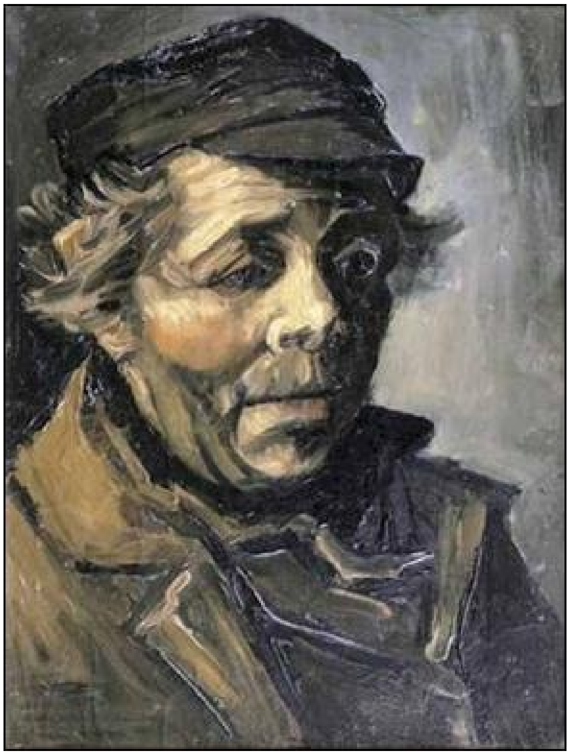
Oil on canvas on panel
85.0 x 151.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



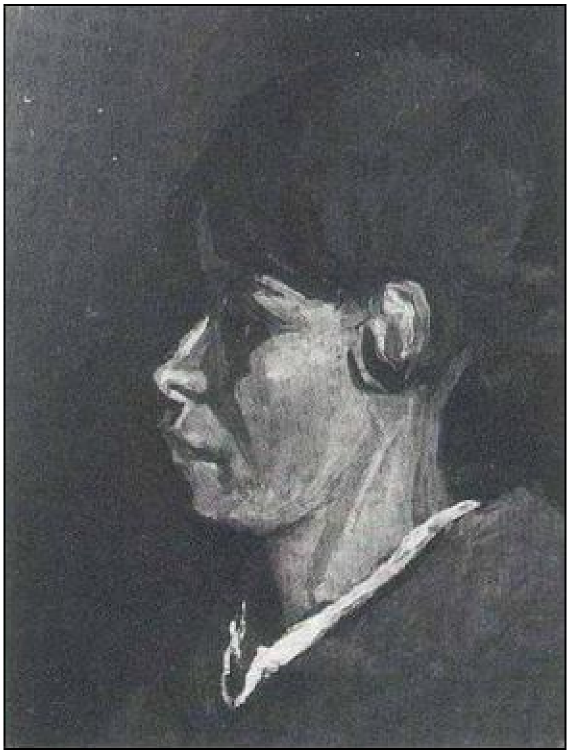
Water Mill at Opwetten
Oil on canvas on panel
45.0 x 58.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



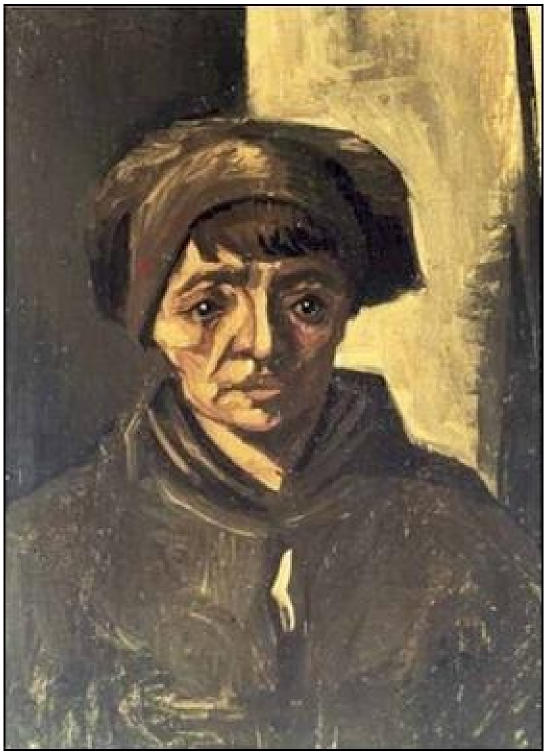
Water Mill at Gennep
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 78.5 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1884



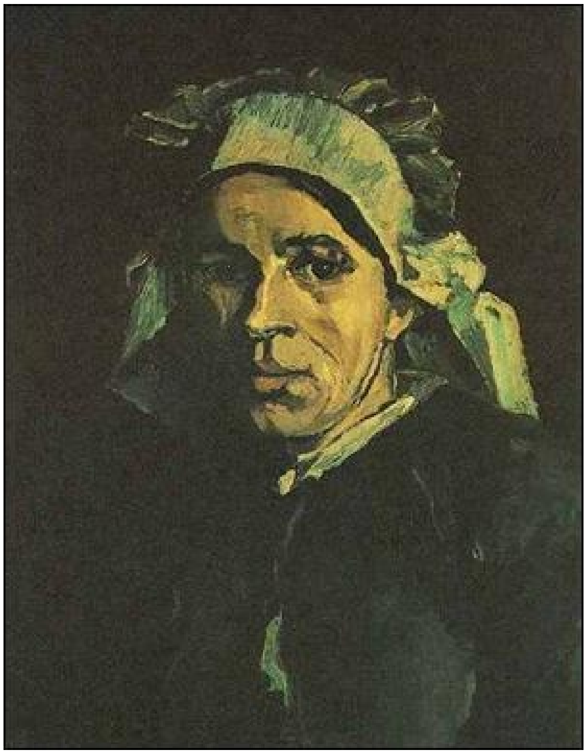
Head of a Peasant with Cap
Oil on canvas
39.4 x 30.2 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884



Head of a Peasant Woman
Oil on canvas on panel
40.0 x 32.5 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884

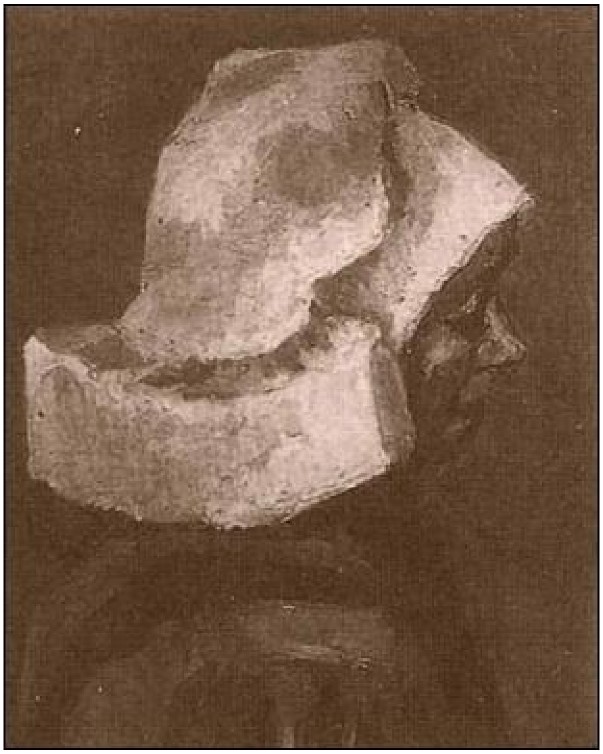


Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
35.0 x 26.0 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884



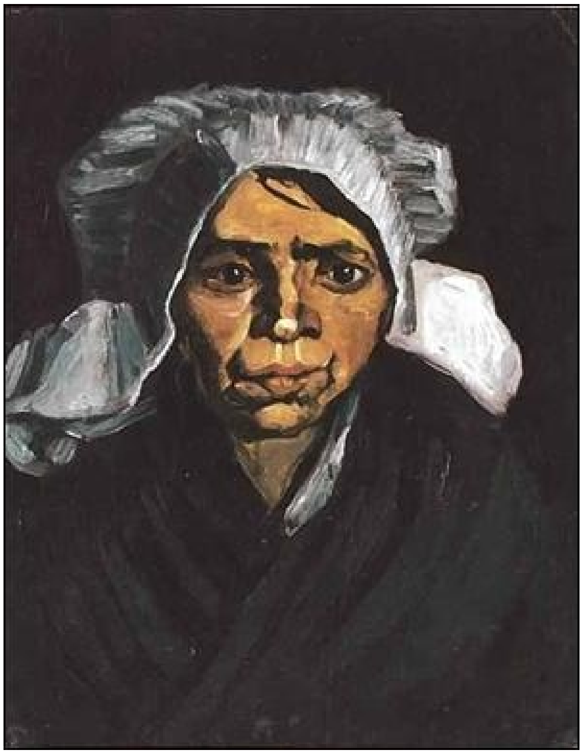
Head of a Woman

Oil on canvas
42.0 x 33.3 cm.
Nuenen: November-January, 1884-85

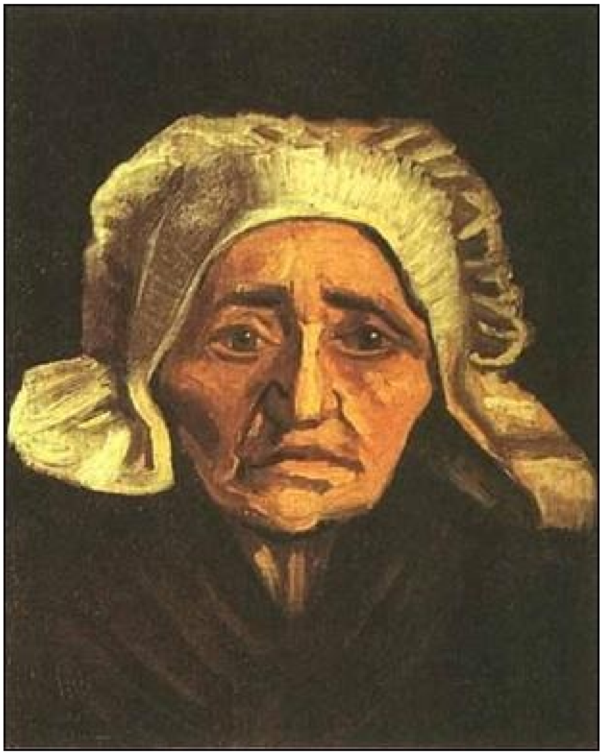


Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap

Oil on canvas on panel
40.5 x 30.5 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884

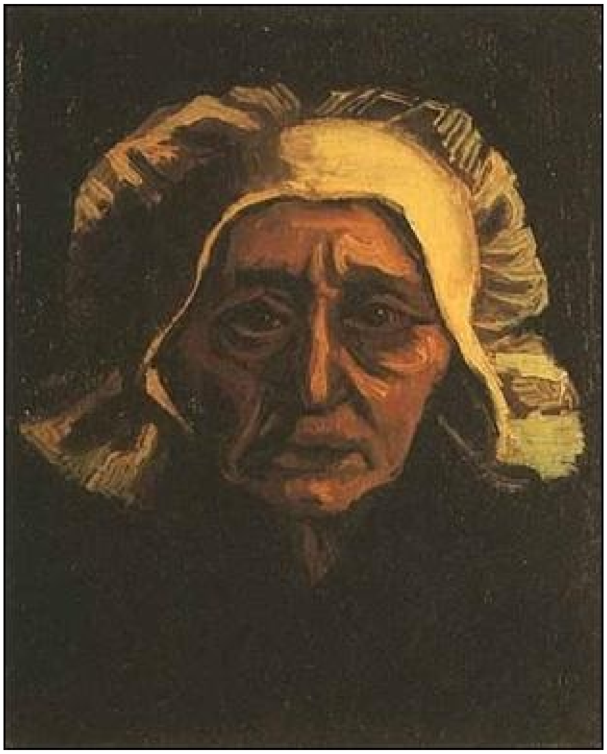


Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas
43.5 x 37.0 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884

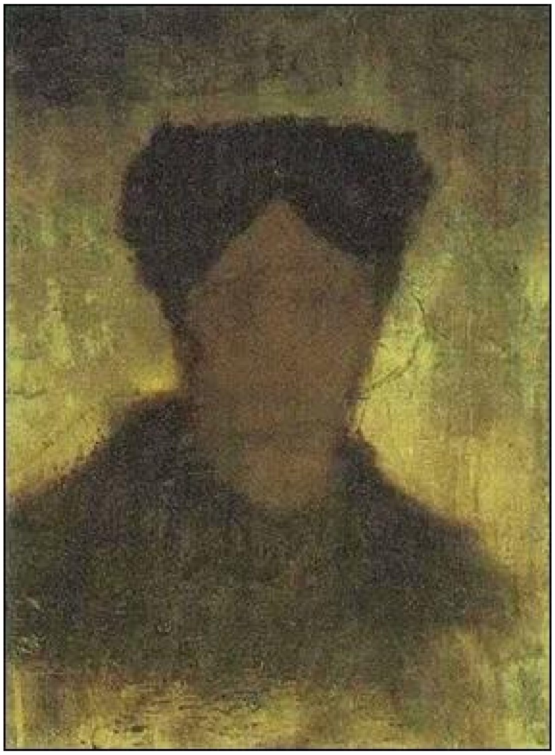


Head of an Old Peasant Woman with White Cap

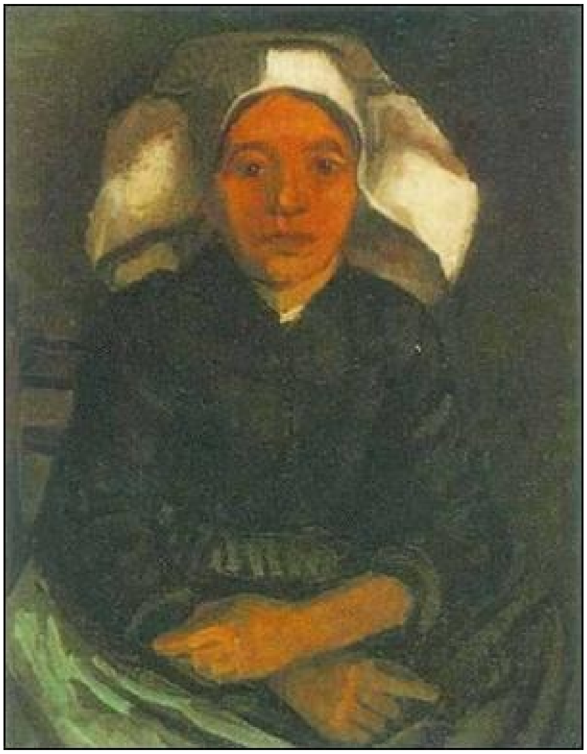
Oil on canvas on cardboard
33.0 x 26.0 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884



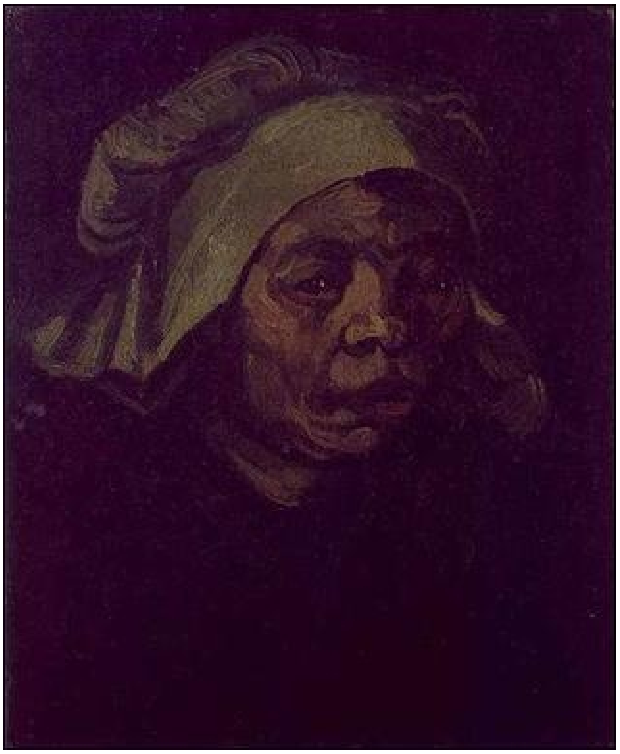
Head of an Old Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas
36.5 x 29.5 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884



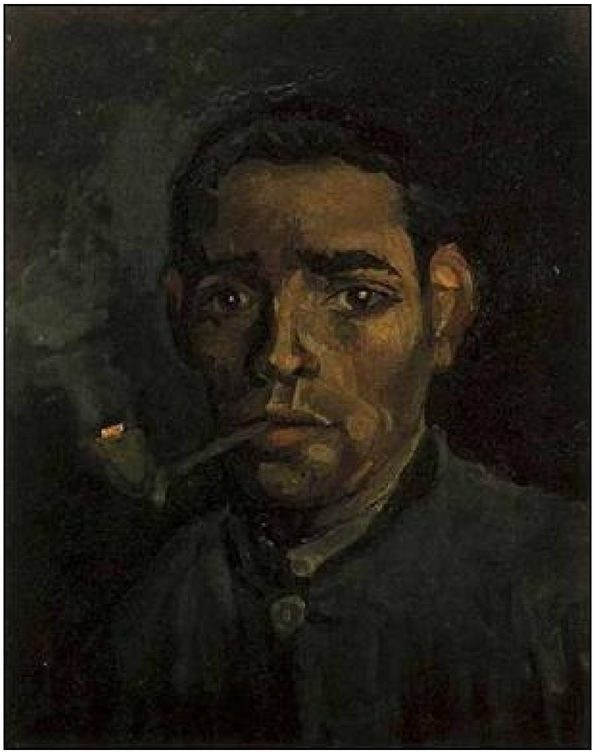
Head of a Woman
Oil on canvas on panel
47.8 x 34.8 cm.
Nuenen: November-May, 1884-85



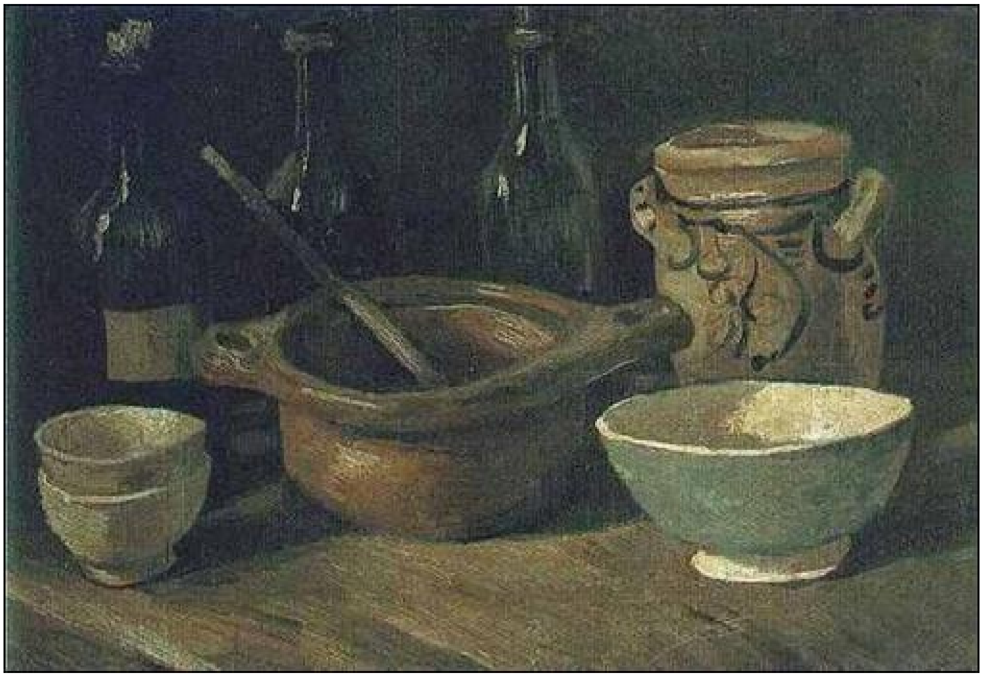
Peasant Woman, Seated with White Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
36.0 x 26.0 cm.
Nuenen: December, 1884



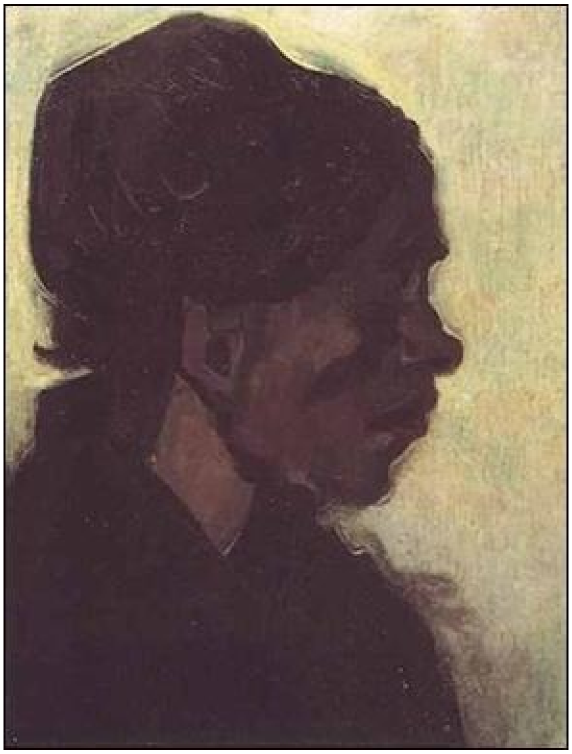
Head of a Woman
Oil on canvas marouflagued on triplex
42.2 x 34.8 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



Head of a Man
Oil on canvas
37.7 x 29.5 cm.
Nuenen: November-January, 1884-85

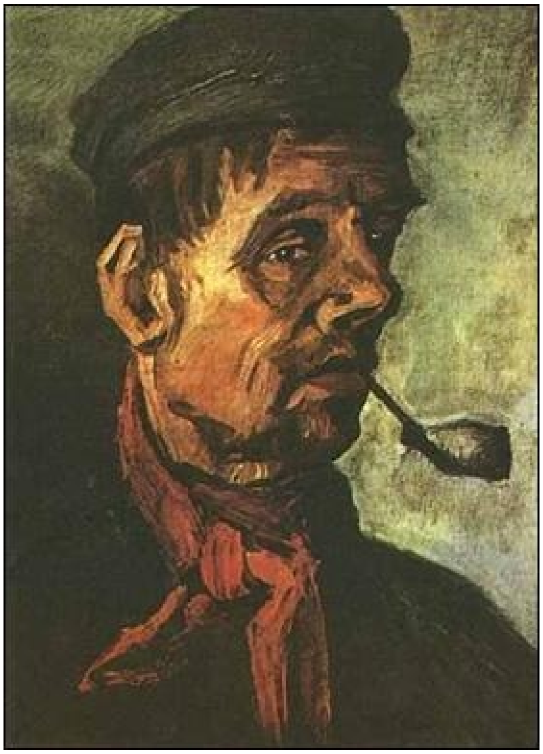


Still Life with Earthenware and Bottles
Oil on canvas
40.0 x 56.0 cm.
Nuenen: September-mid-October, 1885

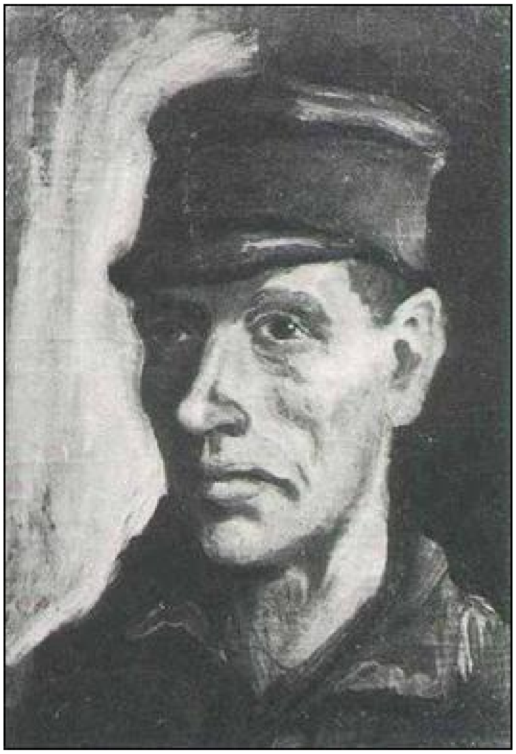


Head of a Brabant Peasant Woman with Dark Cap

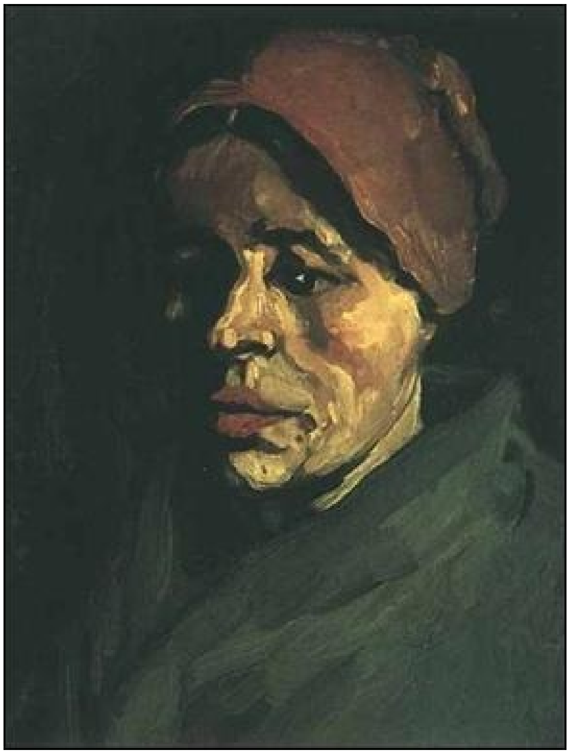
Oil on canvas on panel
26.0 x 20.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885



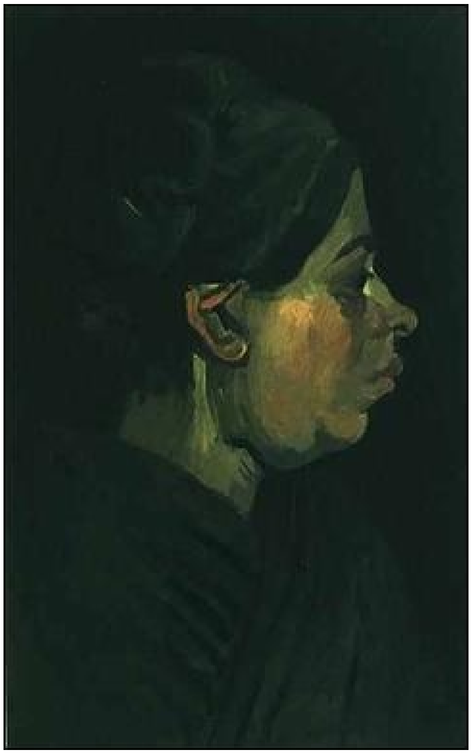
Head of a Peasant with a Pipe
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 32.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885



Head of a Peasant with Cap
Oil on canvas
35.5 x 26.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

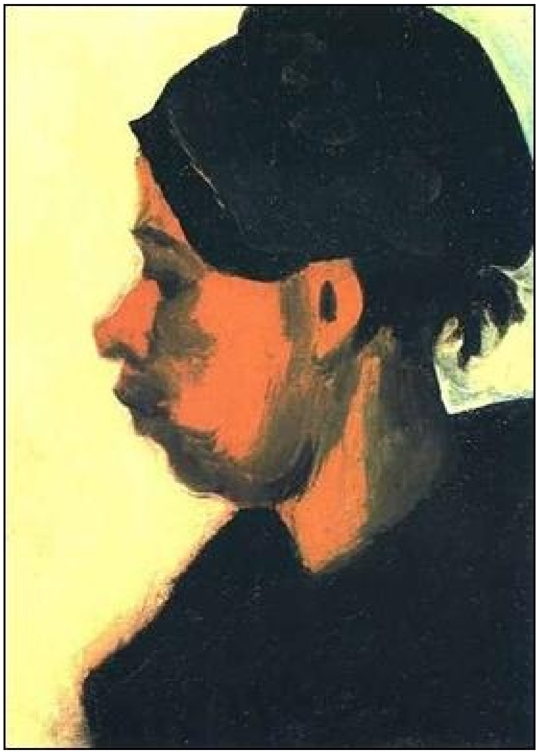


Head of a Peasant Woman with Brownish Cap
Oil on canvas
40.0 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

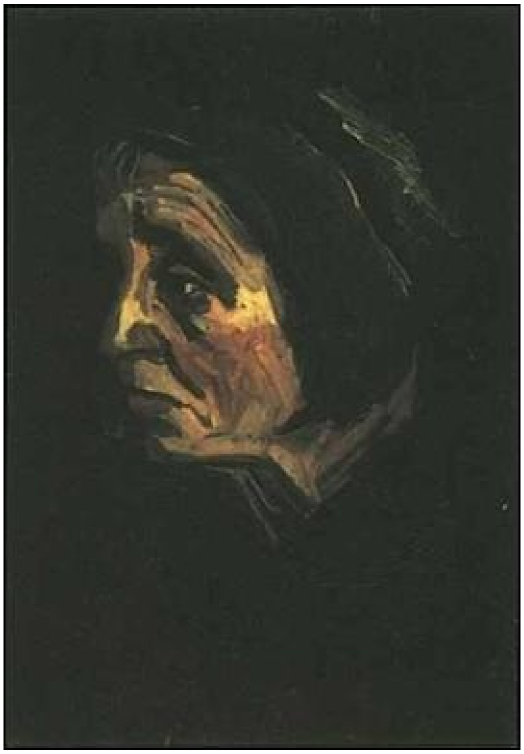


Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap

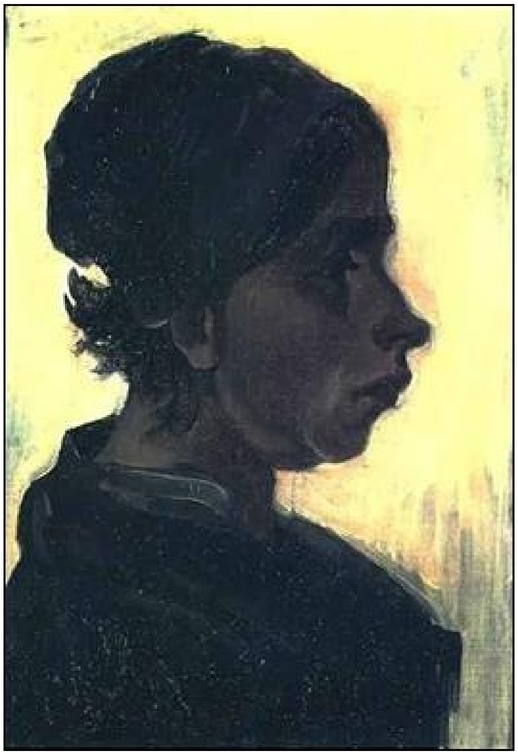
Oil on canvas on panel
37.5 x 24.5 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885



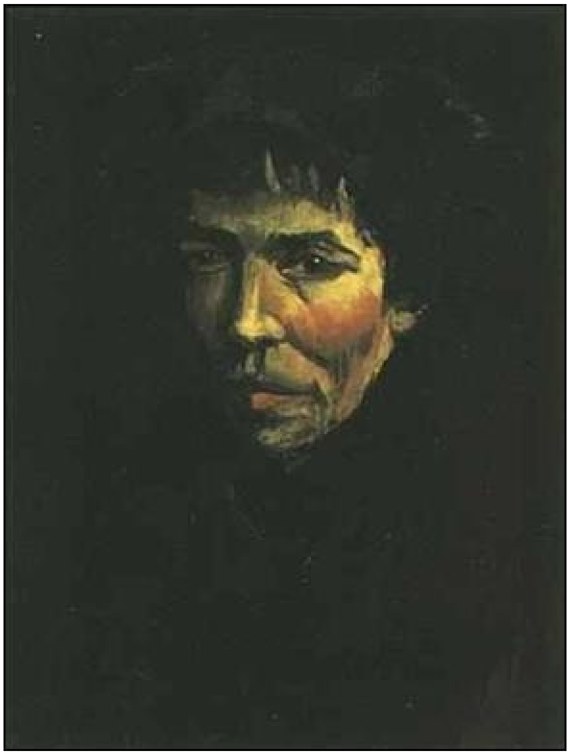
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
25.0 x 19.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885



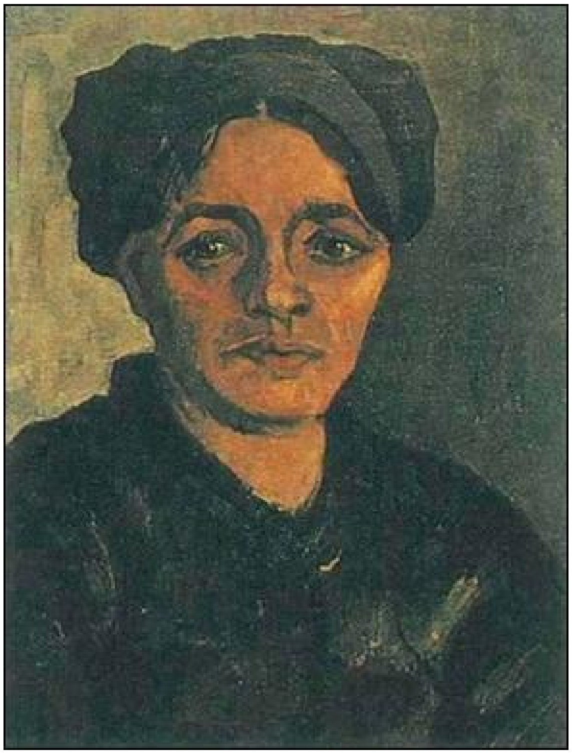
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
36.0 x 25.5 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885



Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Oil on canvas
39.5 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

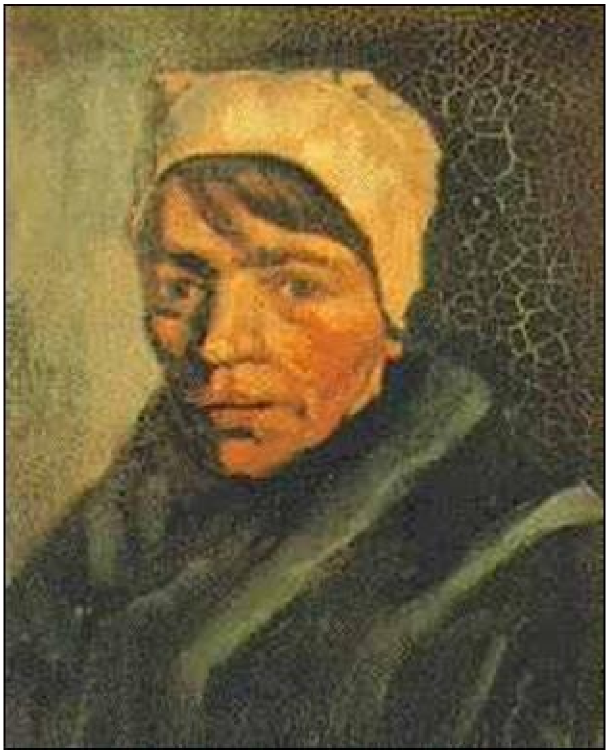


Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Oil on canvas
40.6 x 31.7 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

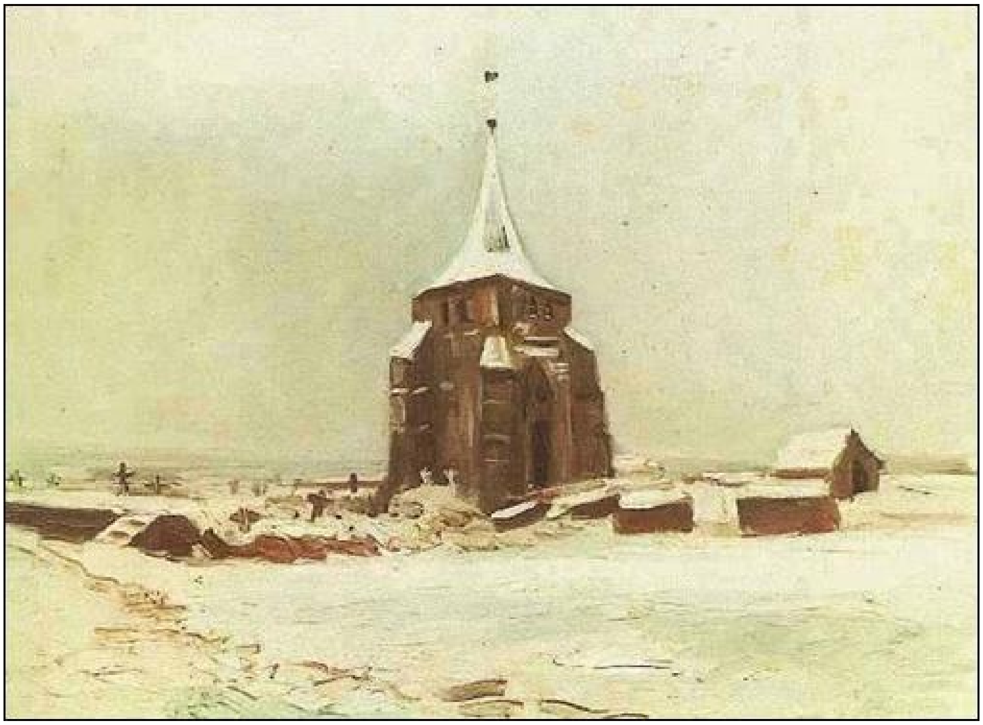


Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap

Oil on canvas
40.0 x 30.5 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

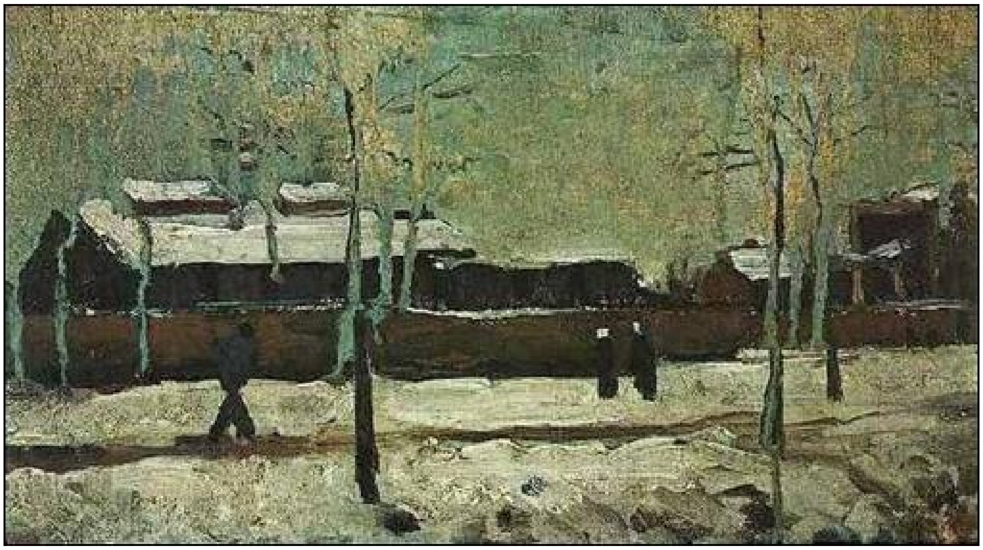


Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

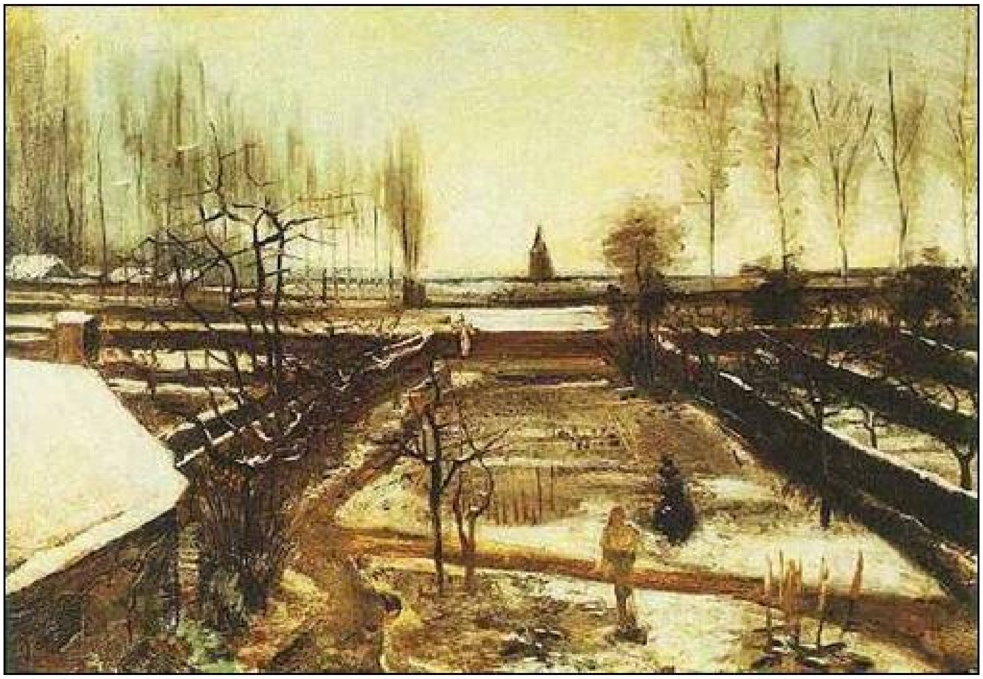


Old Cemetery Tower at Nuenen in the Snow, The

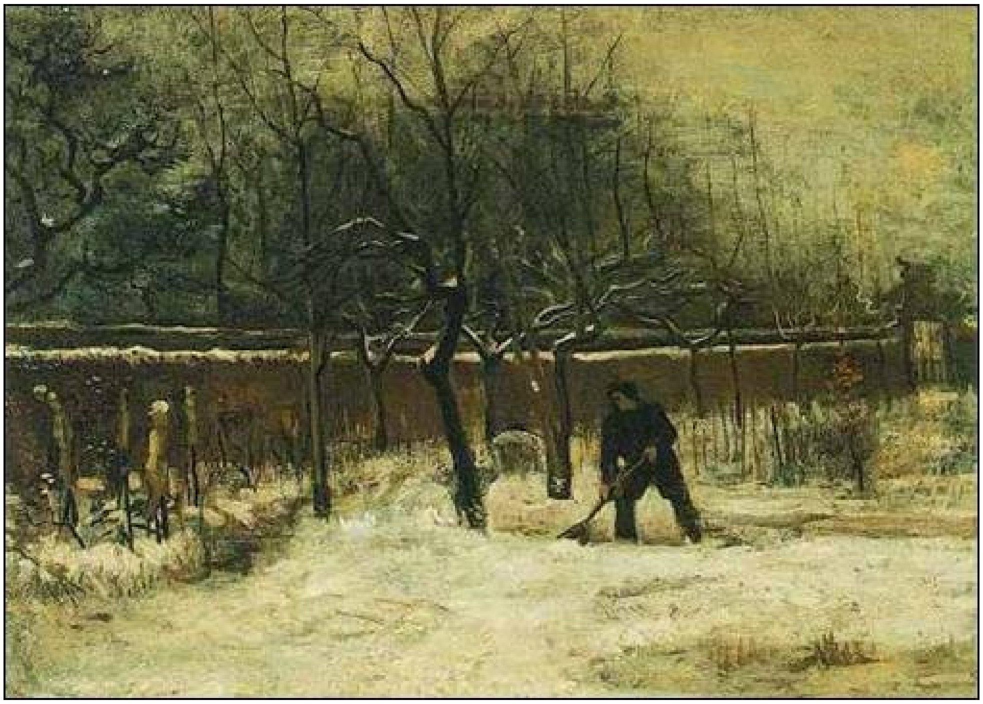
Oil on canvas on cardboard
30.0 x 41.5 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885



Old Station at Eindhoven, The
Oil on canvas
13.5 x 24.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

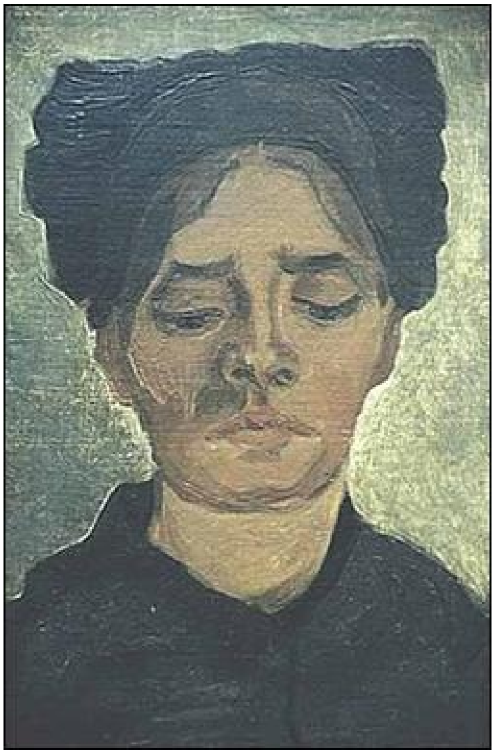


Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in the Snow, The
Oil on canvas on panel
53.0 x 78.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885

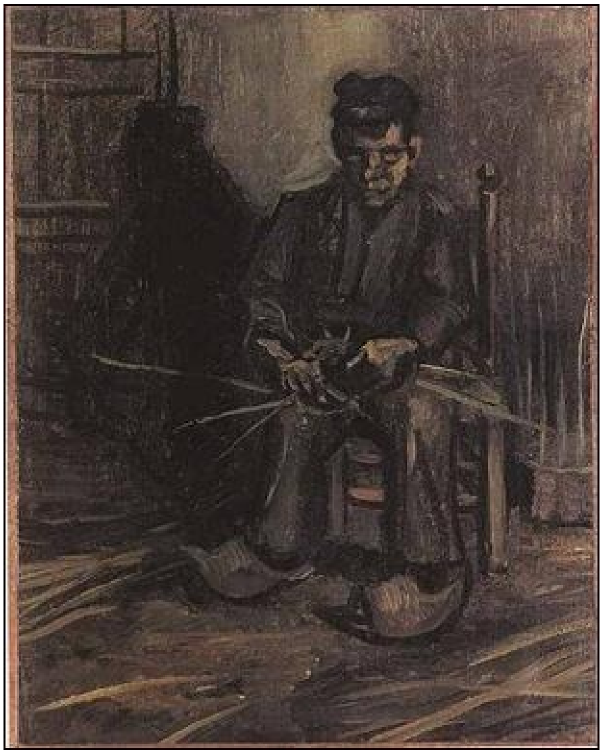


Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in the Snow, The

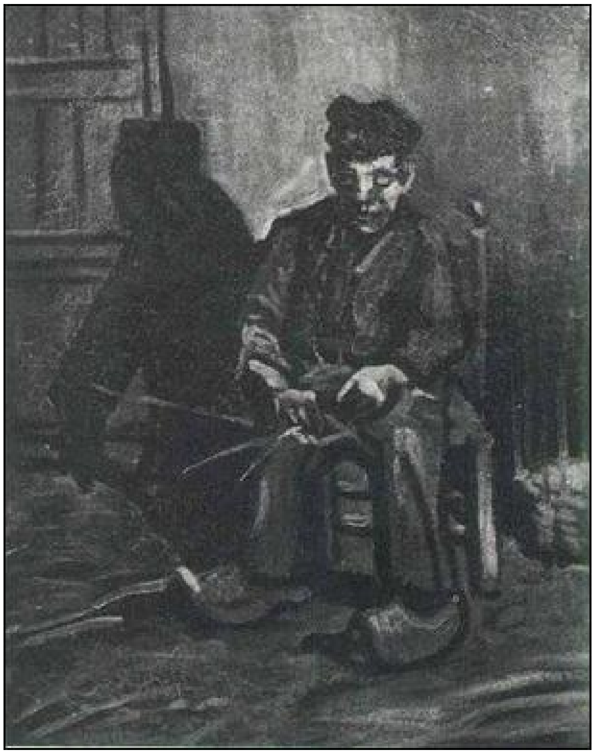
Oil on canvas on panel
51.0 x 77.0 cm.
Nuenen: January, 1885



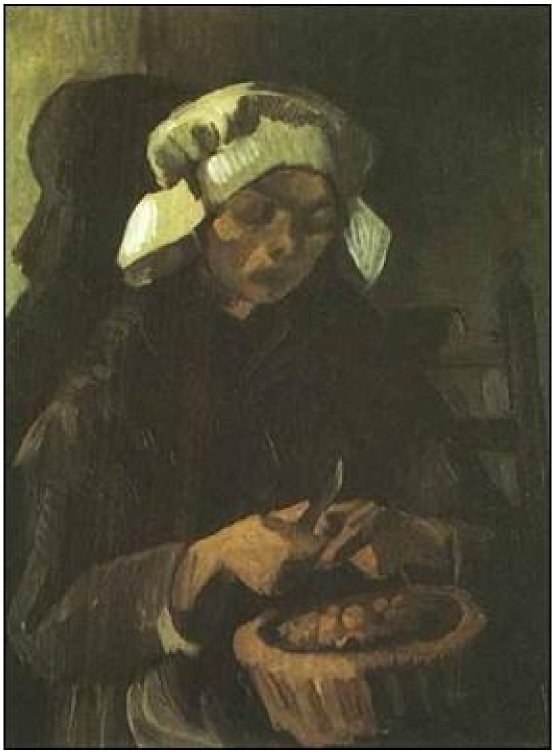
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 24.5 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1885



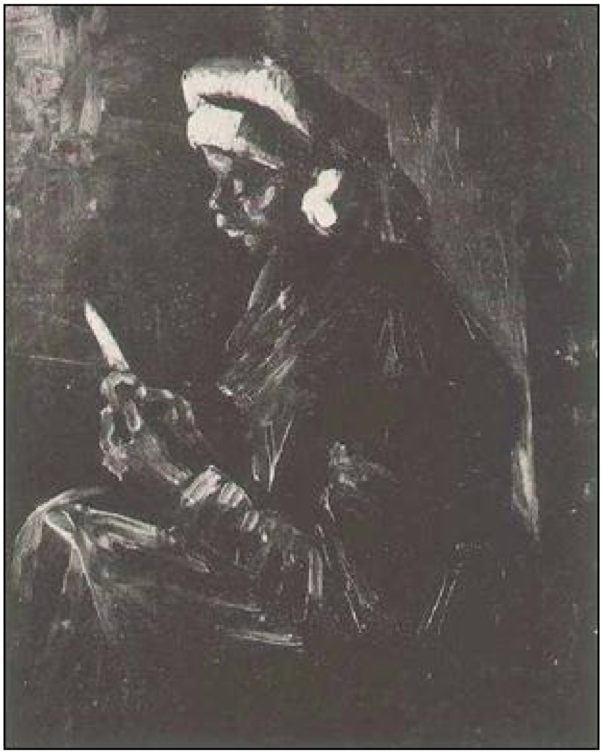
Peasant Making a Basket
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 33.0 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1885



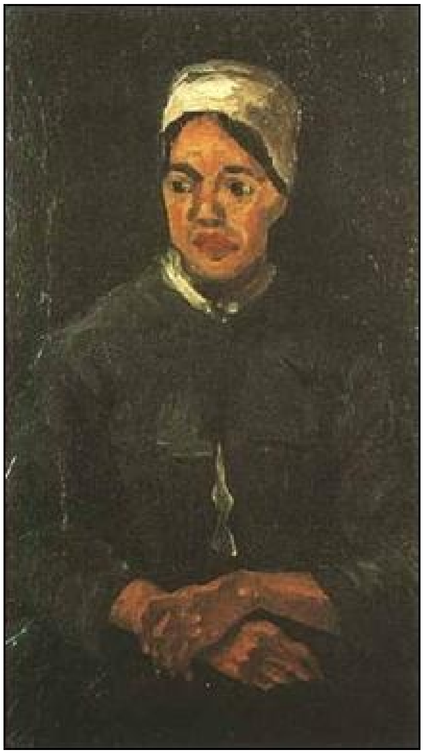
Peasant Making a Basket
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 33.0 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1885



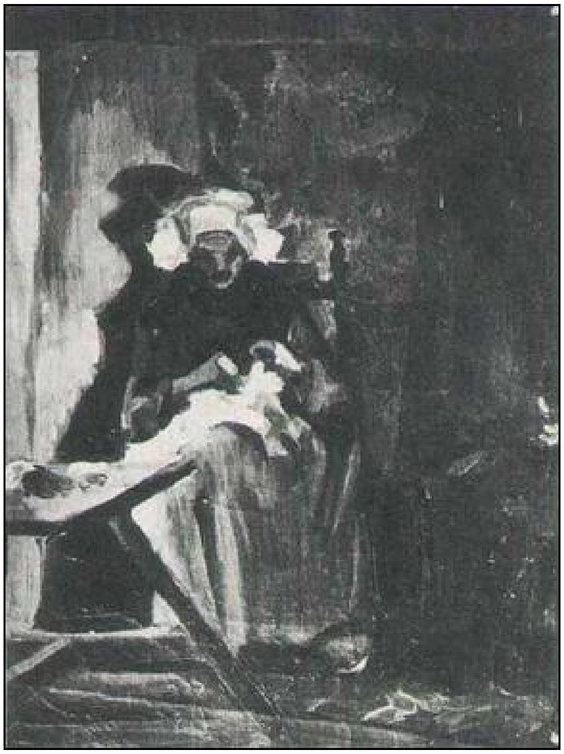
Peasant Woman Peeling Potatoes
Oil on canvas on panel
43.0 x 31.0 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1885



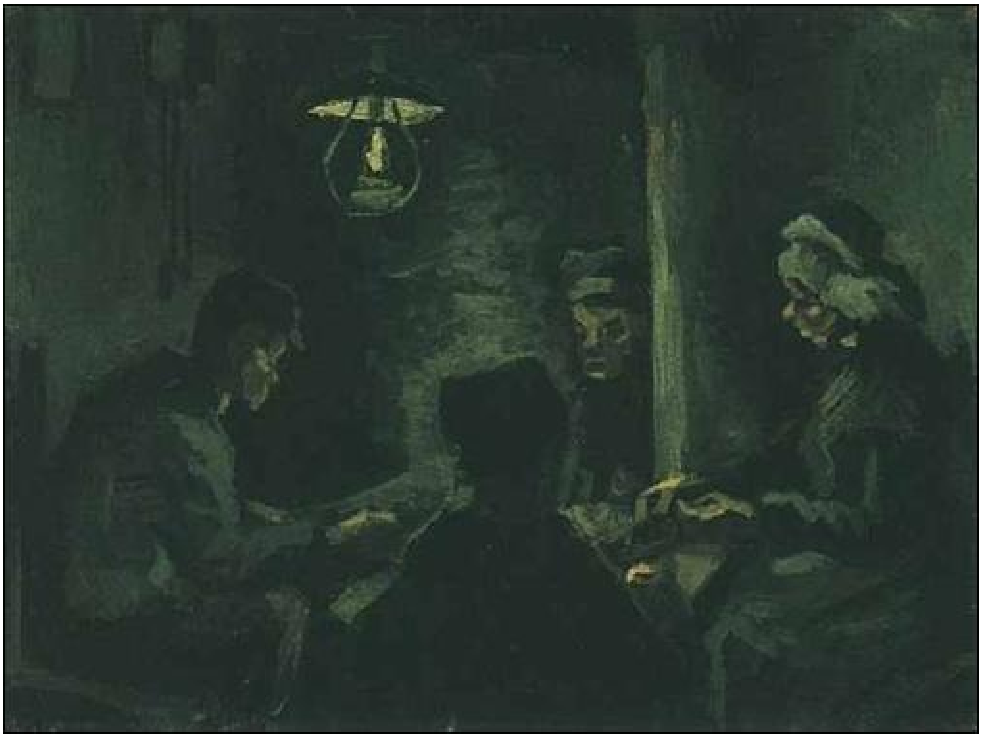
Peasant Woman, Peeling Potatoes
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 31.5 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1885



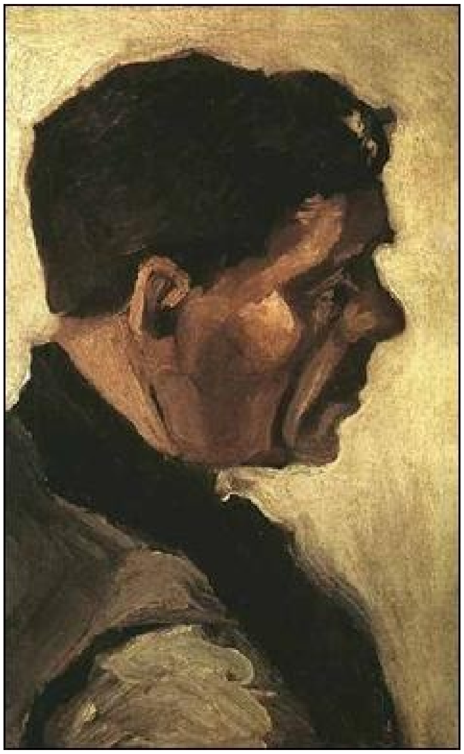
Peasant Woman, Seated (Half-Figure)
Oil on canvas on panel
46.0 x 27.0 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1885



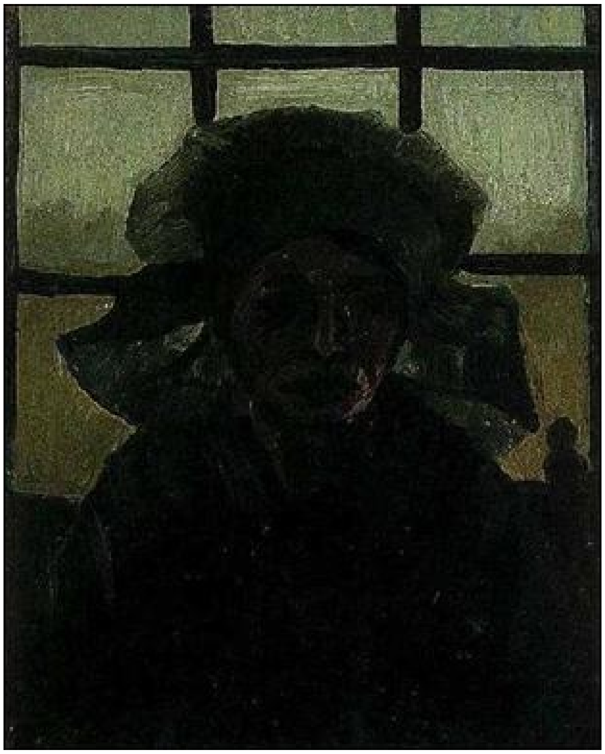
Peasant Woman Sewing
Oil on canvas
42.5 x 33.0 cm.
Nuenen: February, 1885



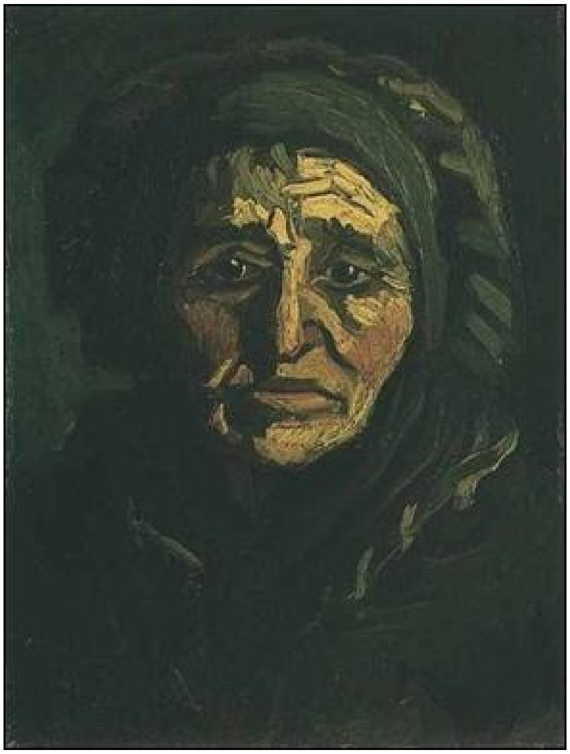
Study for 'The Potato Eaters'
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 44.4 cm.
Nuenen: Early April, 1885



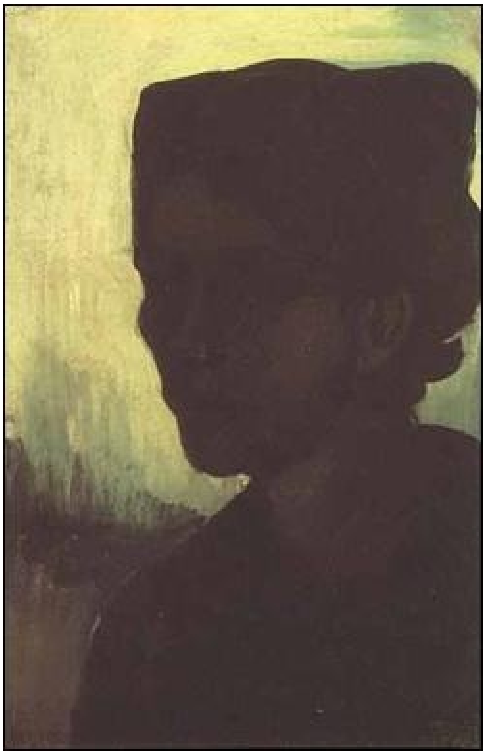
Head of a Peasant
Oil on canvas
47.0 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: February-March, 1885



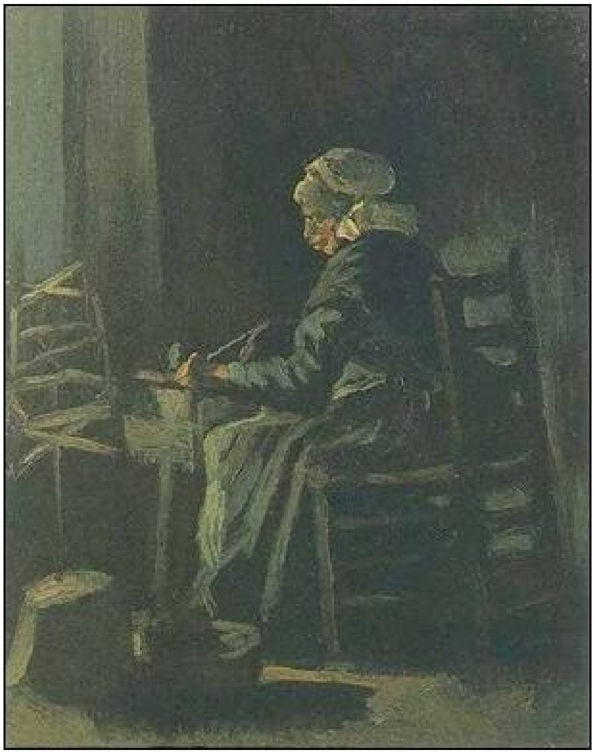
Head of a Woman
Oil on canvas
38.8 x 31.3 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



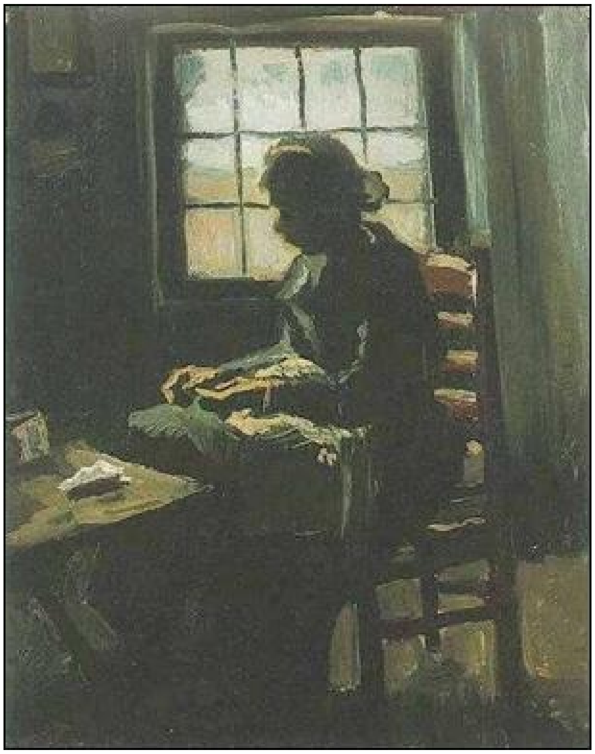
Head of a Peasant Woman with Greenish Lace Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
38.0 x 28.5 cm.
Nuenen: February-March, 1885



Head of a Young Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Oil on canvas
39.0 x 26.0 cm.
Nuenen: February-March, 1885

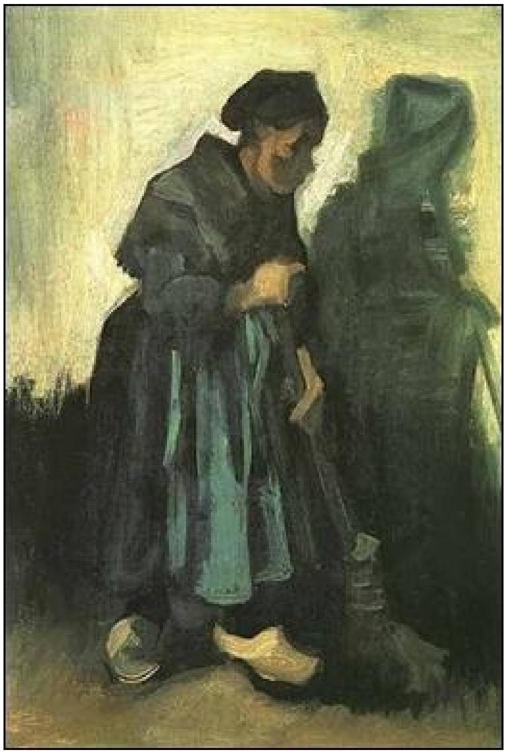


Woman Winding Yarn
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 31.7 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

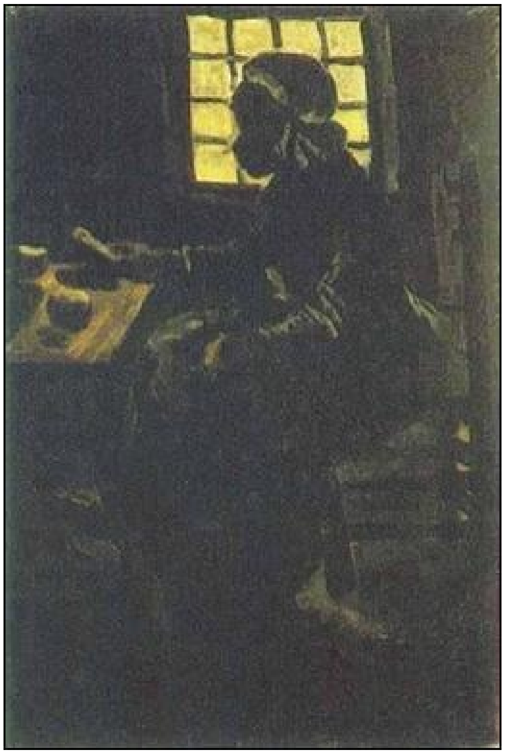


Woman Sewing

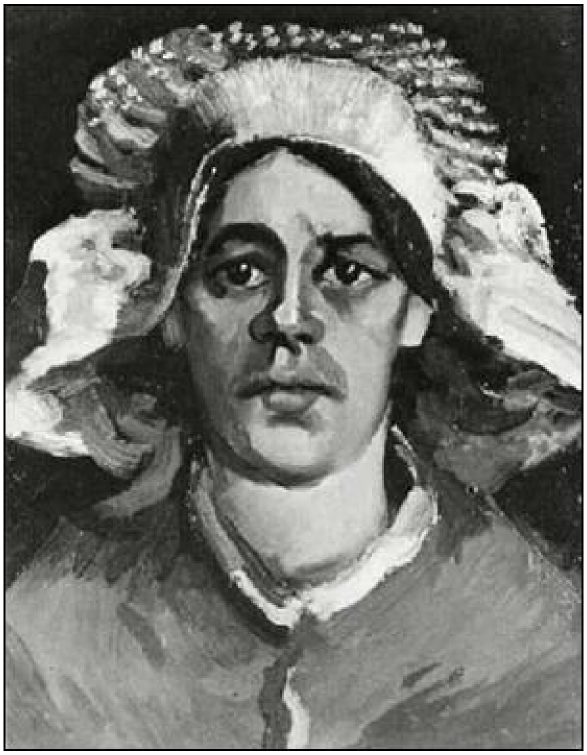
Oil on canvas
43.2 x 34.2 cm.
Nuenen: March-April, 1885



Peasant Woman Sweeping the Floor
Oil on canvas on panel
41.0 x 27.0 cm.
Nuenen: February-March, 1885

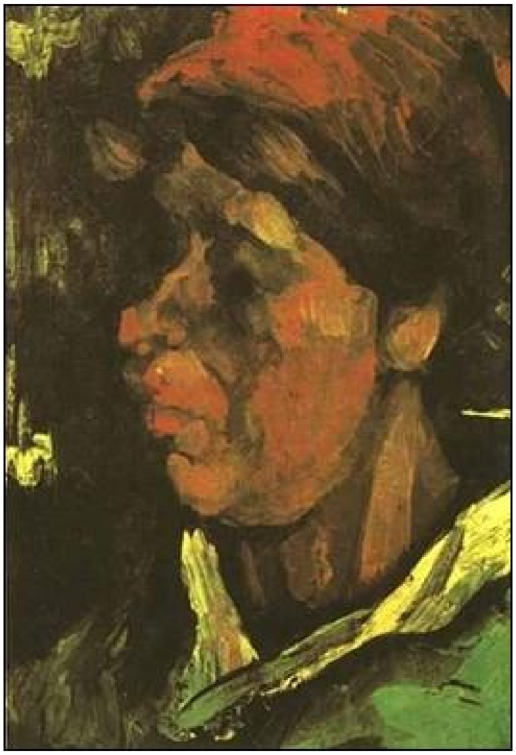


Peasant Woman Taking her Meal
Oil on canvas
42.0 x 29.0 cm.
Nuenen: February-March, 1885

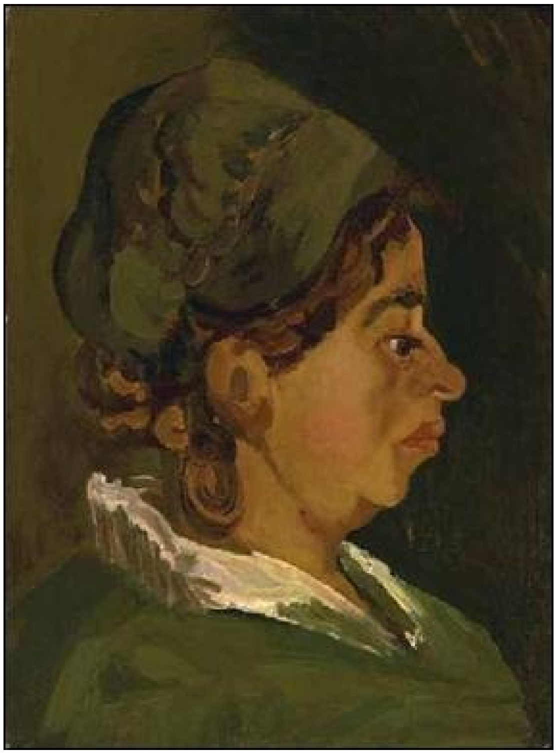


Gordina de Groot, Head

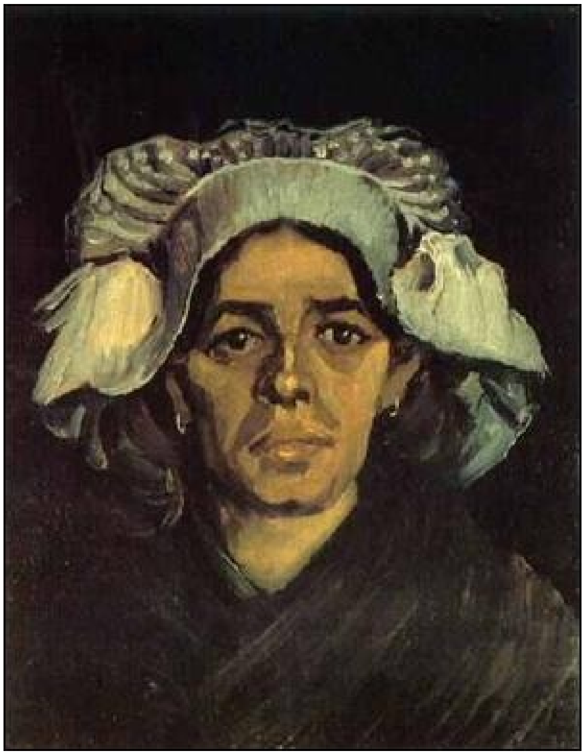
Oil on canvas on panel
41.0 x 32.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



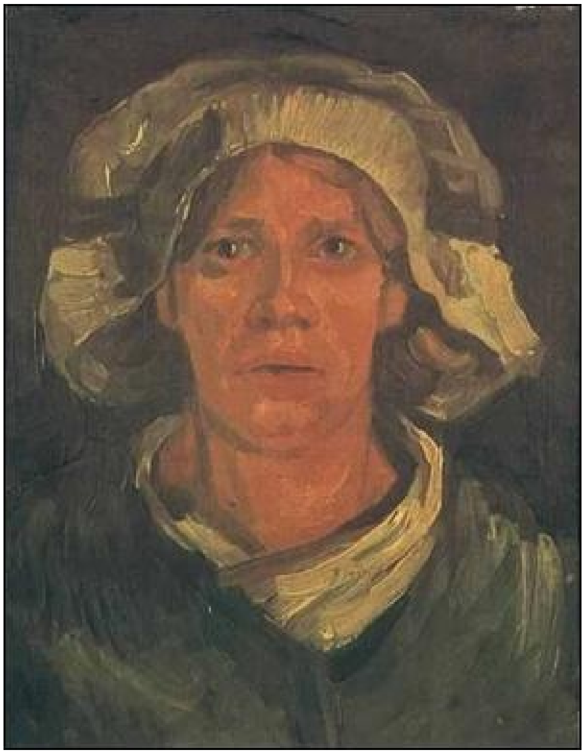
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Canvas on panel
38.5 x 26.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



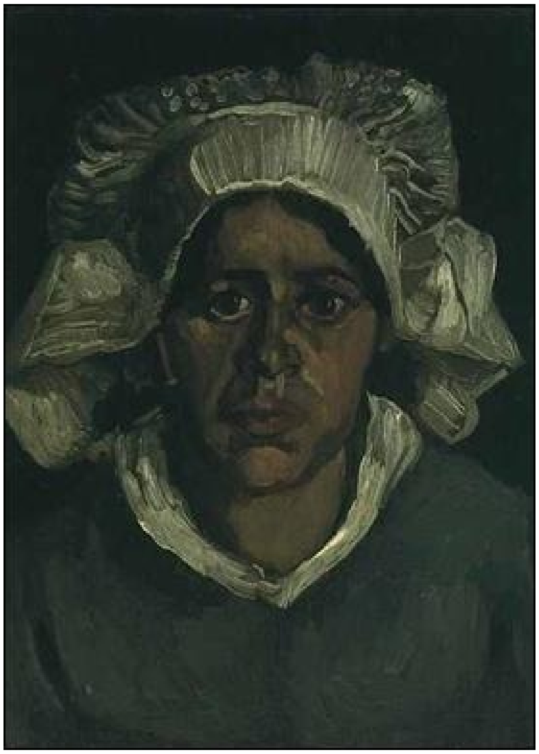
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Nuenen: March, 1885



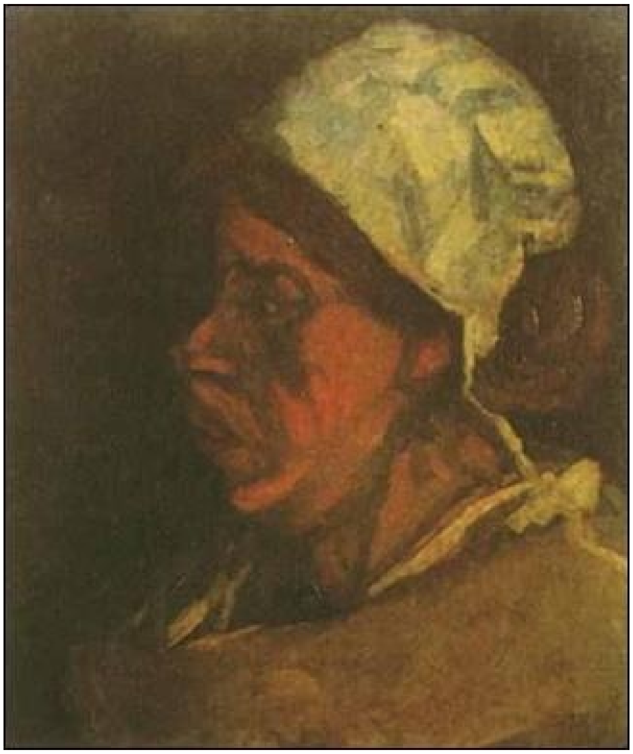
Head of a Woman
Oil on canvas
42.7 x 33.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



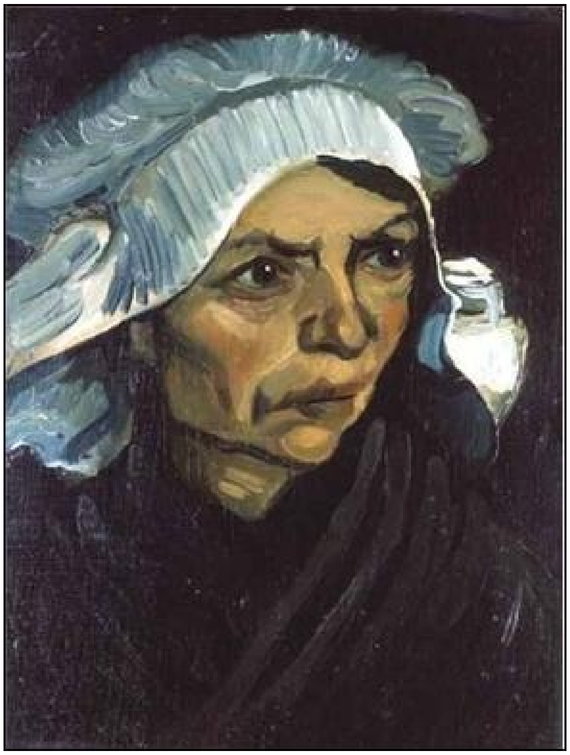
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on panel
41.0 x 31.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



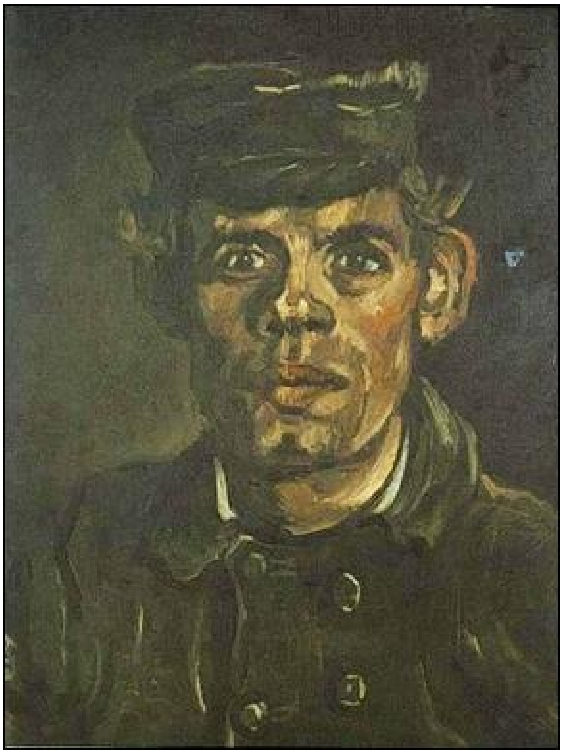
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
47.0 x 34.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
41.0 x 35.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

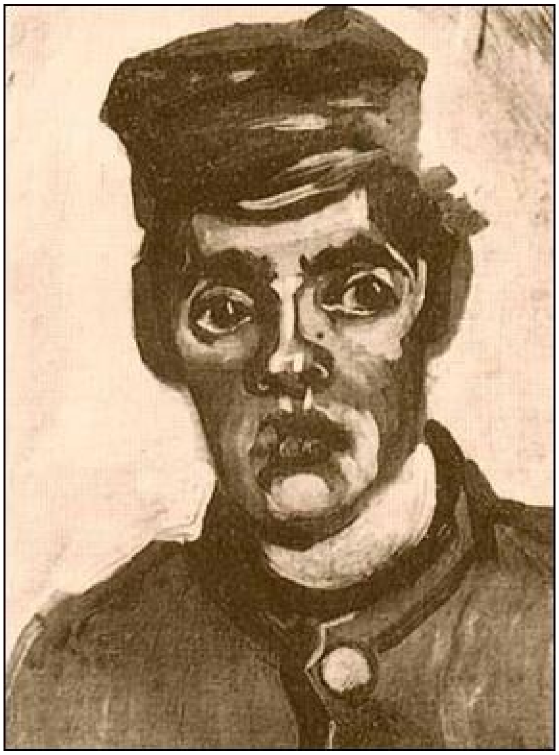


Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas on panel
41.0 x 31.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

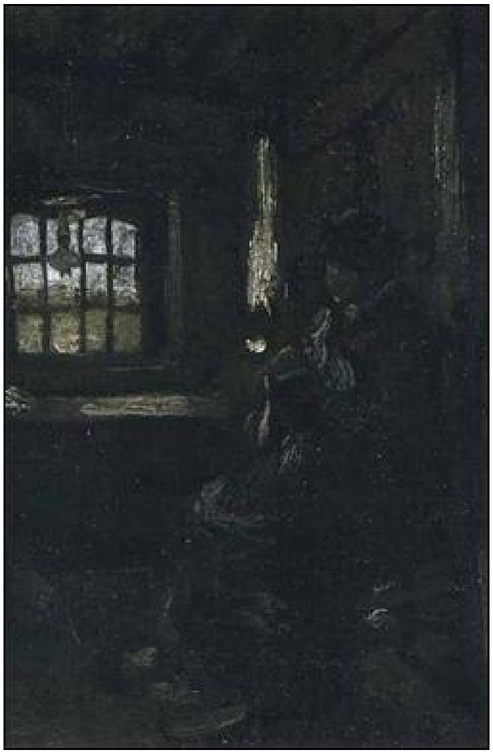


Head of a Young Peasant in a Peaked Cap

Oil on canvas
39.0 x 30.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

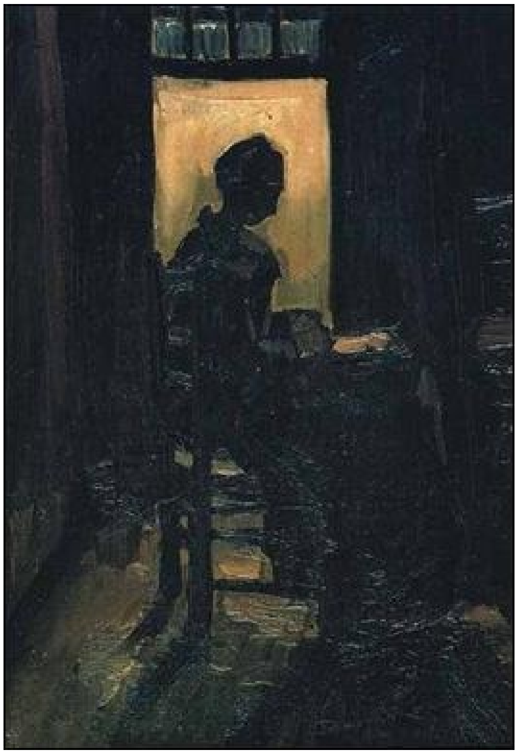


Head of a Young Peasant in a Peaked Cap
Oil on panel
44.5 x 33.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

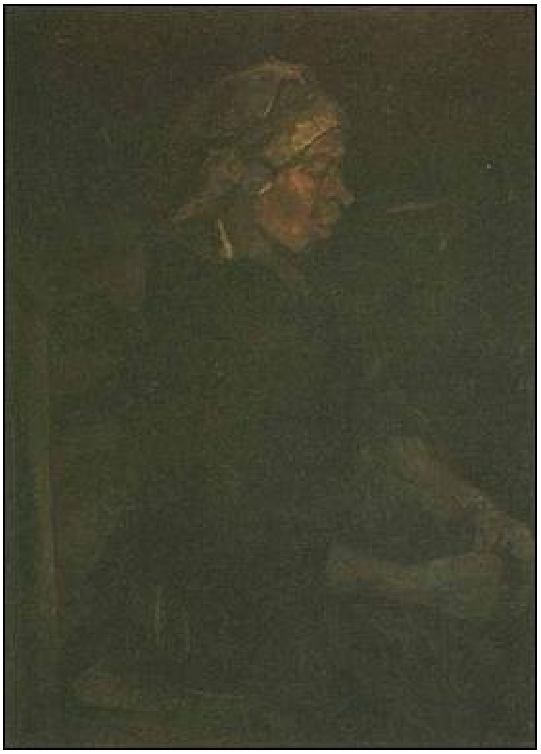


Peasant Woman Darning Stockings

Oil on canvas on panel
28.5 x 18.5 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

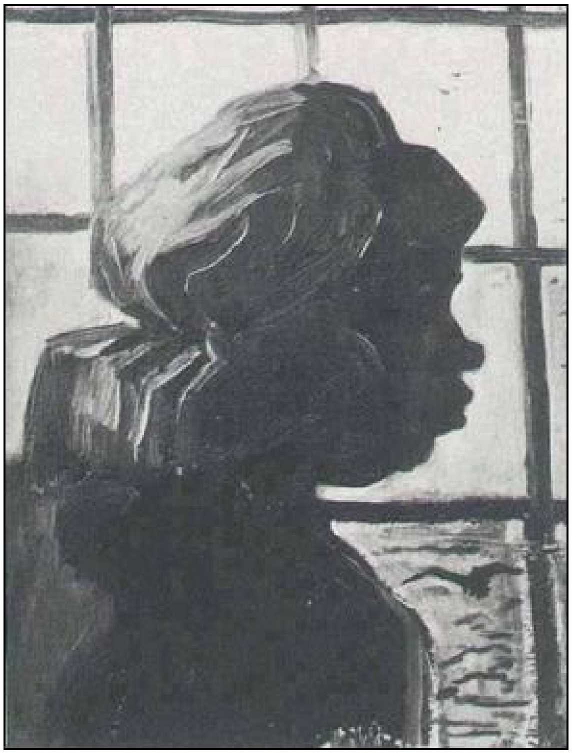


Peasant Woman Seated before an Open Door, Peeling Potatoes
Oil on canvas on panel
36.5 x 25.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

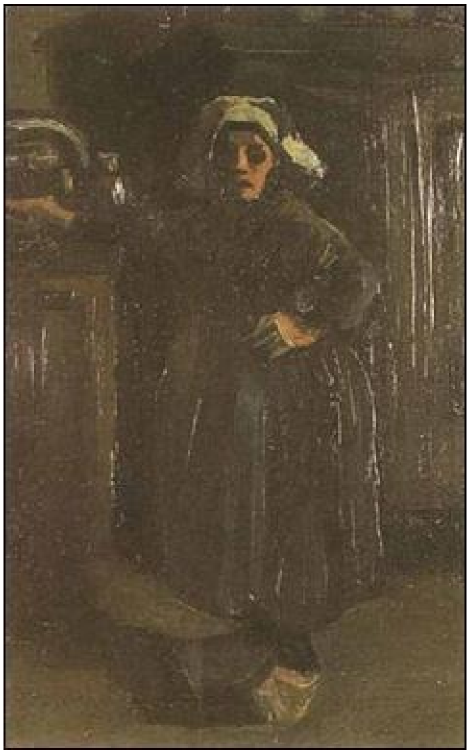


Peasant Woman, Seated, with White Cap

Oil on canvas on panel
36.0 x 27.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

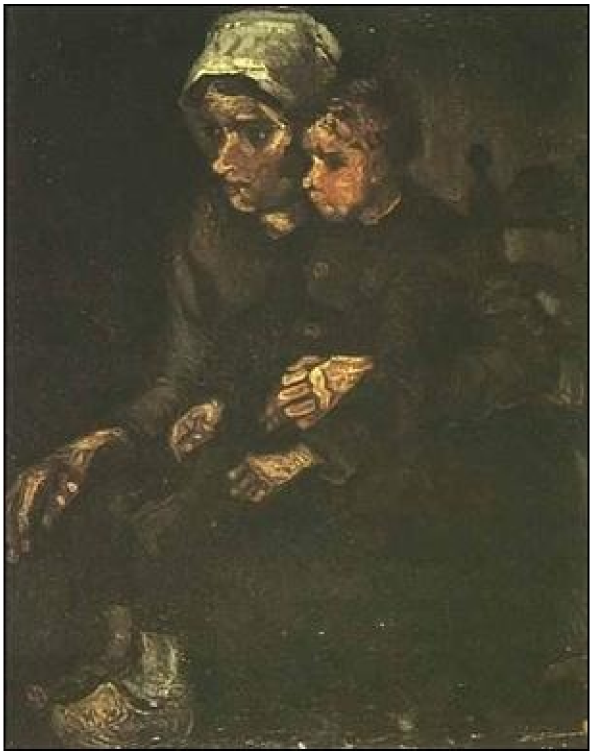


Peasant Woman, Seen against the Window
Oil on canvas on cardboard
41.0 x 32.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885

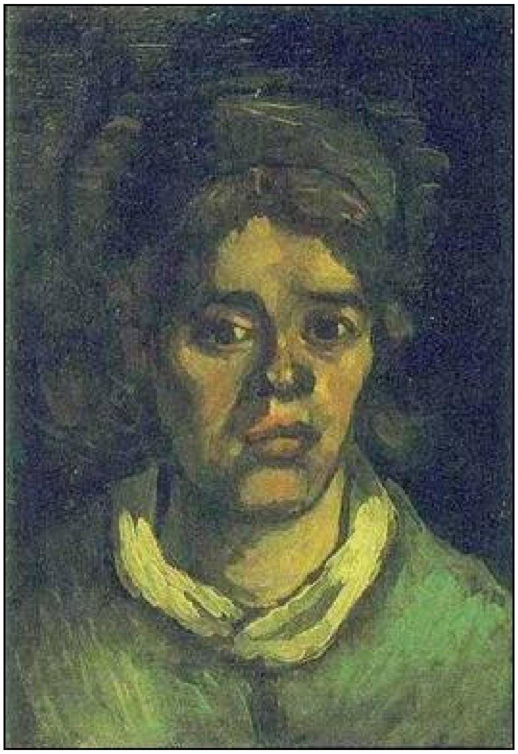


Peasant Woman Standing Indoors

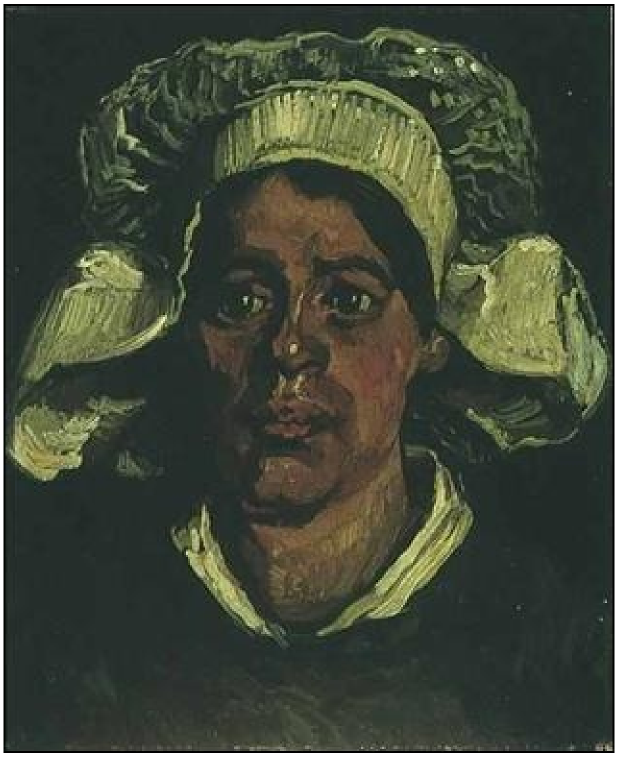
Oil on canvas on panel
41.0 x 26.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



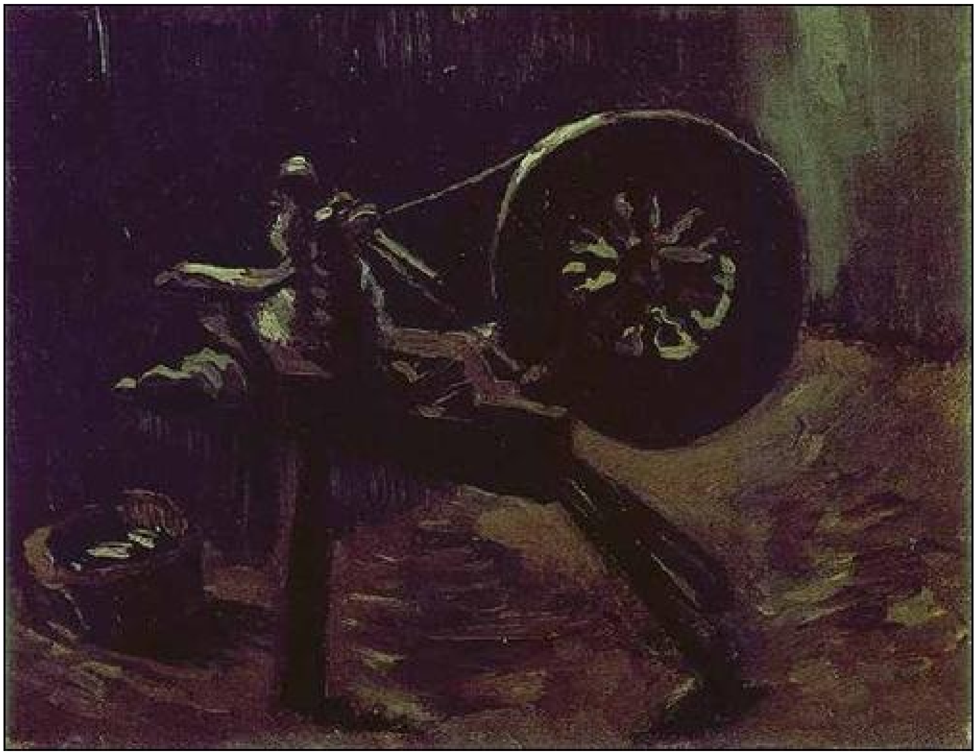
Peasant Woman with Child on Her Lap
Oil on canvas on cardboard
43.0 x 34.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



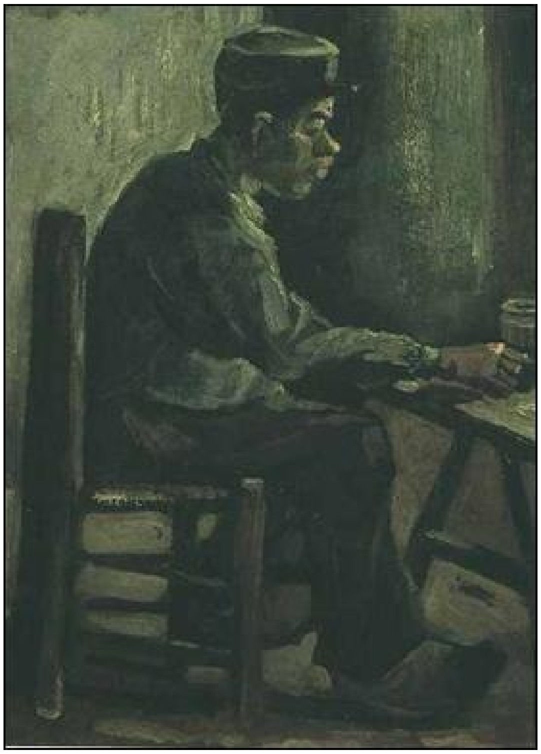
Head of a Woman
Oil on canvas
43.8 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: March-May, 1885



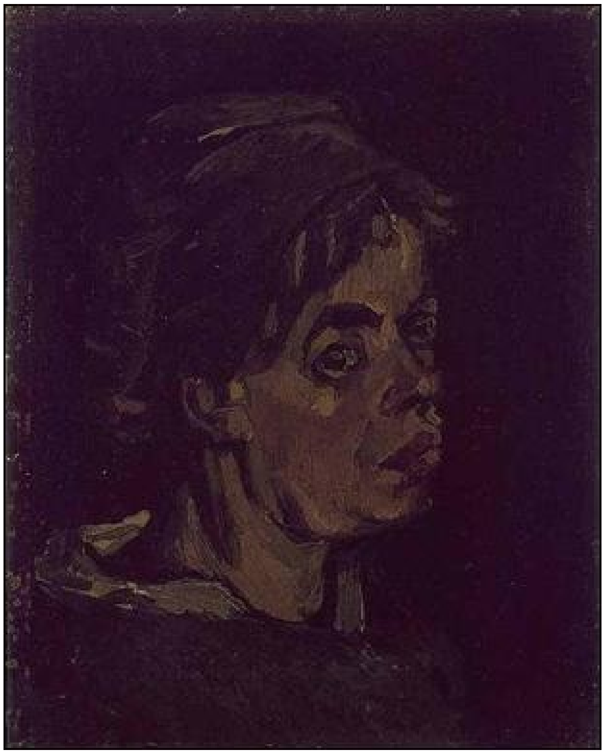
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 36.0 cm.
Nuenen: March-April, 1885



Bobbin Winder
Oil on canvas
34.0 x 44.3 cm.
Nuenen: March-April, 1885

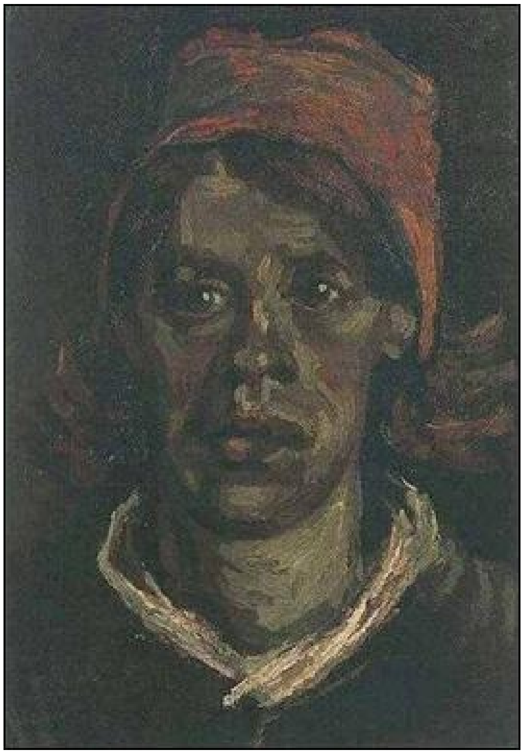


Peasant Sitting at a Table
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 32.5 cm.
Nuenen: March-April, 1885

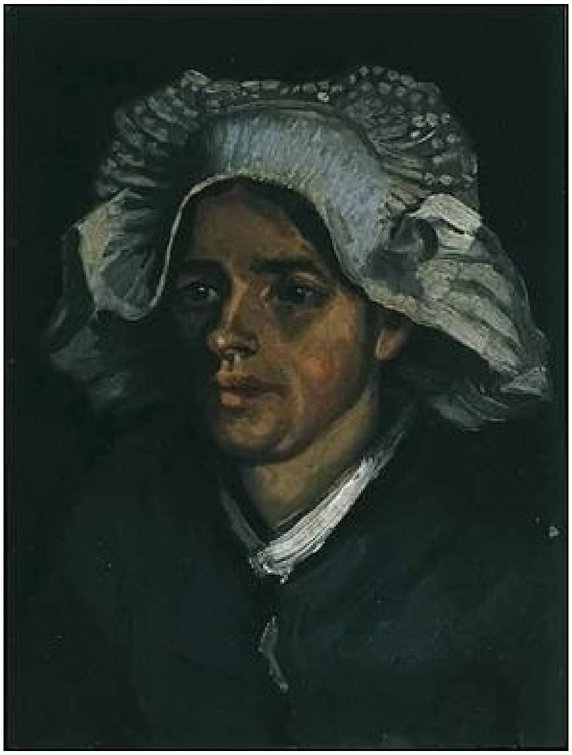


Head of a Woman

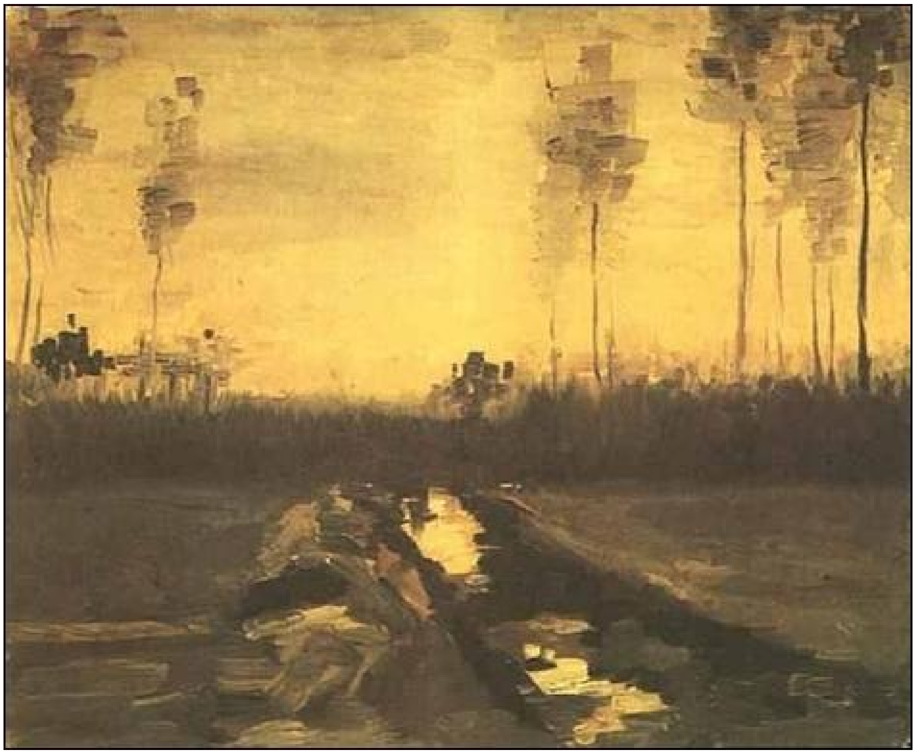
Oil on canvas
42.2 x 34.5 cm.
Nuenen: March-May, 1885



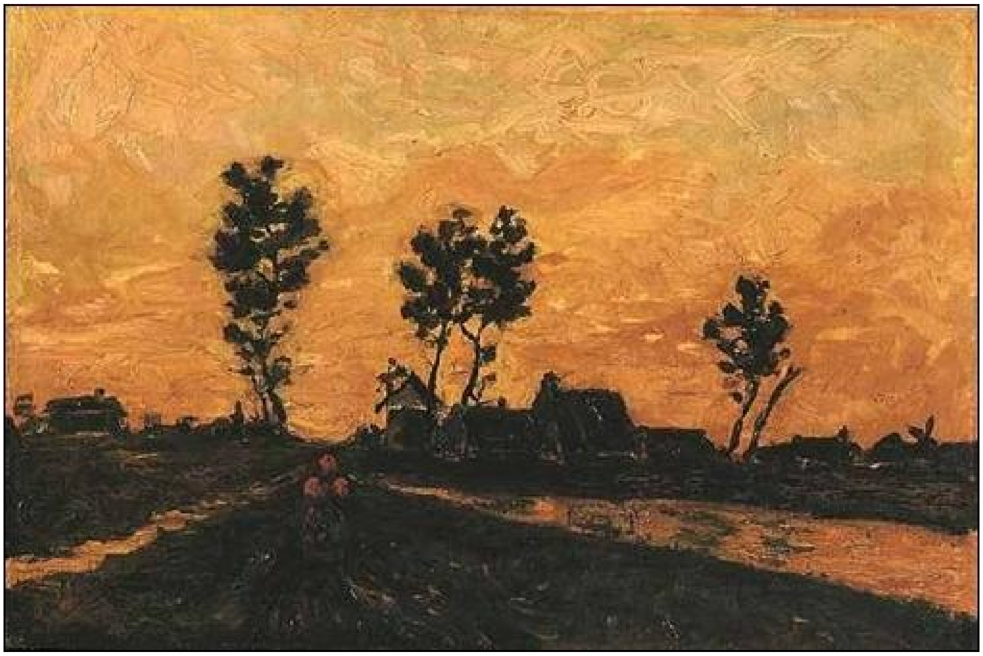
Head of a Woman
Oil on canvas
43.0 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: March, 1885



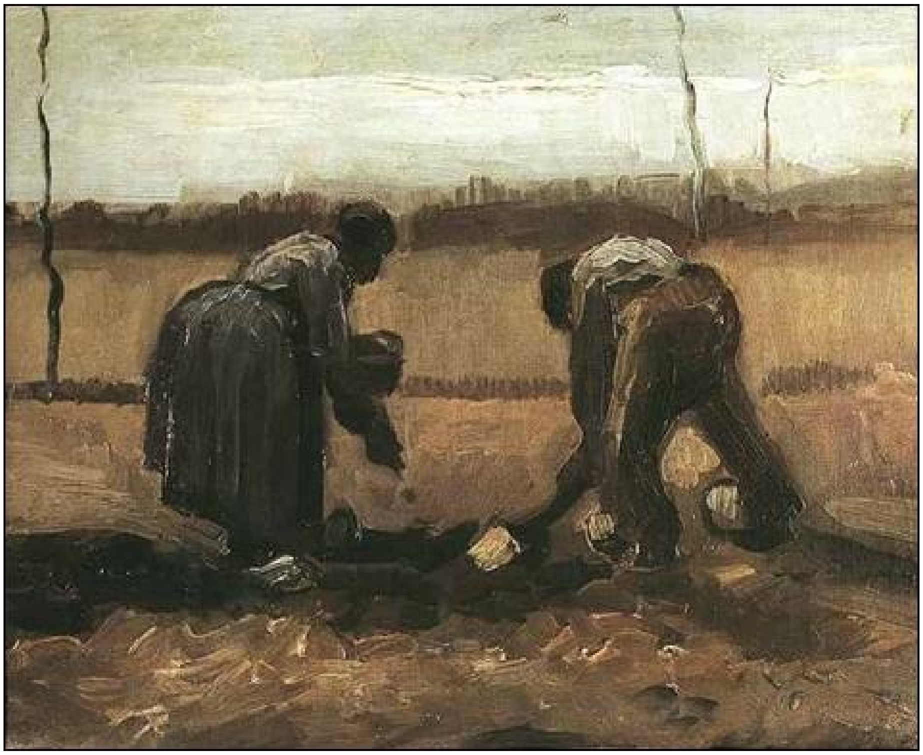
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas on cardboard
47.5 x 35.5 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885



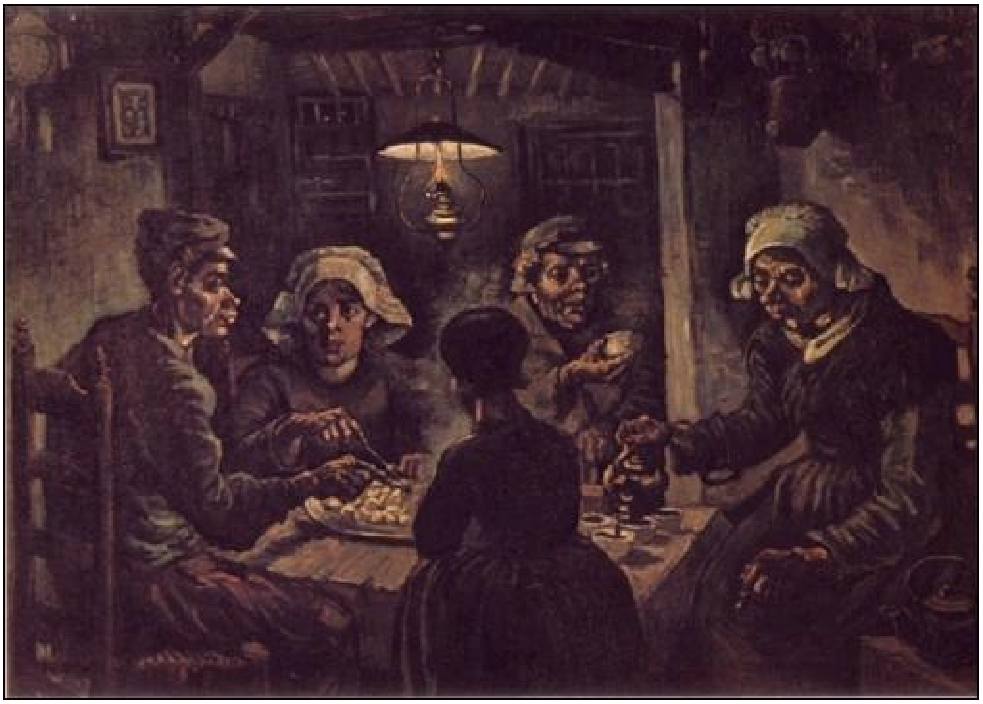
Landscape at Dusk
Oil on canvas on cardboard
35.0 x 43.0 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885



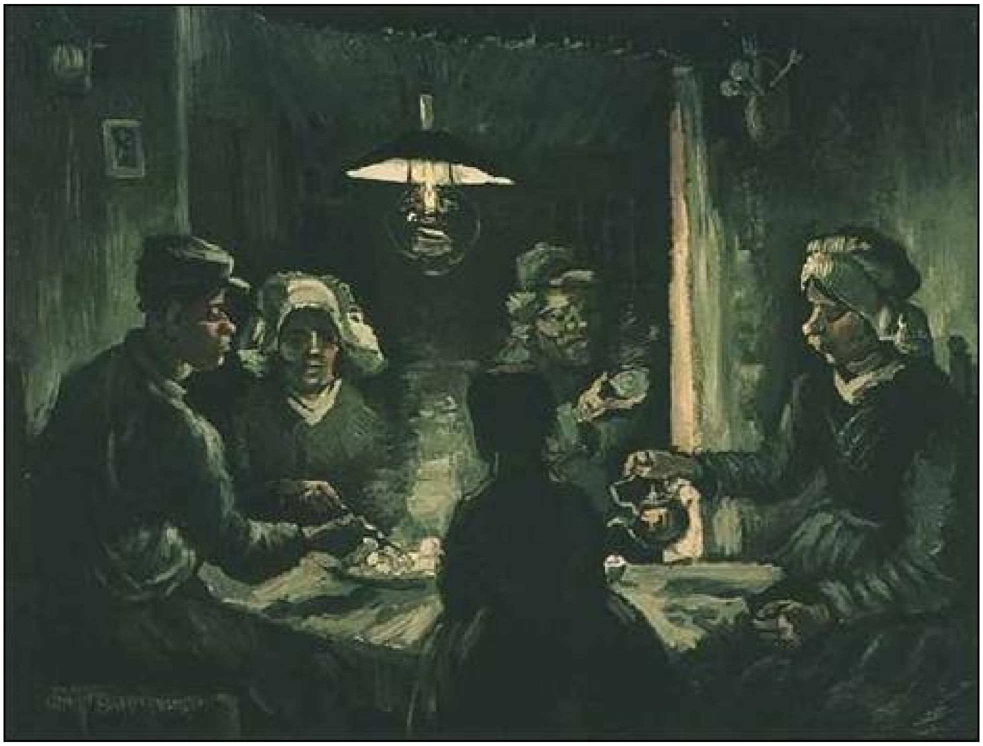
Landscape at Sunset
Oil on canvas
27.5 x 41.5 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885



Peasant and Peasant Woman Planting Potatoes
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885

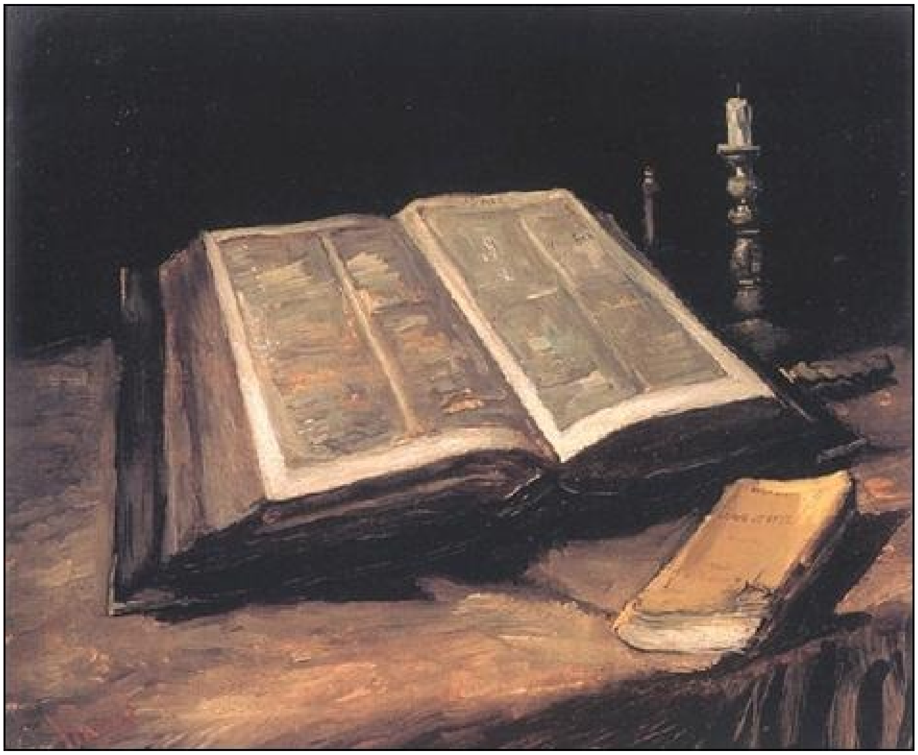


The Potato Eaters
Oil on canvas
82.0 x 114.0 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885

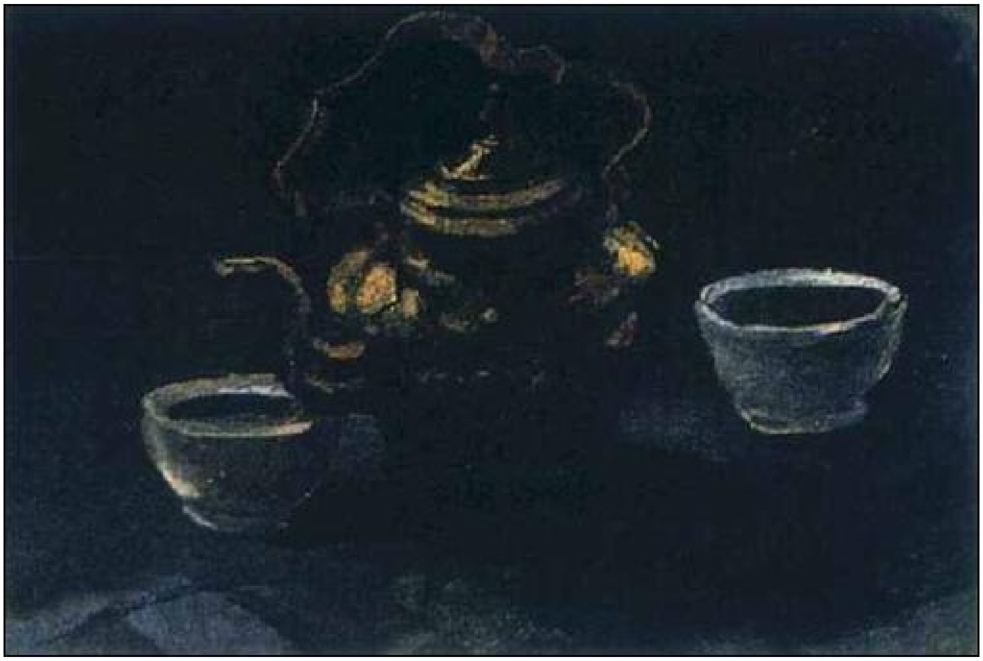


Potato Eaters, The

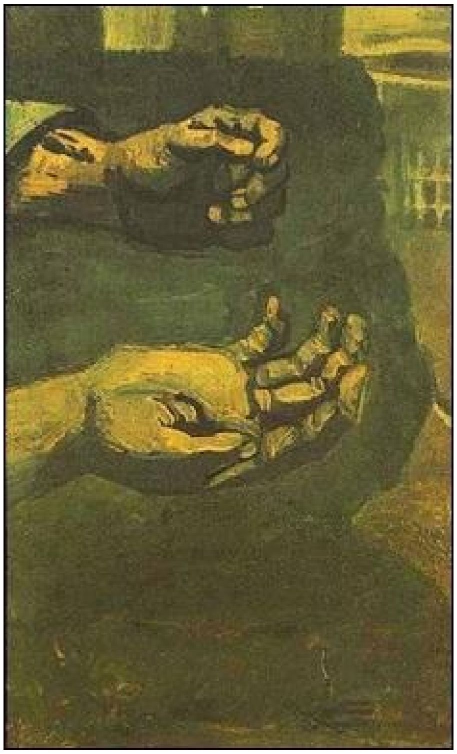
Oil on canvas on panel
72.0 x 93.0 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885



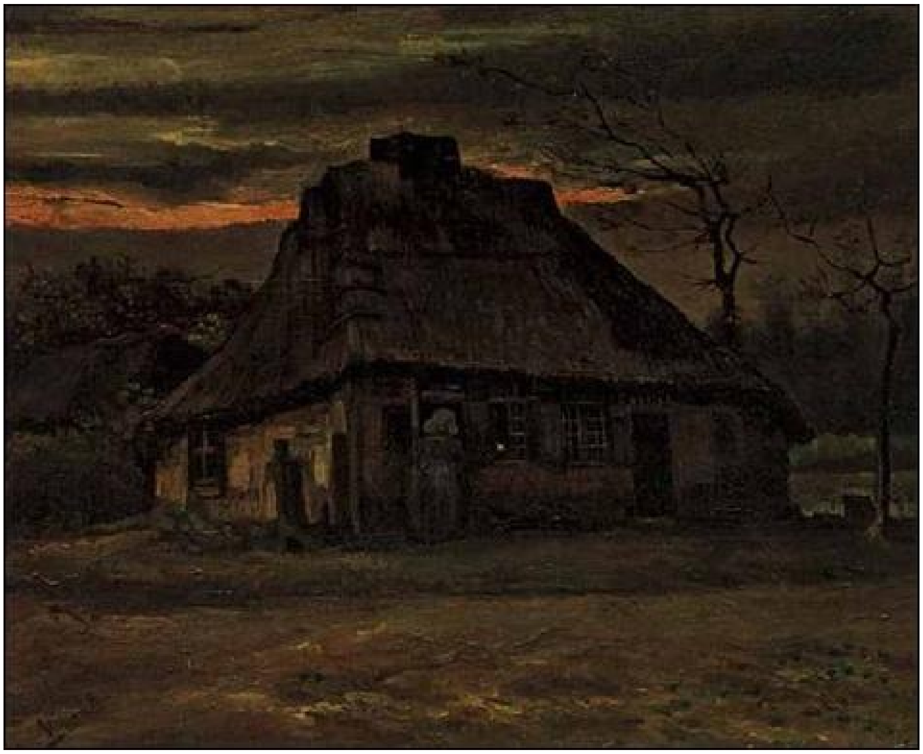
Still Life with Bible
Oil on canvas
65.7 x 78.5 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1885



Still Life with Copper Coffeepot and Two White Bowls
Oil on canvas
23.0 x 34.0 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885

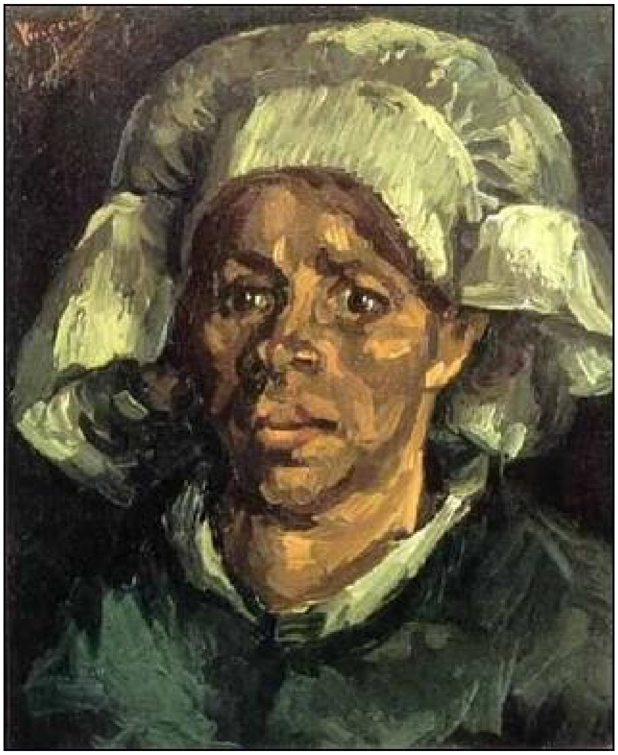


Two Hands
Oil on canvas on panel
29.5 x 19.0 cm.
Nuenen: April, 1885

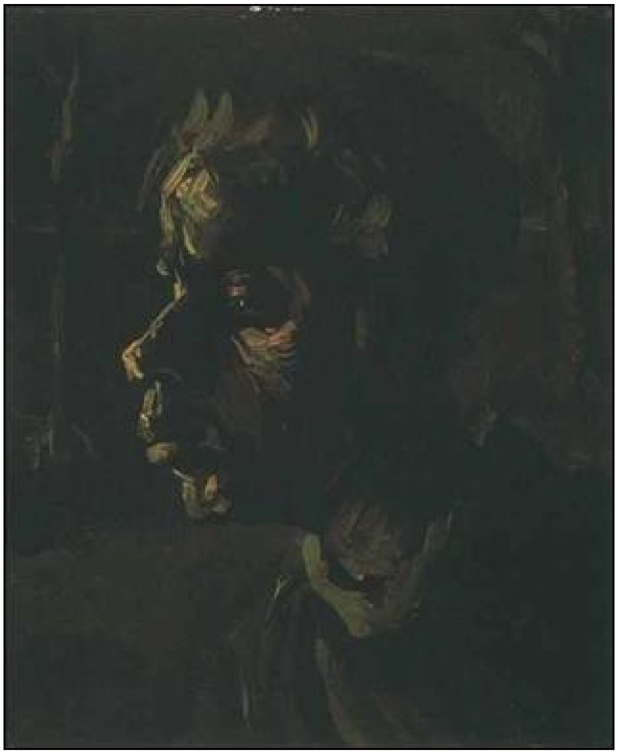


Cottage, The

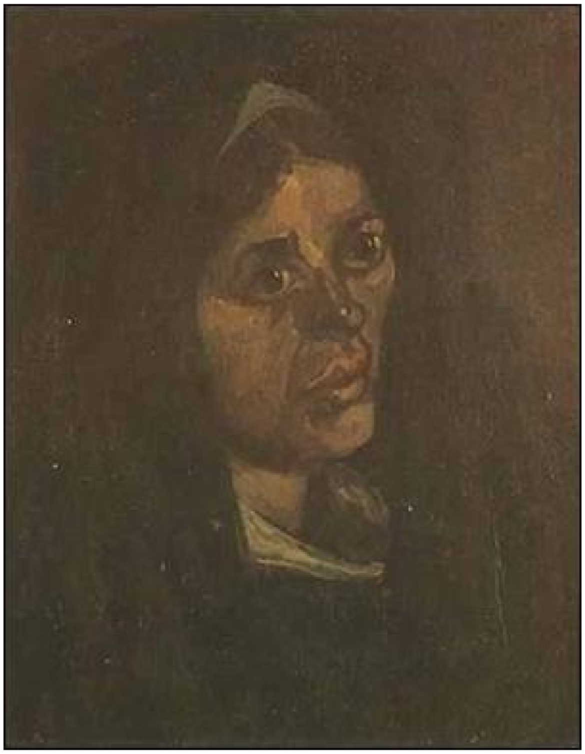
Oil on canvas
65.7 x 97.3 cm.
Nuenen: mid May, 1885



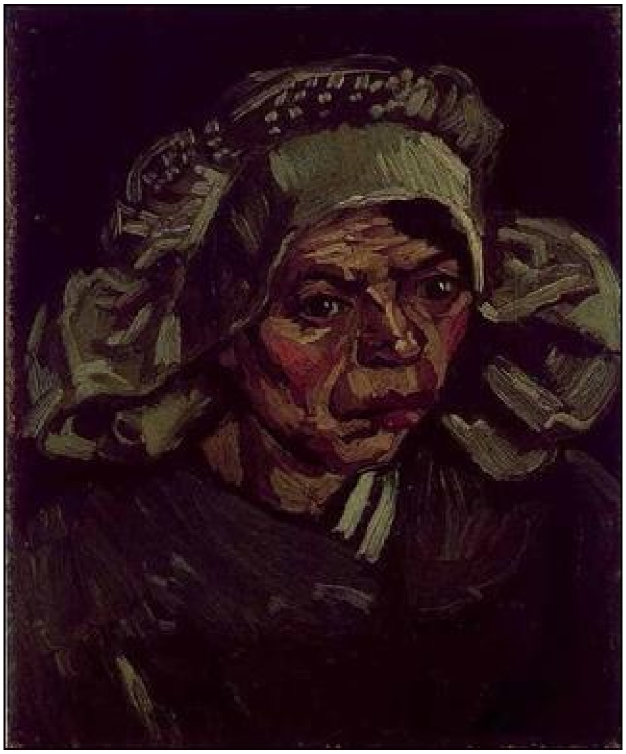
Gordina de Groot, Head
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 34.5 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1885



Head of a Peasant Woman
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 34.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1885

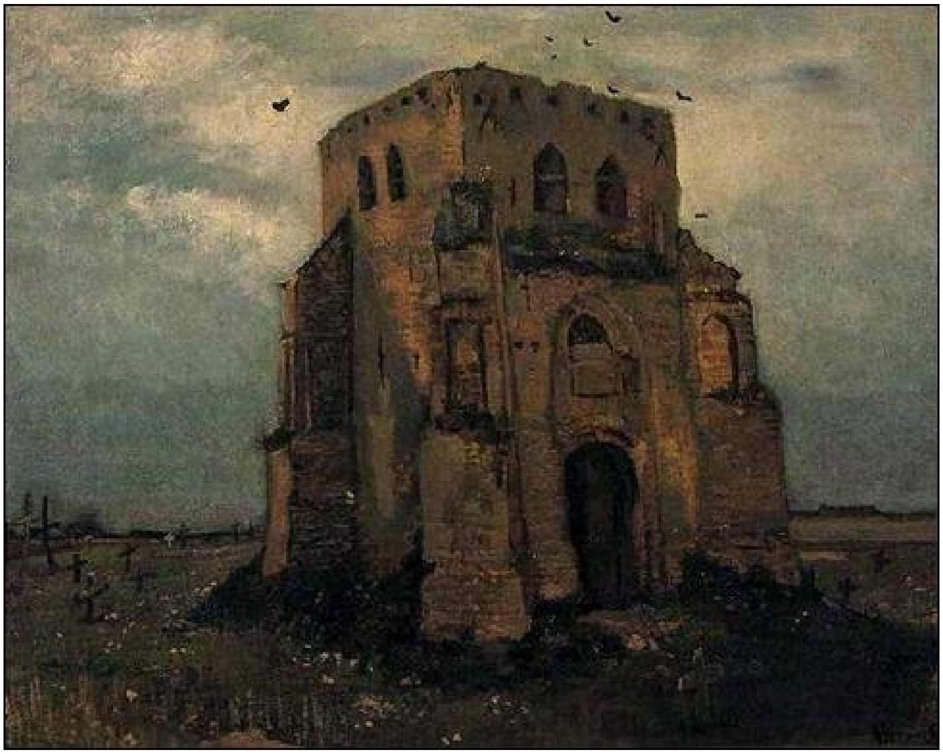


Head of a Peasant Woman in a Green Shawl
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 35.0 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1885

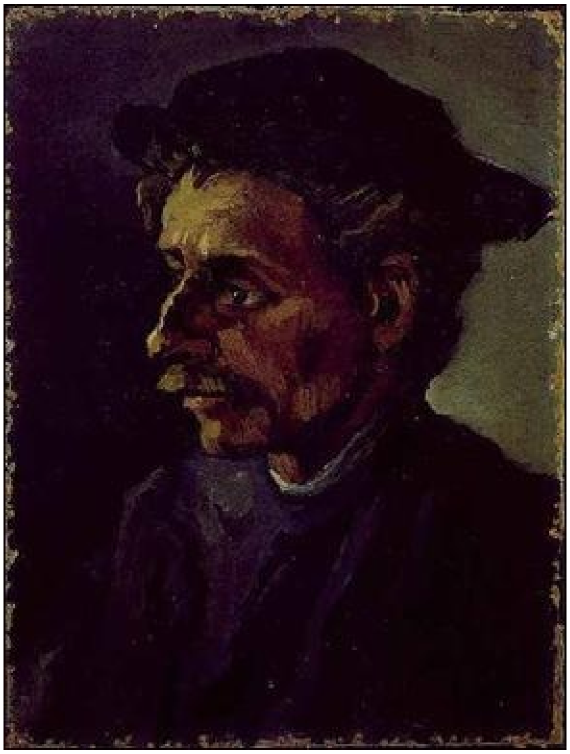


Head of a Woman

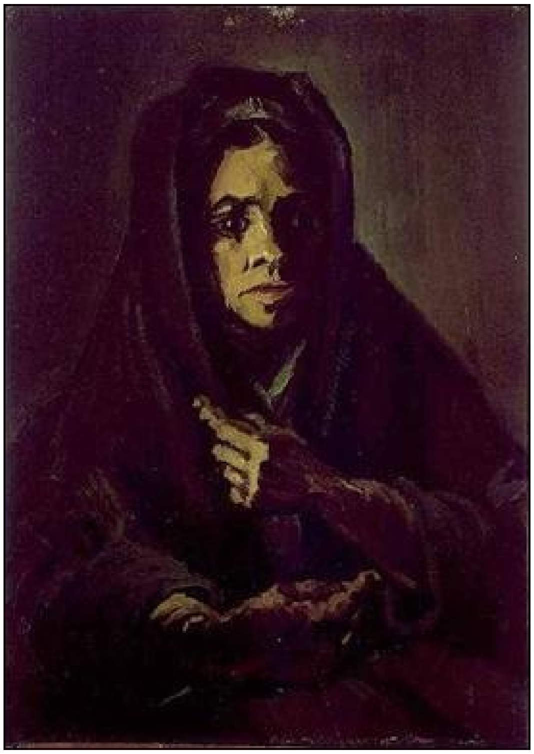
Oil on canvas
43.5 x 36.2 cm.
Nuenen: May, 1885



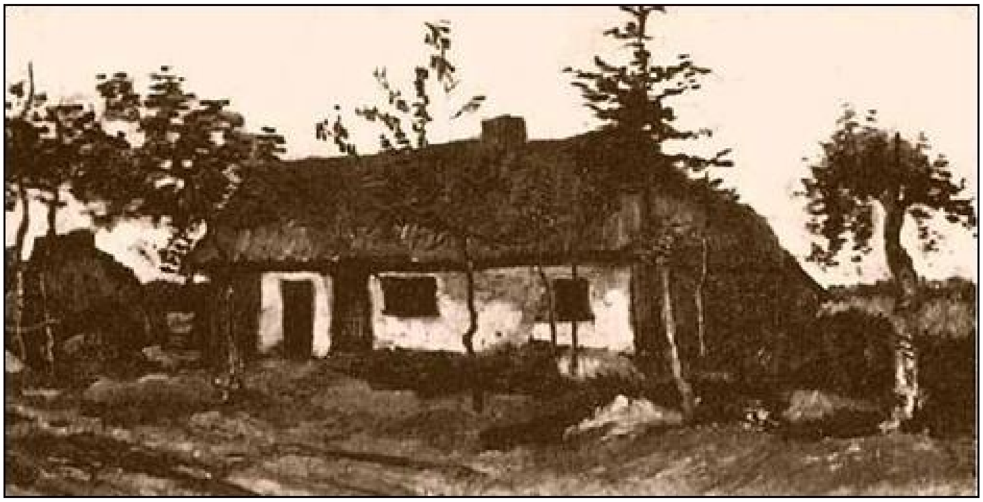
Old Church Tower at Nuenen
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 88.0 cm.
Nuenen: late May-early June, 1885



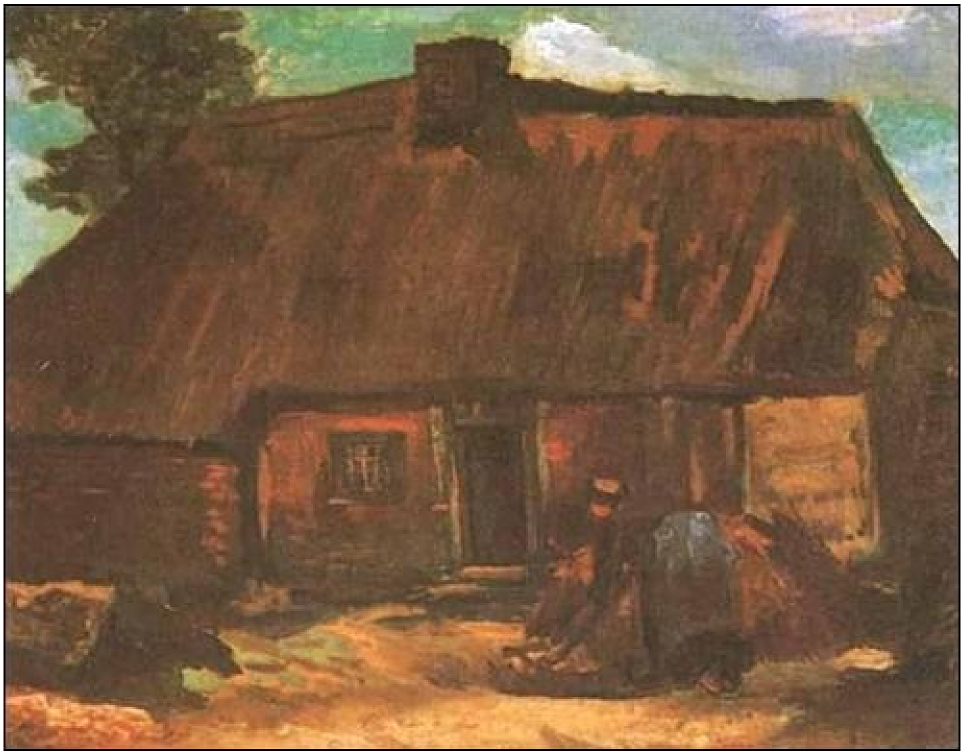
Head of a Man
Oil on canvas
42.5 x 32.0 cm.
Nuenen: March-May, 1885



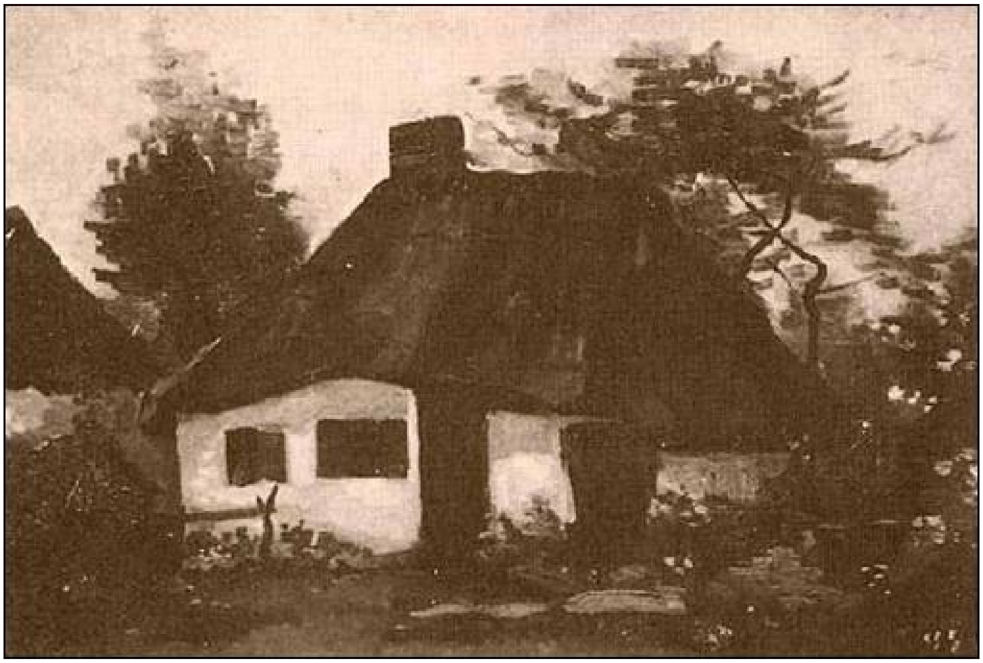
Woman with a Mourning Shawl
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 33.0 cm.
Nuenen: March-May, 1885



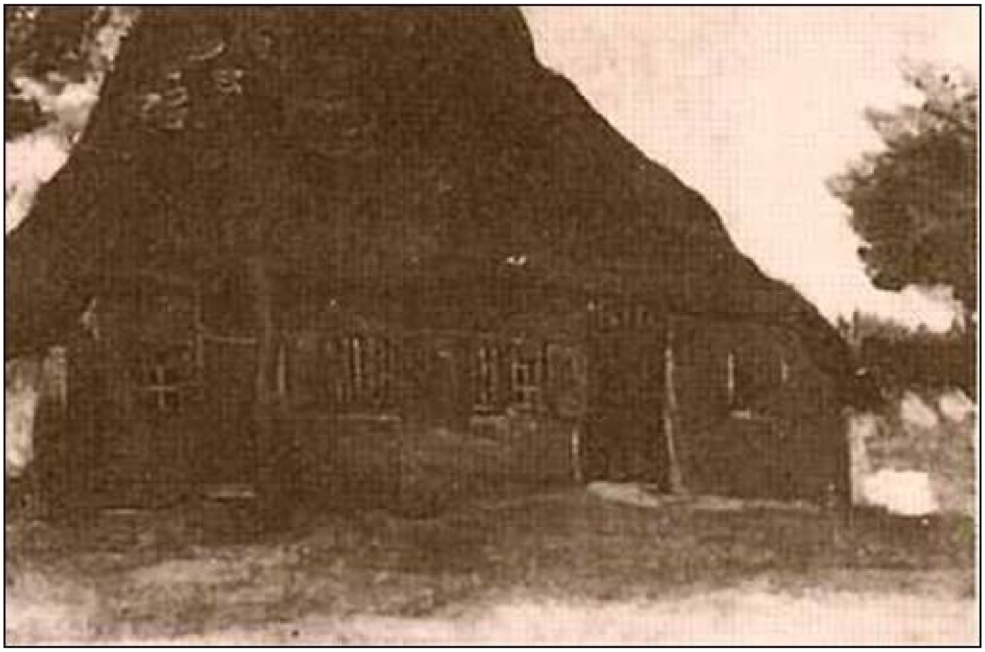
Cottage
Oil on canvas
35.5 x 67.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



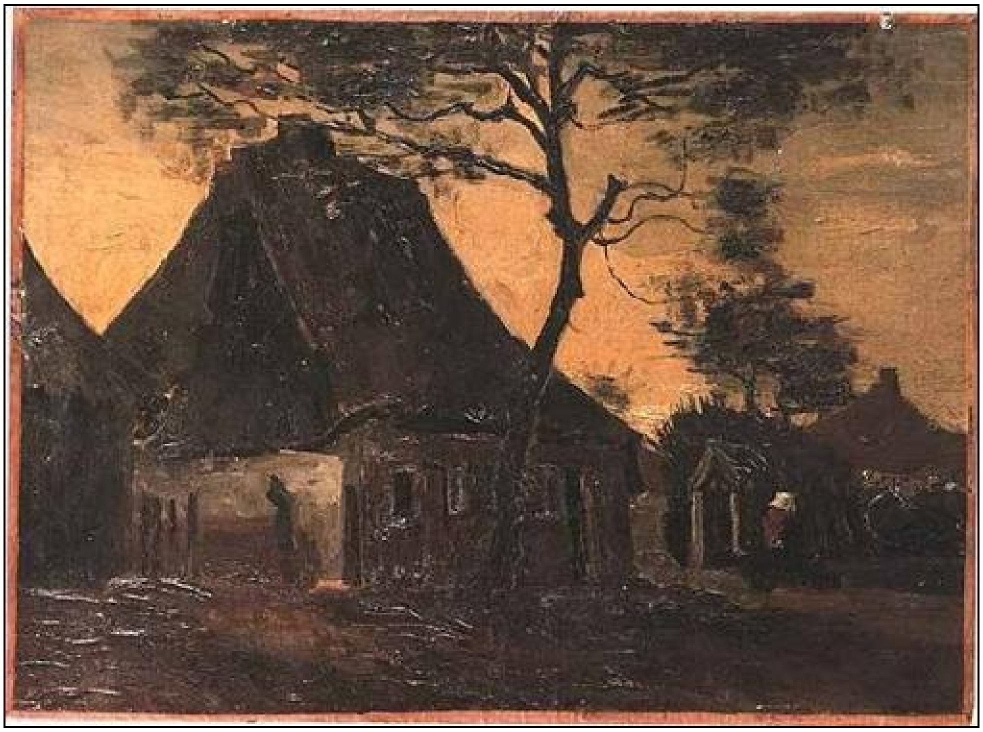
Cottage with Peasant Woman Digging
Oil on canvas on panel
30.5 x 40.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



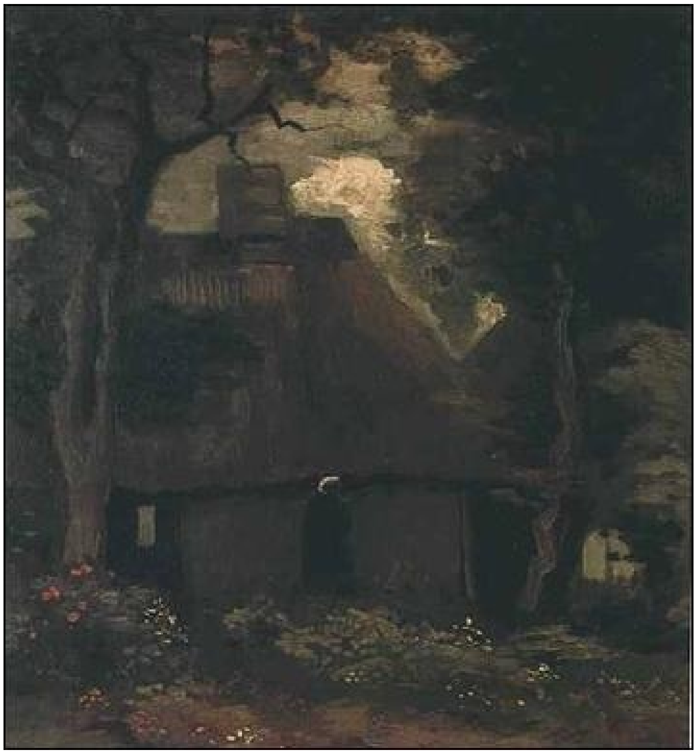
Cottage with Trees
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 59.5 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



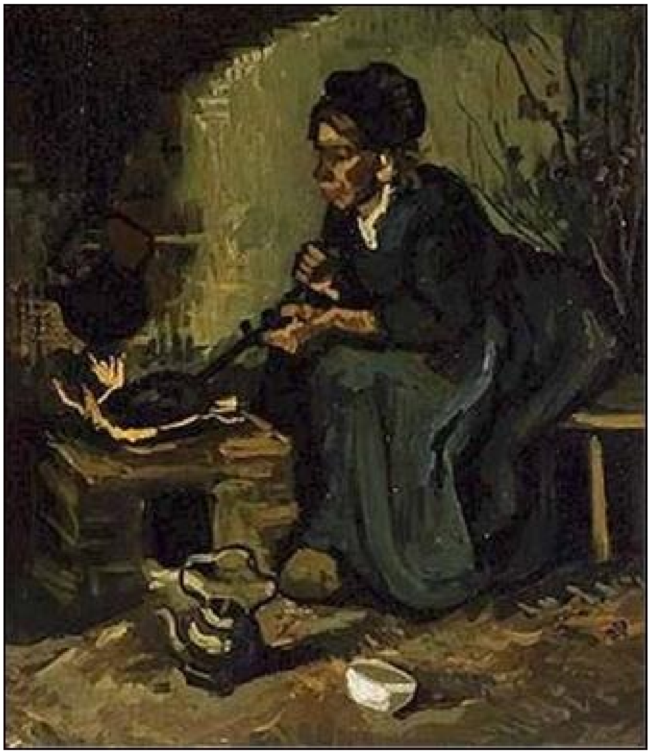
Cottage with Trees
Oil on canvas
22.5 x 34.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



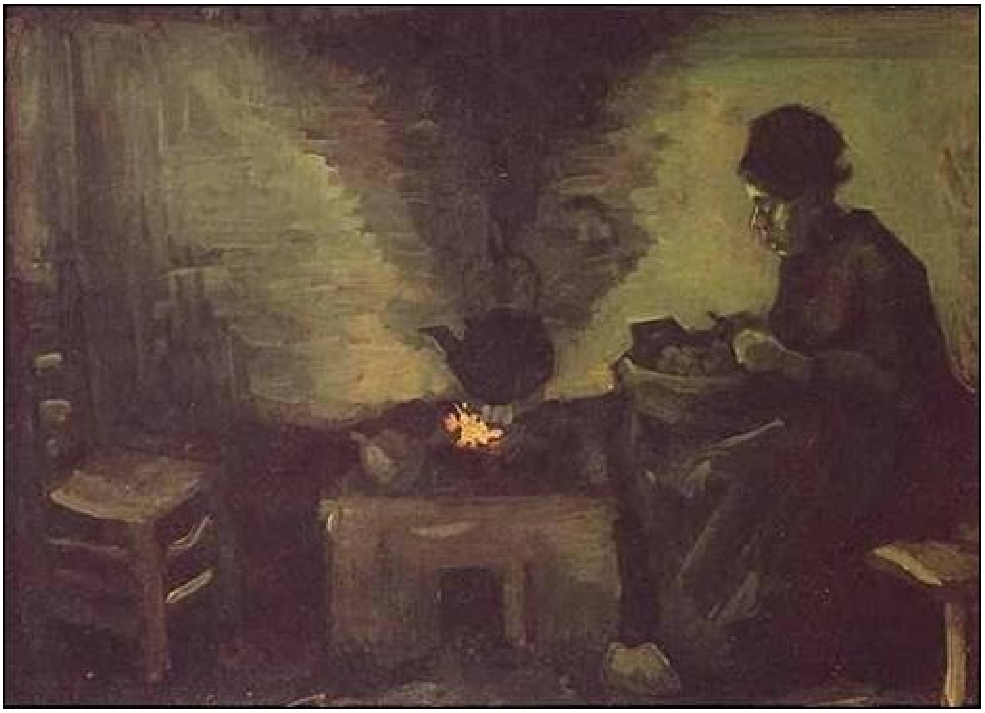
Cottage with Trees
Oil on canvas on panel
32.0 x 46.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



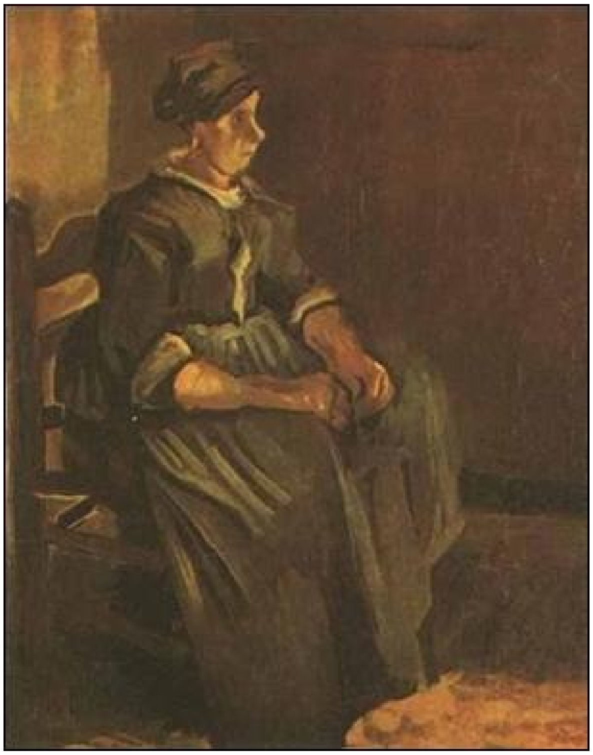
Cottage with Trees and Peasant Woman
Oil on canvas
47.5 x 46.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



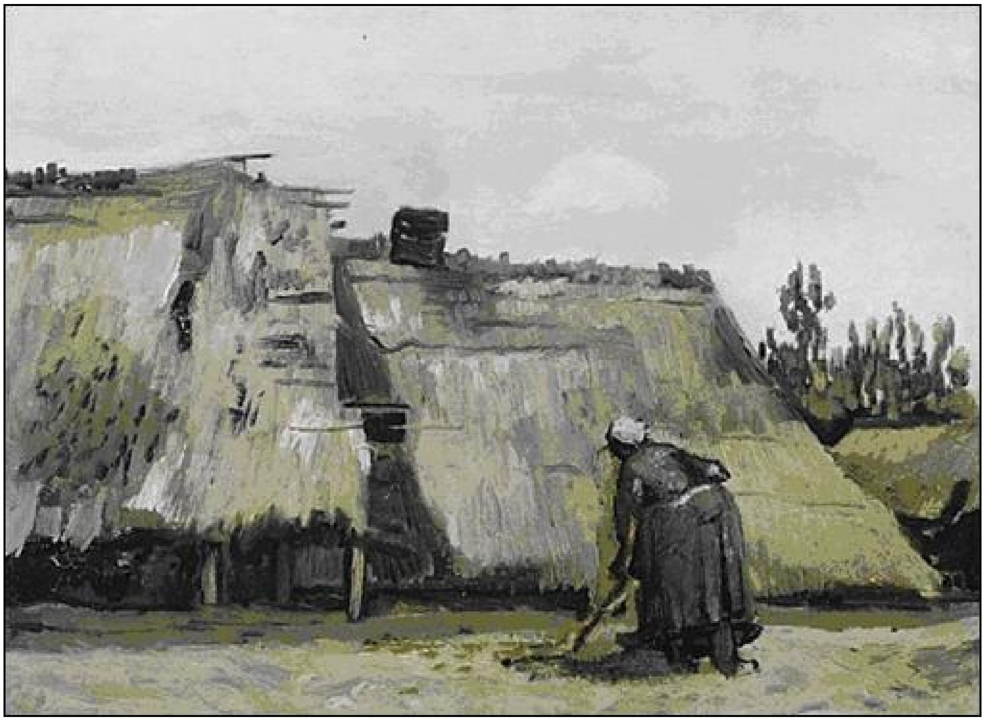
Peasant Woman by the Fireplace
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 38.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



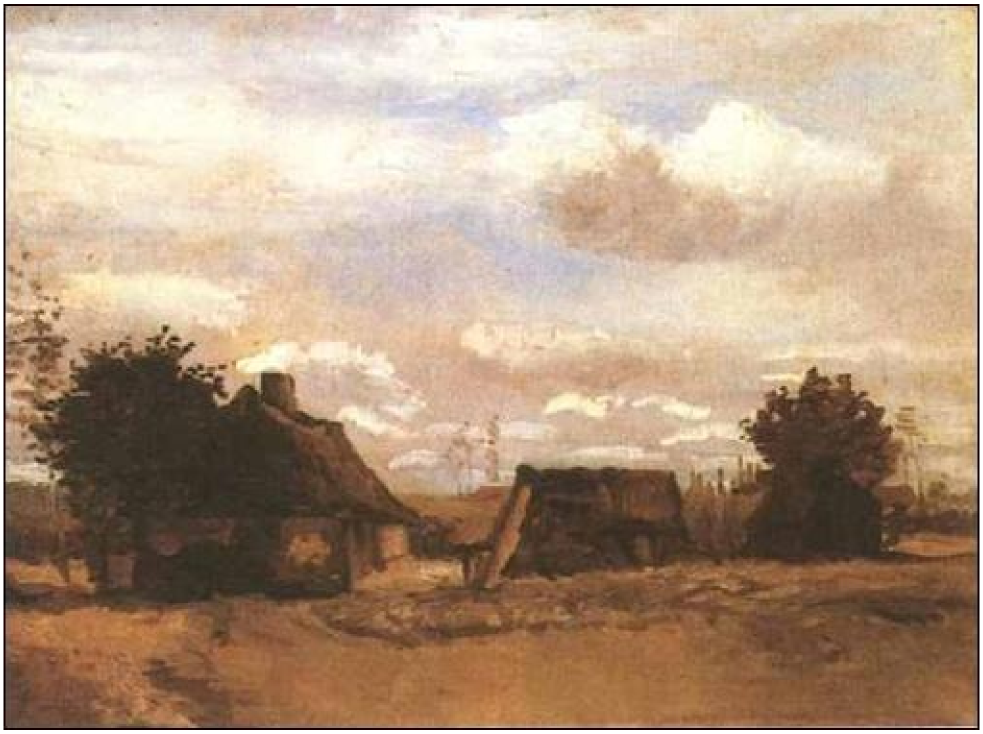
Peasant Woman by the Fireplace
Oil on canvas on panel
29.5 x 40.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



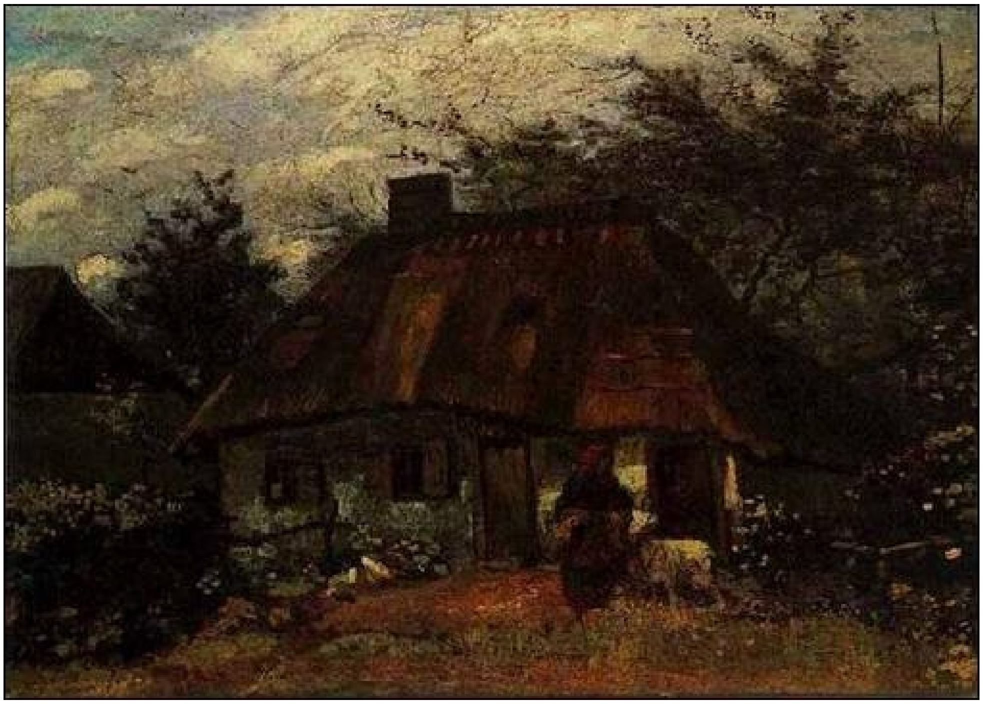
Peasant Woman Sitting on a Chair
Oil on panel
34.0 x 26.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



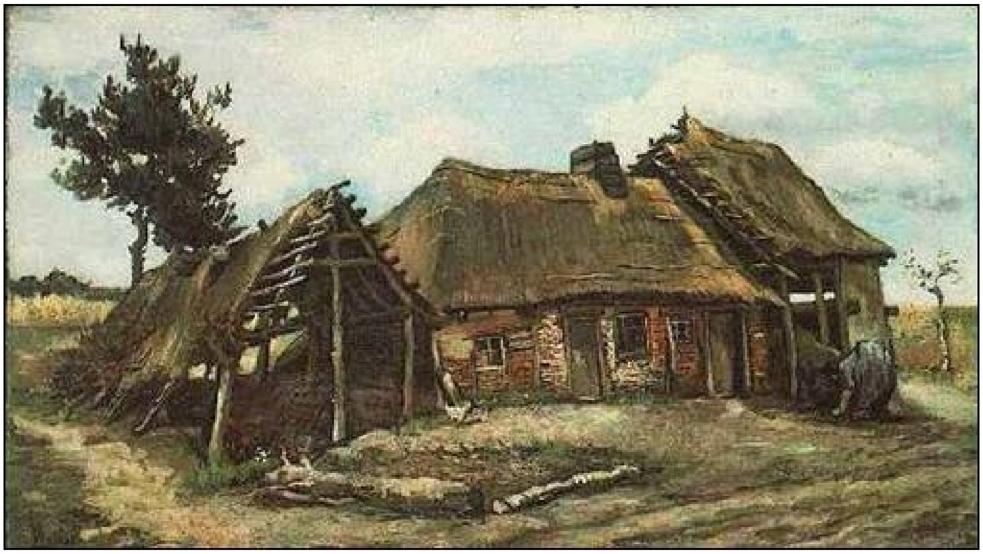
Peasant Woman Digging in Front of Her Cottage
Oil on canvas on cardboard
31.3 x 42.0 cm.
Nuenen: June, 1885



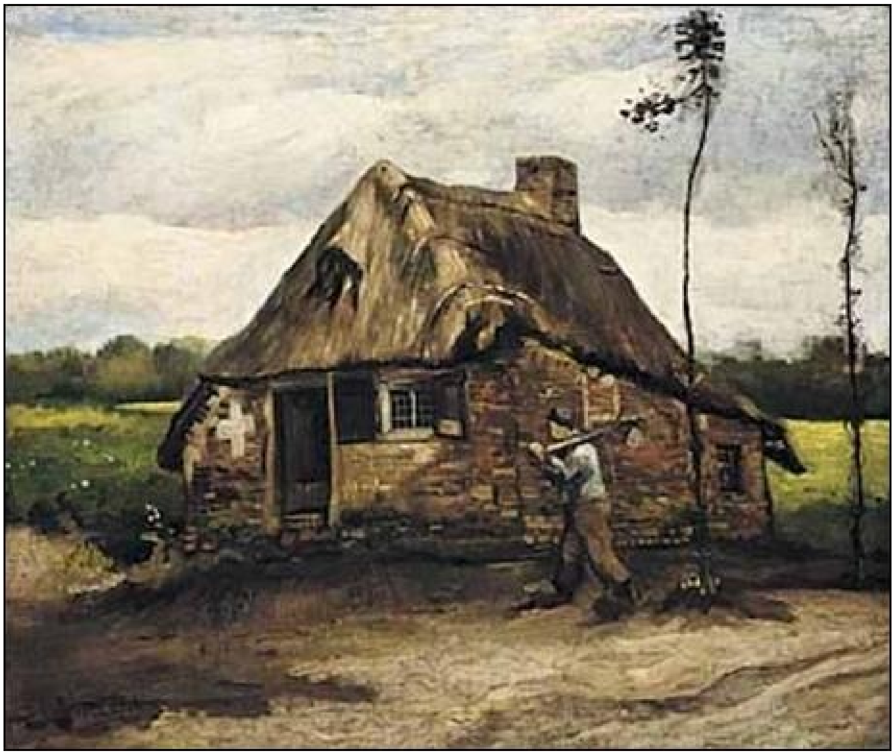
Cottage
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 43.0 cm.
Nuenen: June-July, 1885



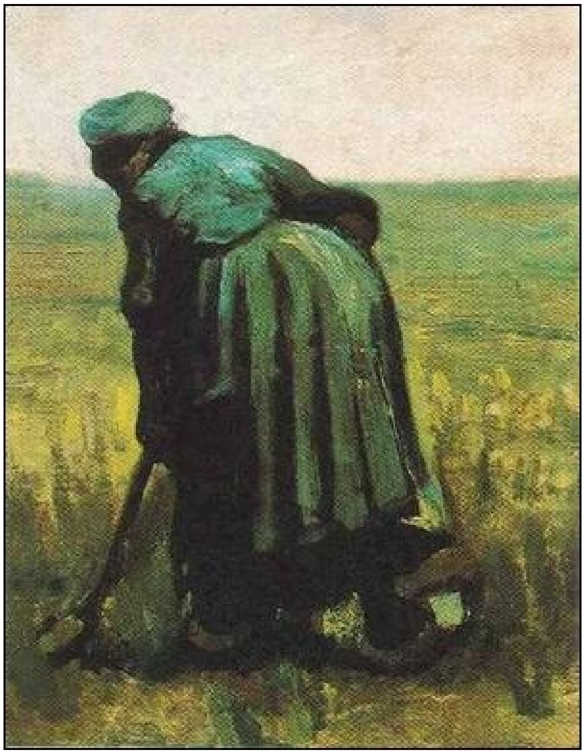
Cottage and Woman with Goat
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 85.0 cm.
Nuenen: June-July, 1885



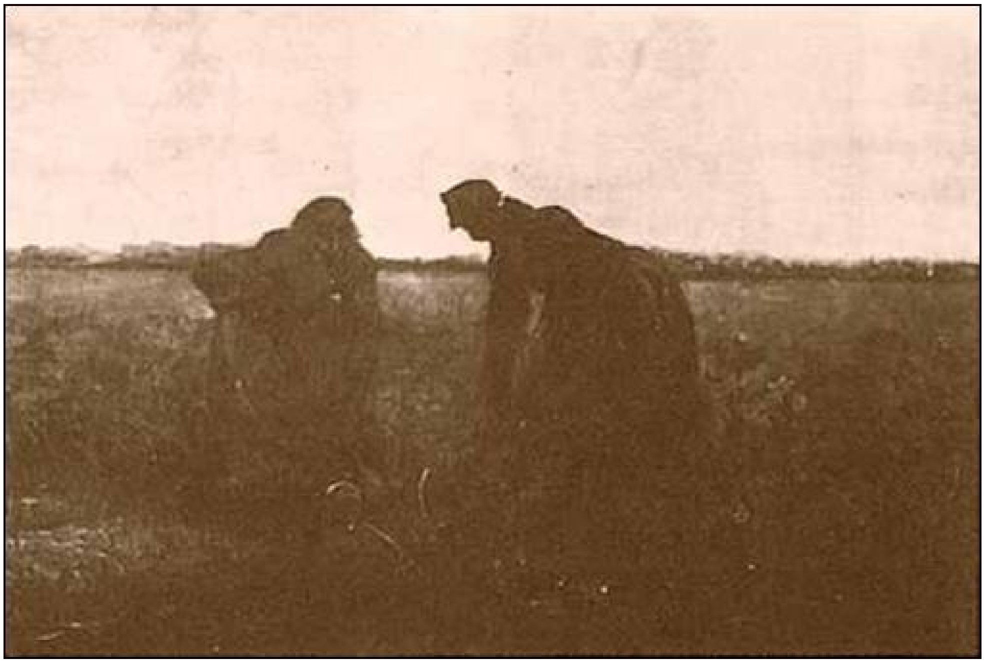
Cottage with Decrepit Barn and Stooping Woman
Oil on canvas
62.0 x 113.0 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1885



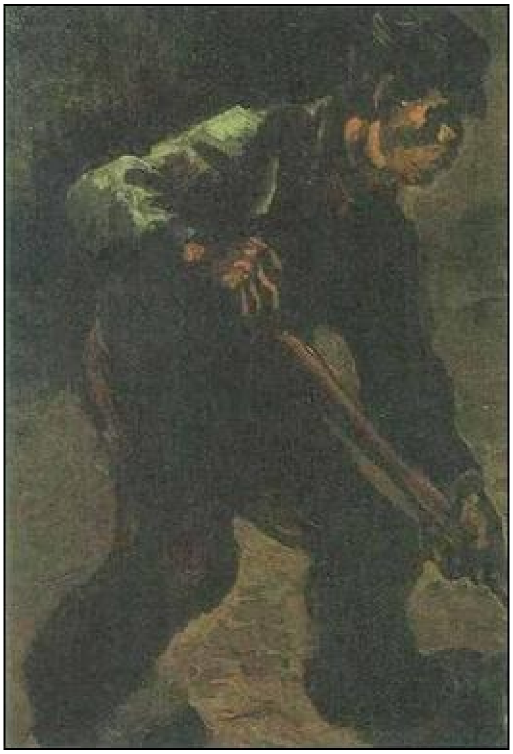
Cottage with Peasant Coming Home
Oil on canvas
63.5 x 76.0 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1885



Peasant Woman Digging
Oil on canvas on panel
41.5 x 32.0 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1885

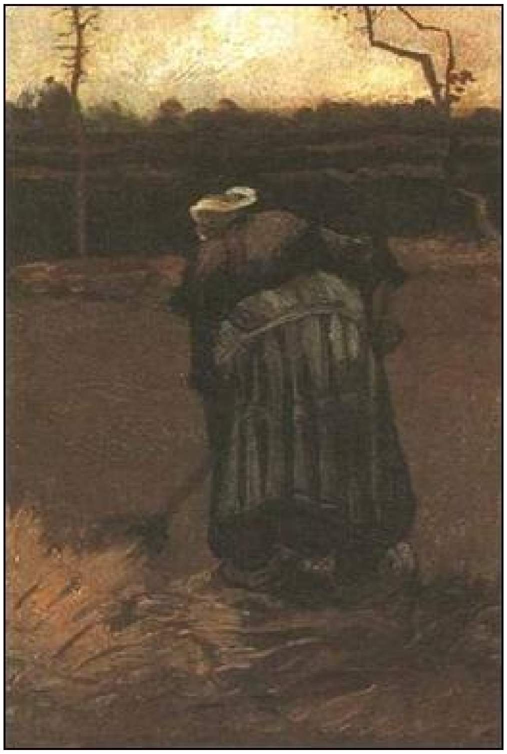


Two Peasant Women Digging
Oil on canvas on panel
39.0 x 55.0 cm.
Nuenen: July, 1885

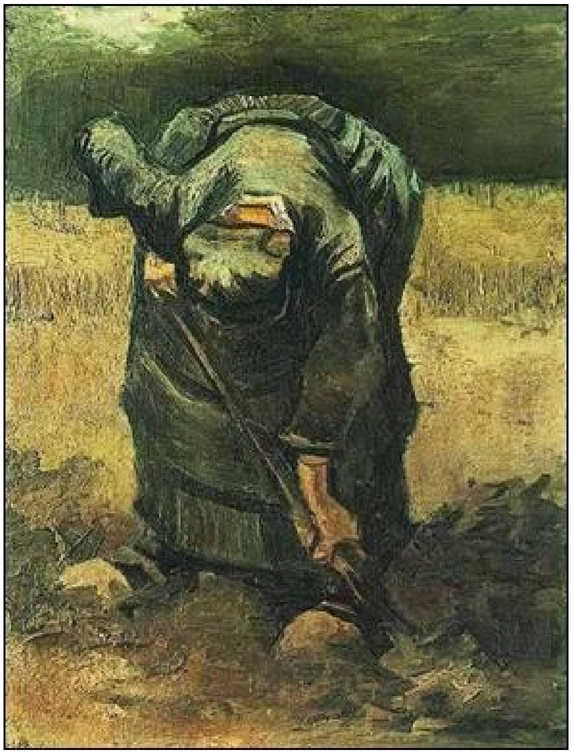


Peasant Digging

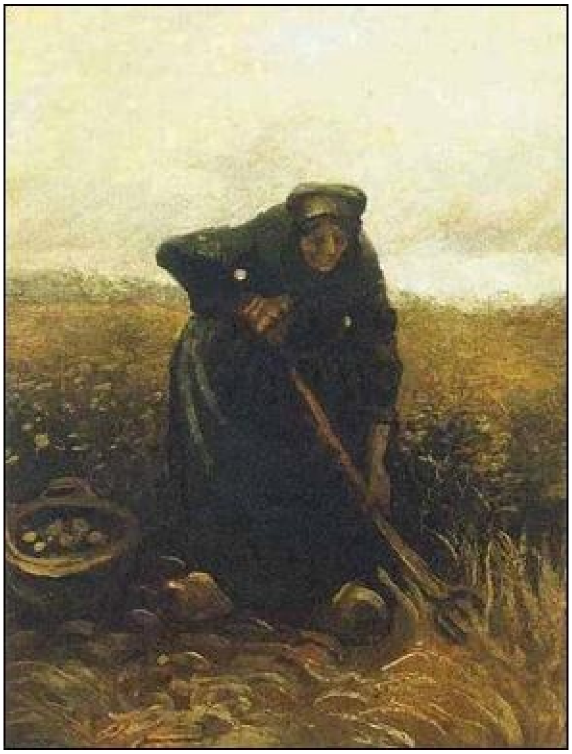
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 31.5 cm.
Nuenen: July-August, 1885



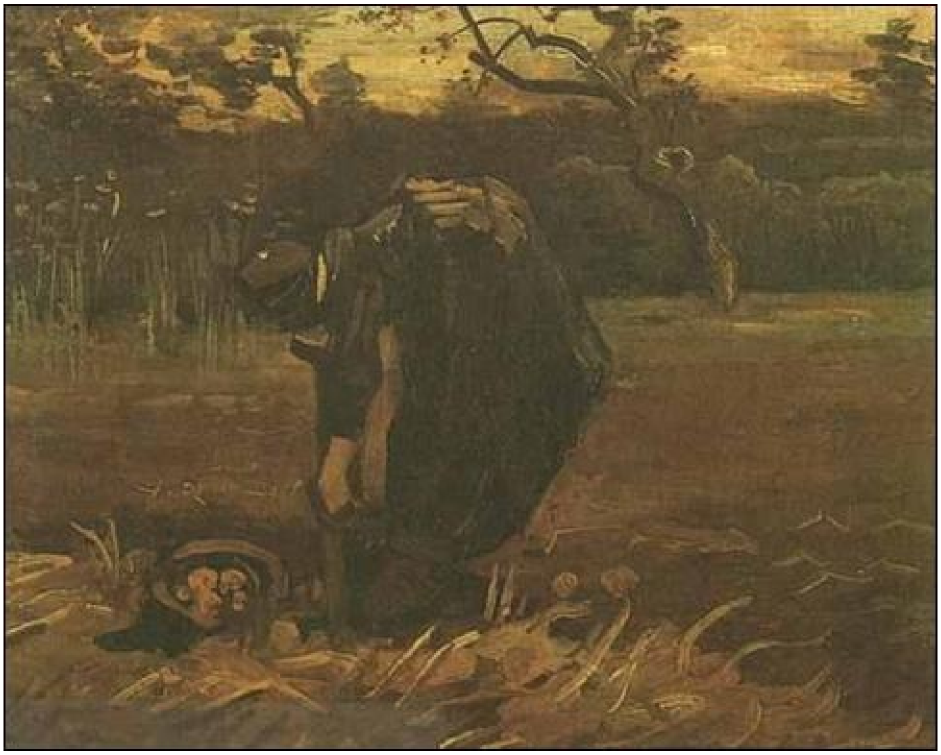
Peasant Woman Digging
Oil on canvas on panel
37.5 x 25.7 cm.
Nuenen: July-August, 1885



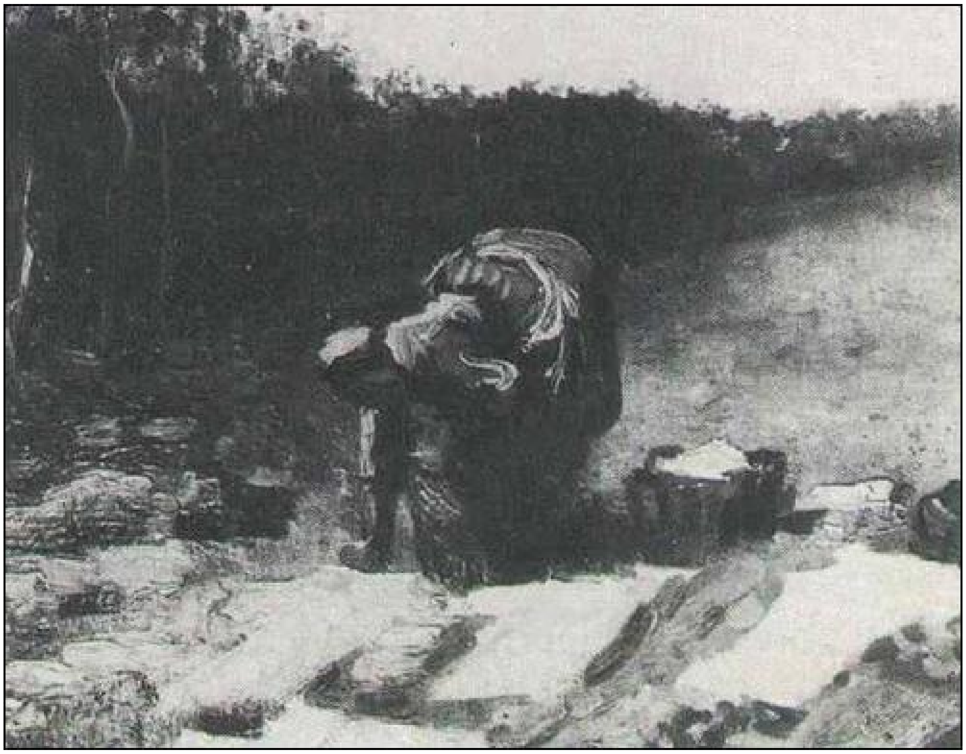
Peasant Woman Digging
Oil on canvas on panel
42.0 x 32.0 cm.
Nuenen: August, 1885



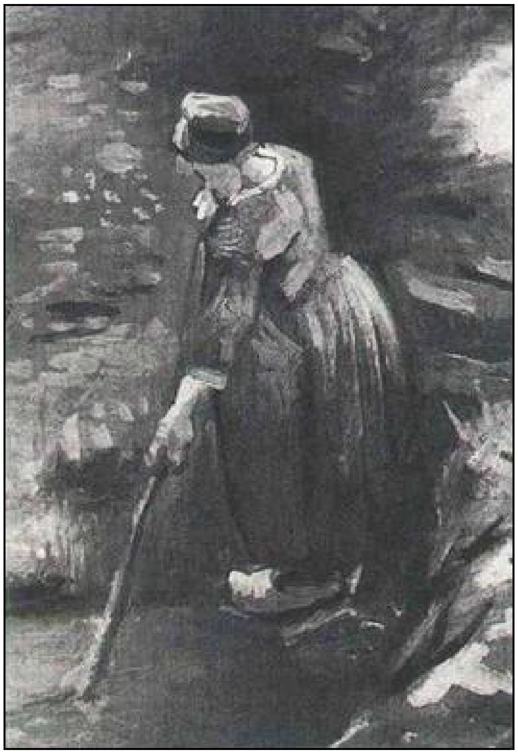
Woman Lifting Potatoes
Oil on canvas on panel
41.8 x 32.5 cm.
Nuenen: late July-August, 1885



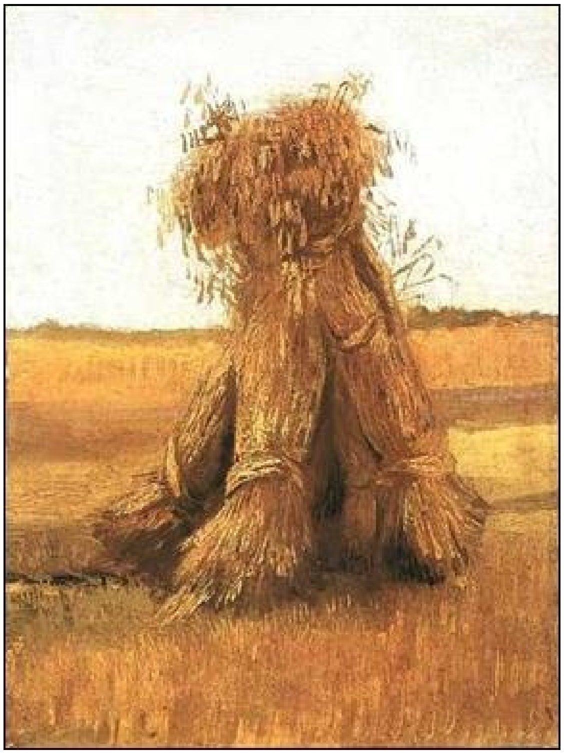
Peasant Woman Digging Up Potatoes
Oil on canvas on panel
31.5 x 38.0 cm.
Nuenen: August, 1885



Peasant Woman Laundering
Oil on canvas
29.5 x 36.0 cm.
Nuenen: August, 1885

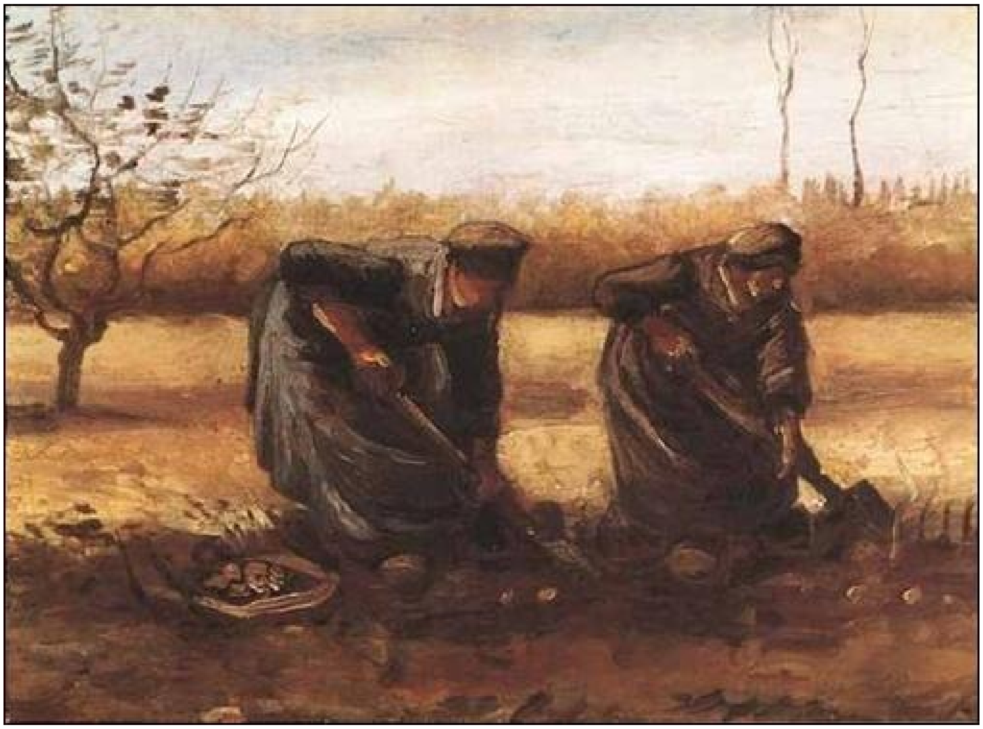


Peasant Woman Raking
Oil on canvas
38.5 x 26.5 cm.
Nuenen: August, 1885

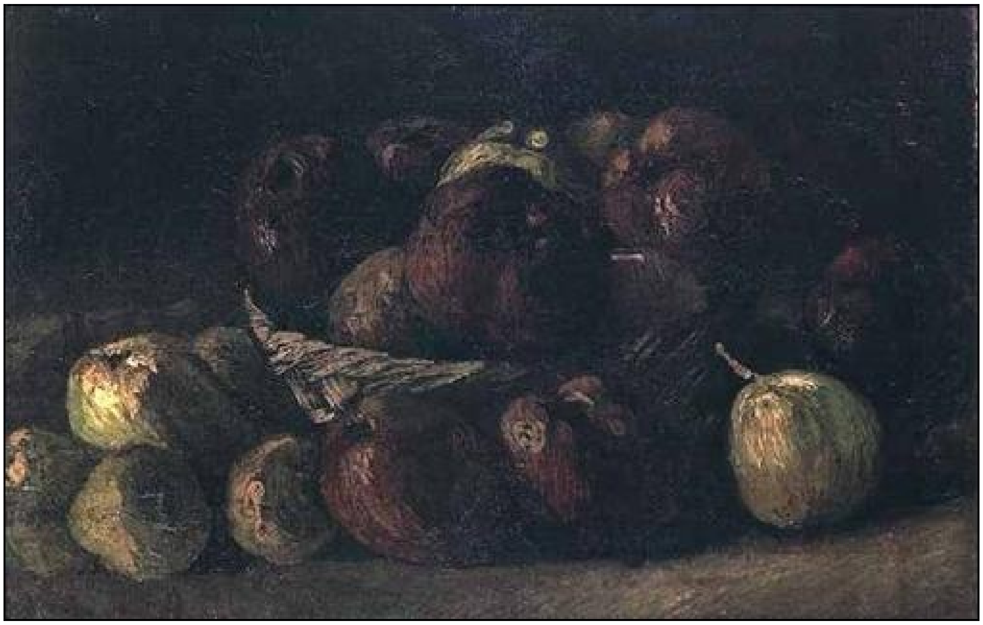


Sheaves of Wheat in a Field

Oil on canvas
40.0 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: August, 1885



Two Peasant Women Digging Potatoes
Oil on canvas on panel
31.5 x 42.5 cm.
Nuenen: August, 1885

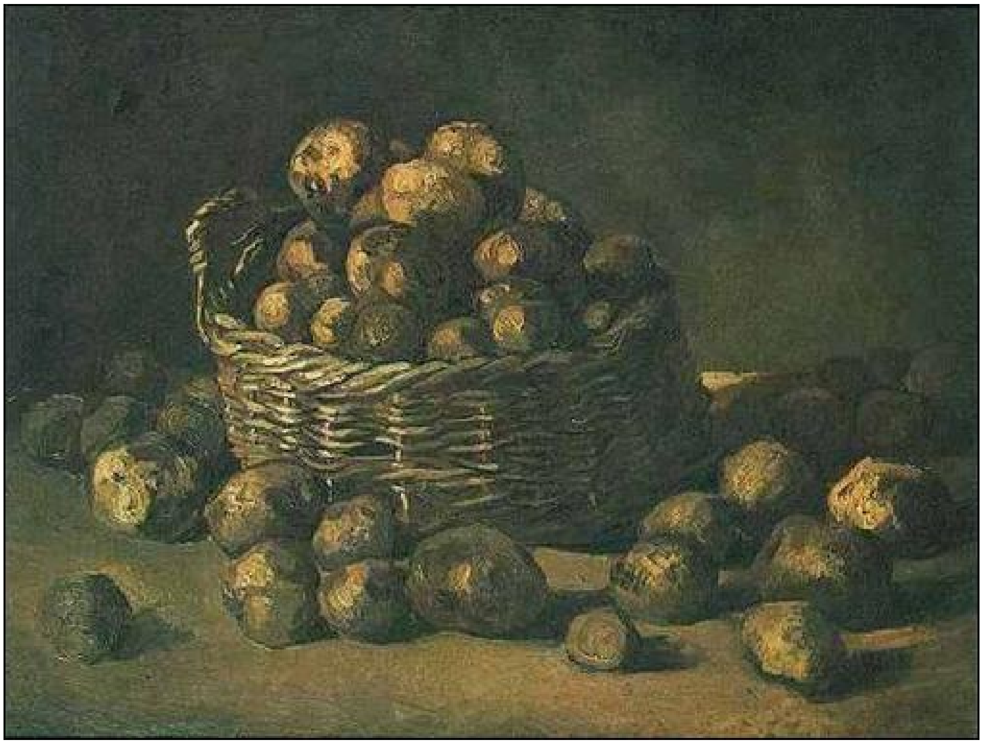


Still Life with a Basket of Apples

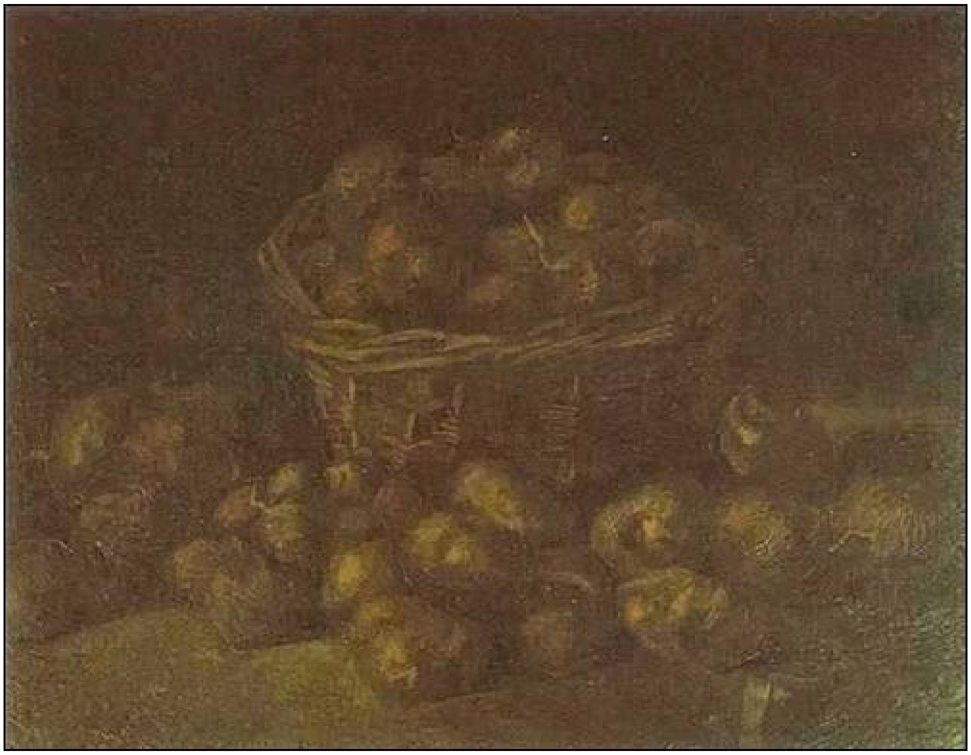
Oil on canvas

30.0 x 47.0 cm.

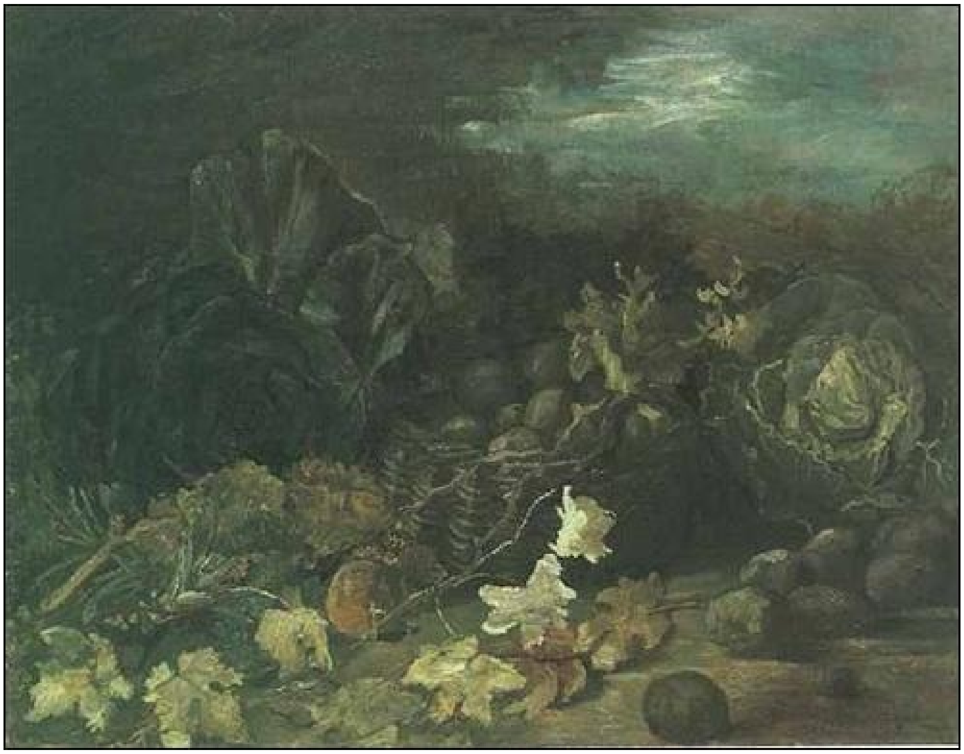
Nuenen: September, 1885



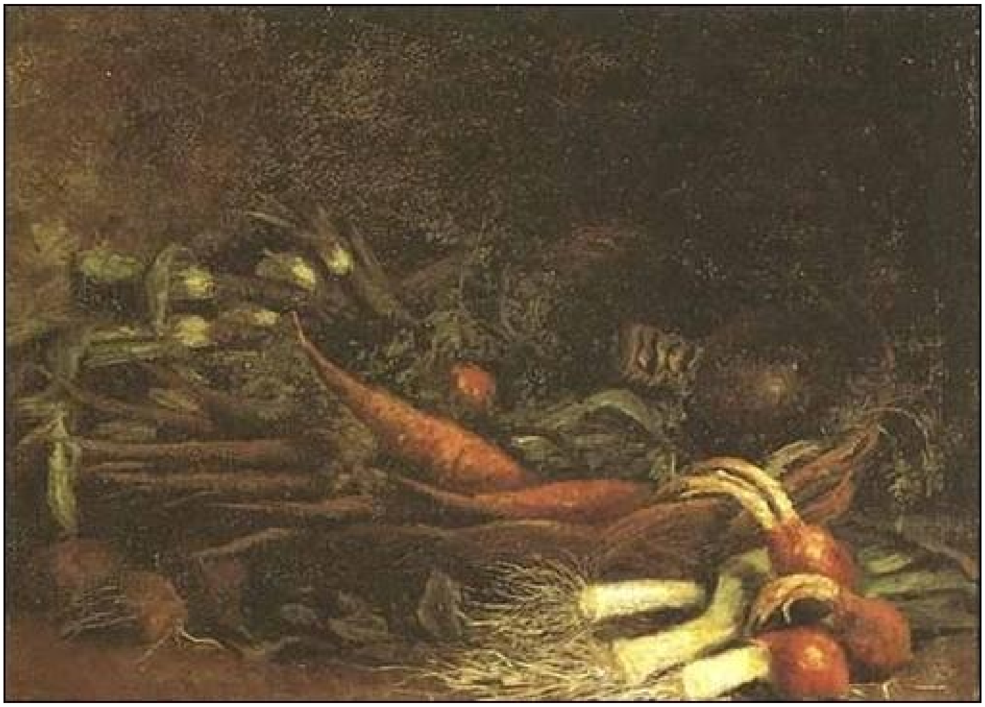
Basket of Potatoes
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 60.5 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



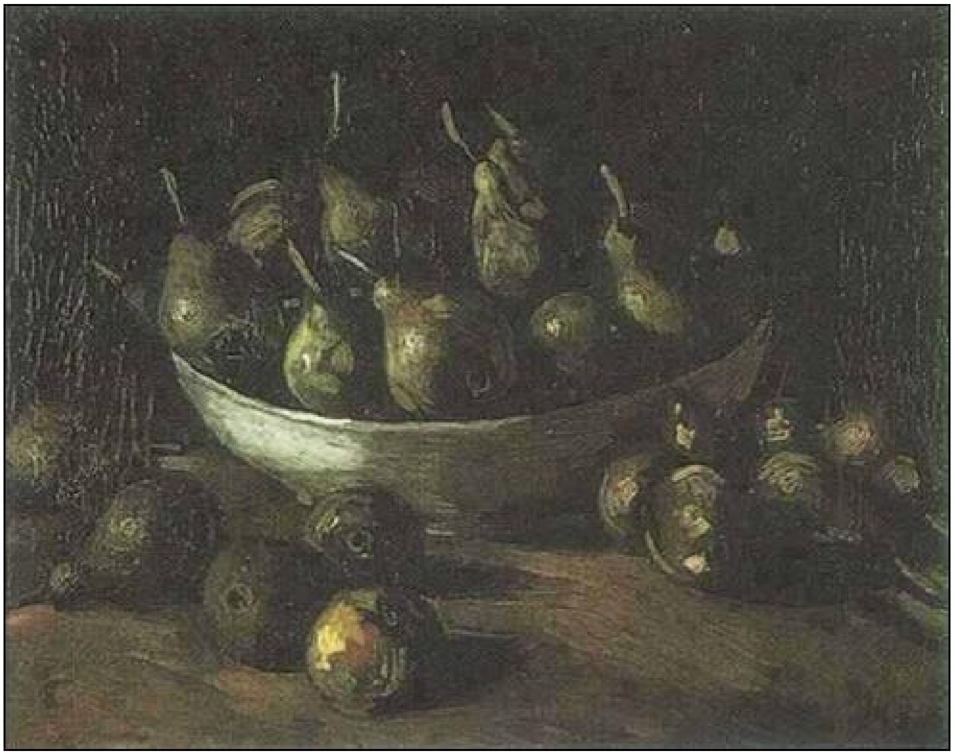
Basket of Potatoes
Oil on canvas
50.8 x 66.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



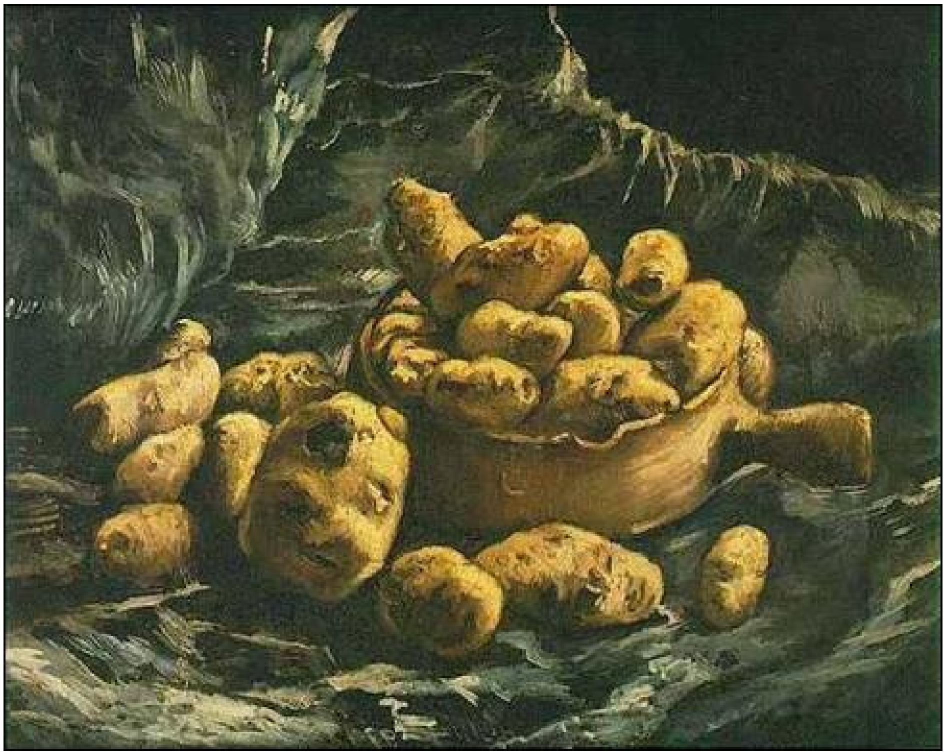
Still Life with a Basket of Potatoes, Surrounded by Autumn Leaves and Vegetables
Oil on canvas
75.0 x 93.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



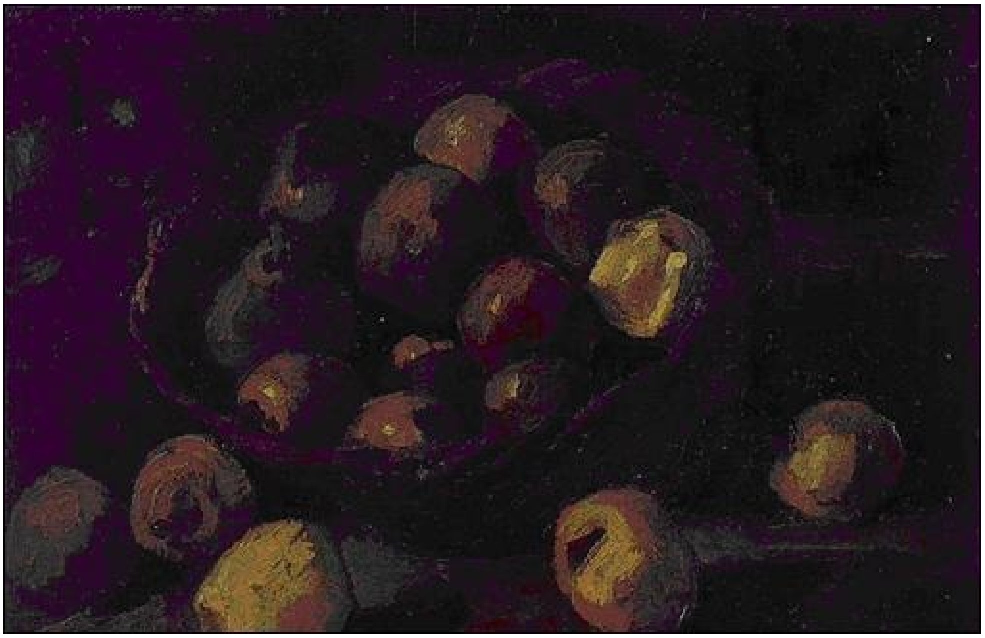
Still Life with a Basket of Vegetables
Oil on canvas
35.5 x 45.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



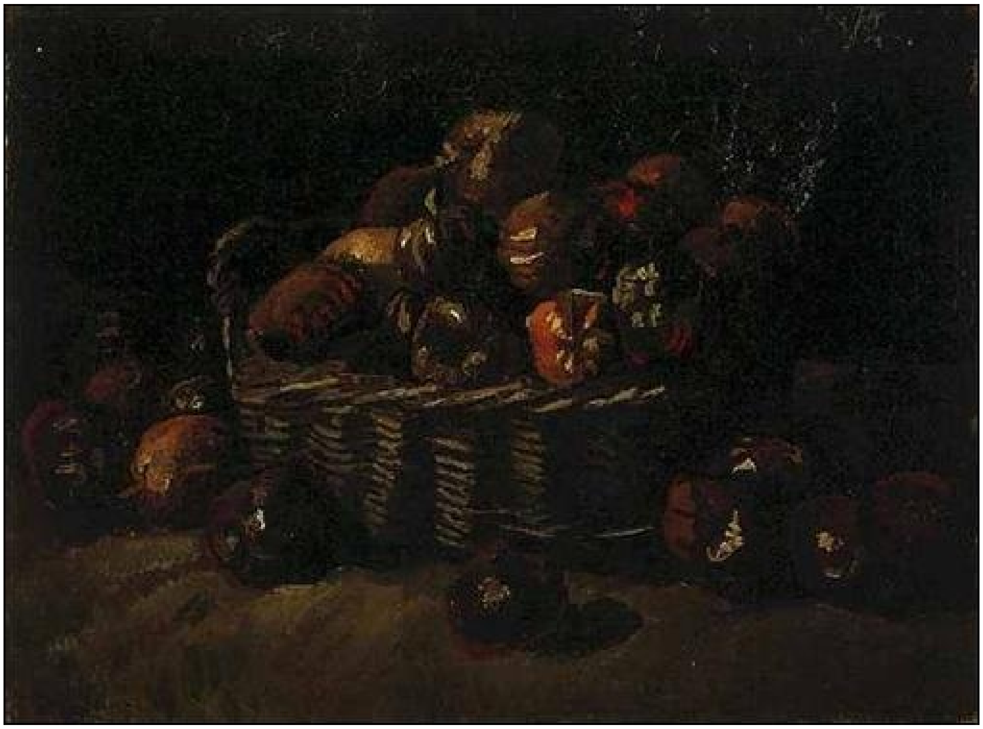
Still Life with an Earthen Bowl and Pears
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 43.5 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



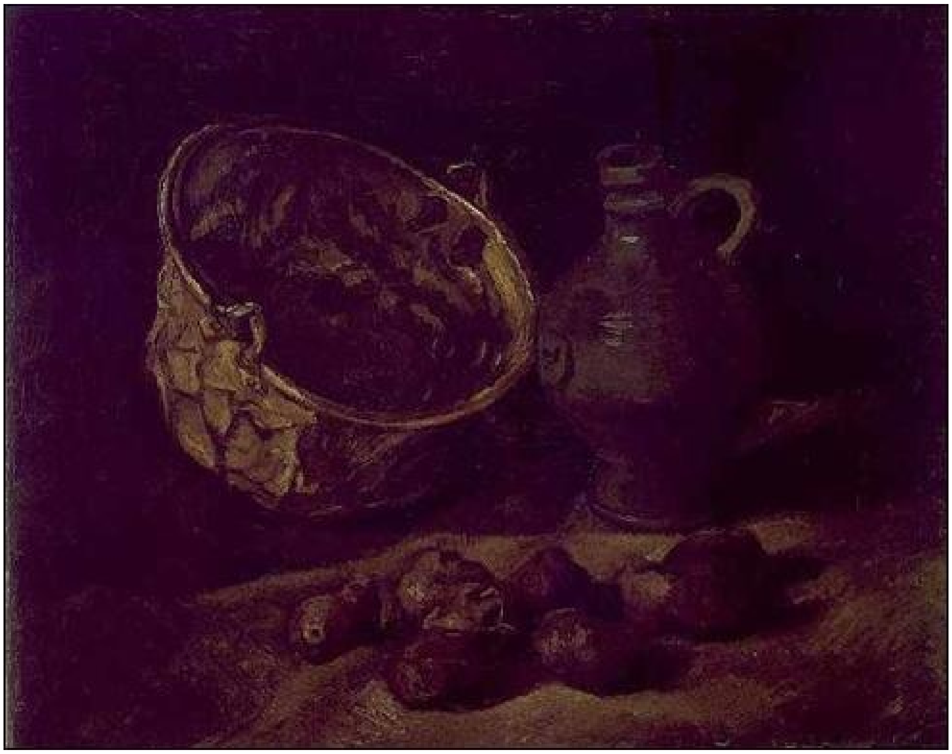
Still Life with an Earthen Bowl and Potatoes
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 57.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



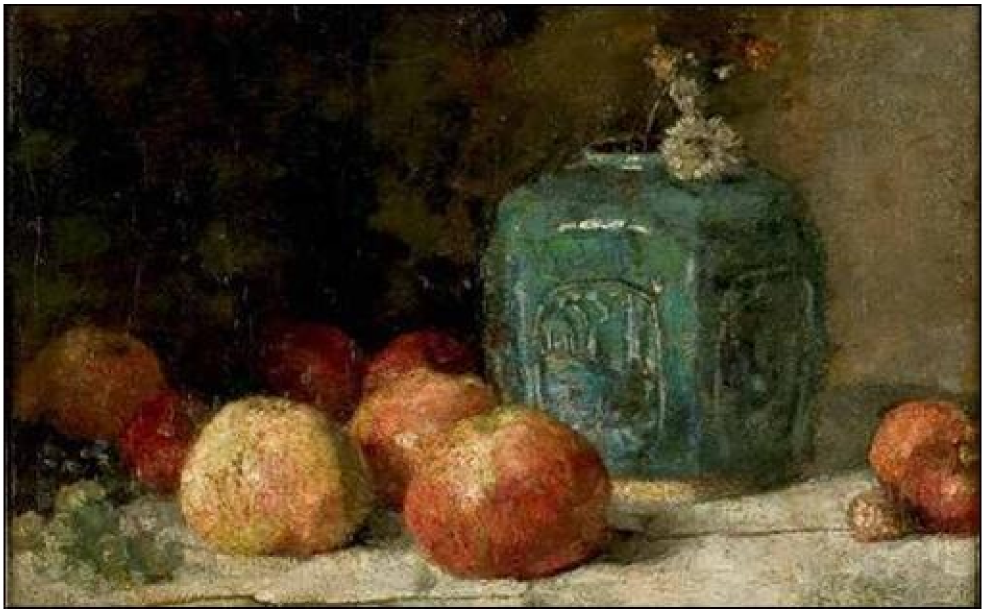
Basket of Apples
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 44.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



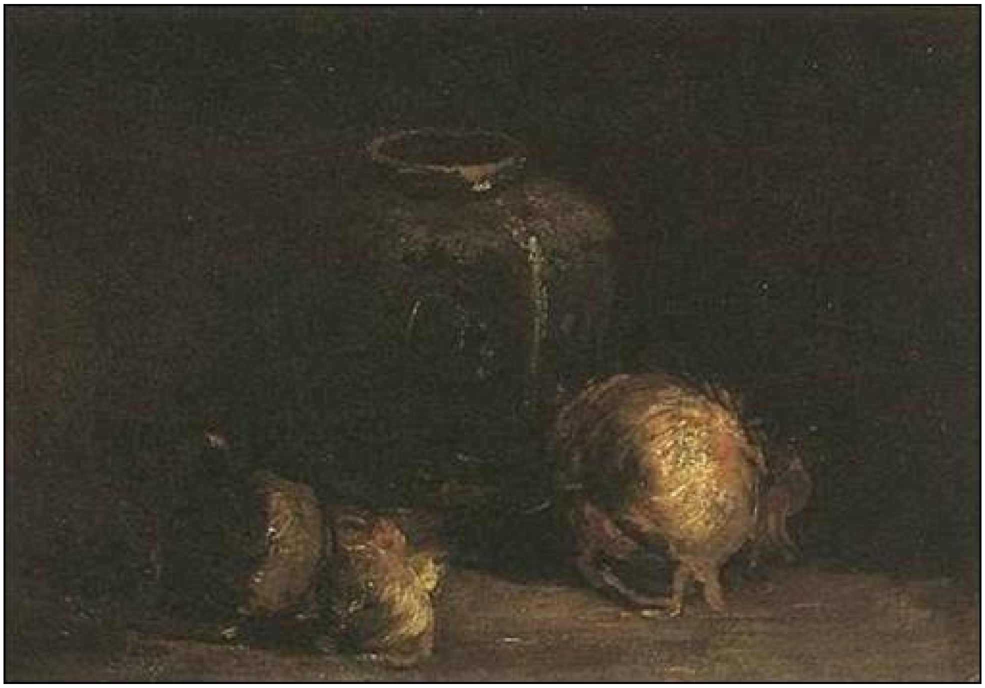
Basket of Apples
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 60.4 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



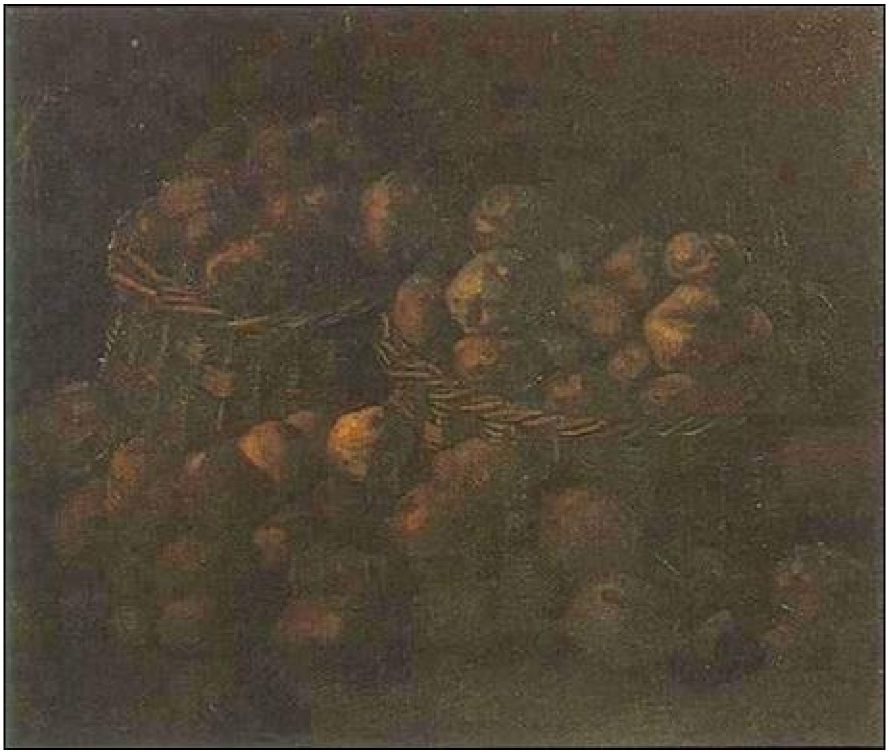
Still Life with Brass Cauldron and Jug
Oil on canvas
65.5 x 80.5 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



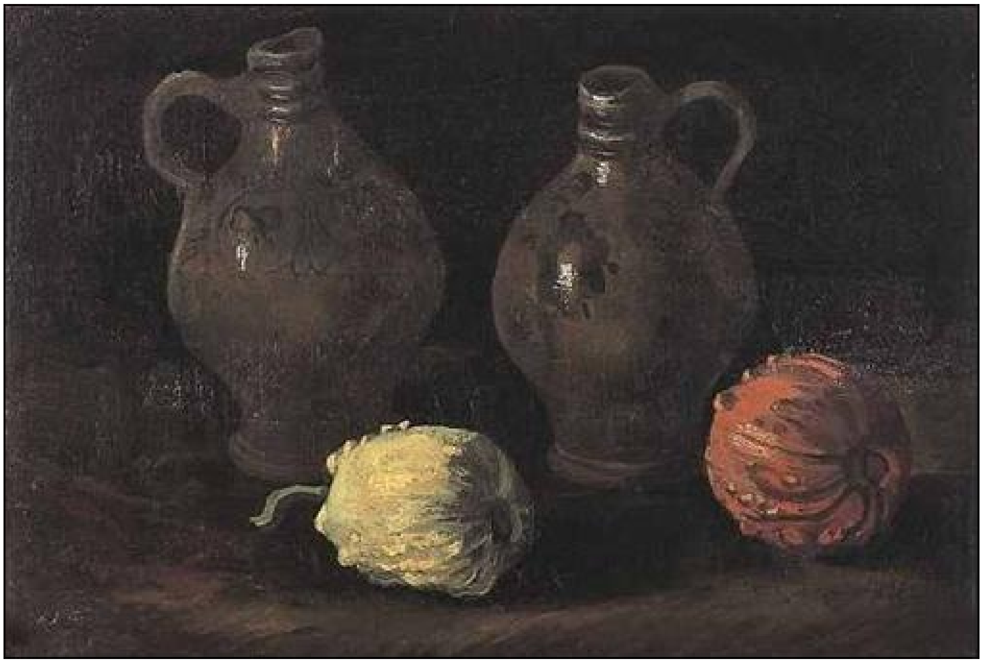
Still Life with Ginger Jar and Apples
Oil on canvas on panel
30.5 x 47.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



Still Life with Ginger Jar and Onions
Oil on canvas
39.3 x 49.6 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885

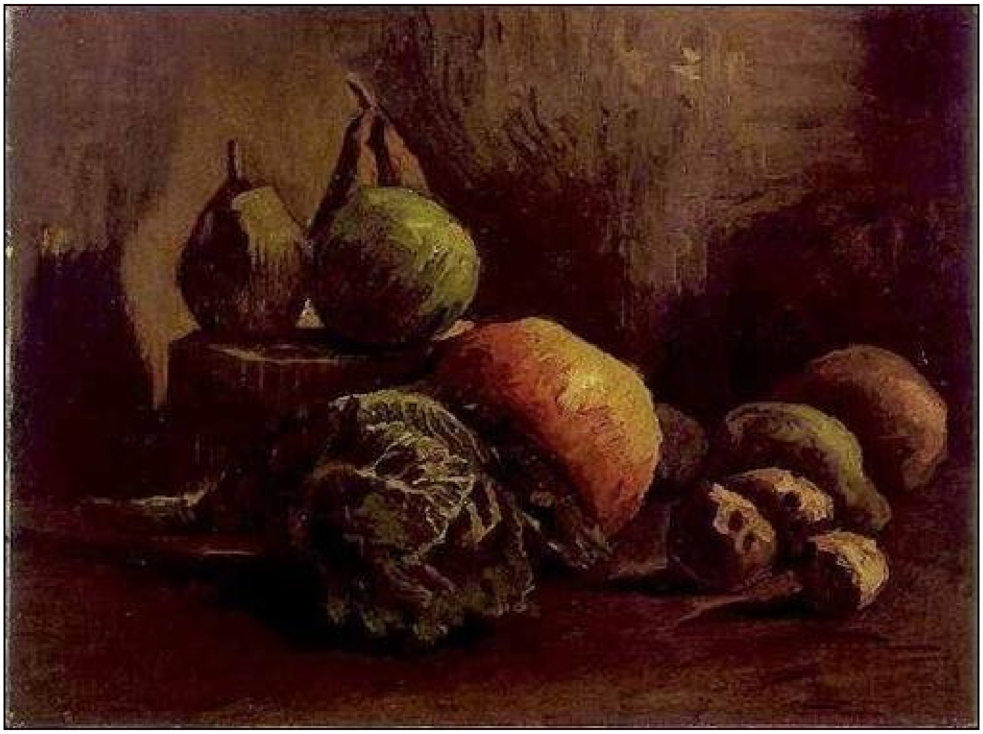


Baskets of Potatoes
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 78.5 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885

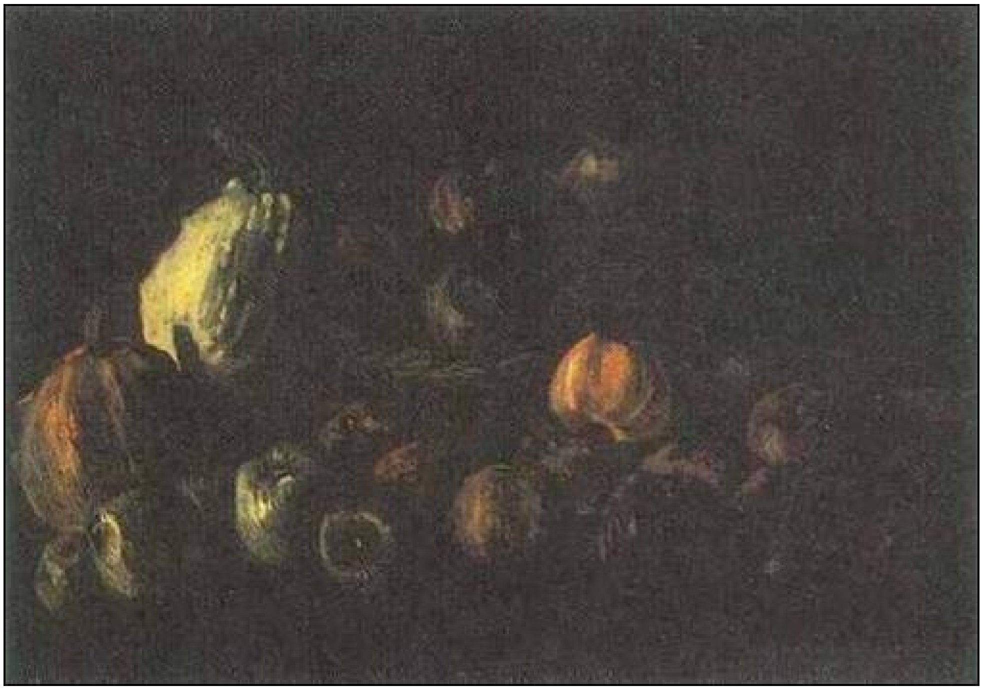


Still Life with Two Jars and Two Pumpkins

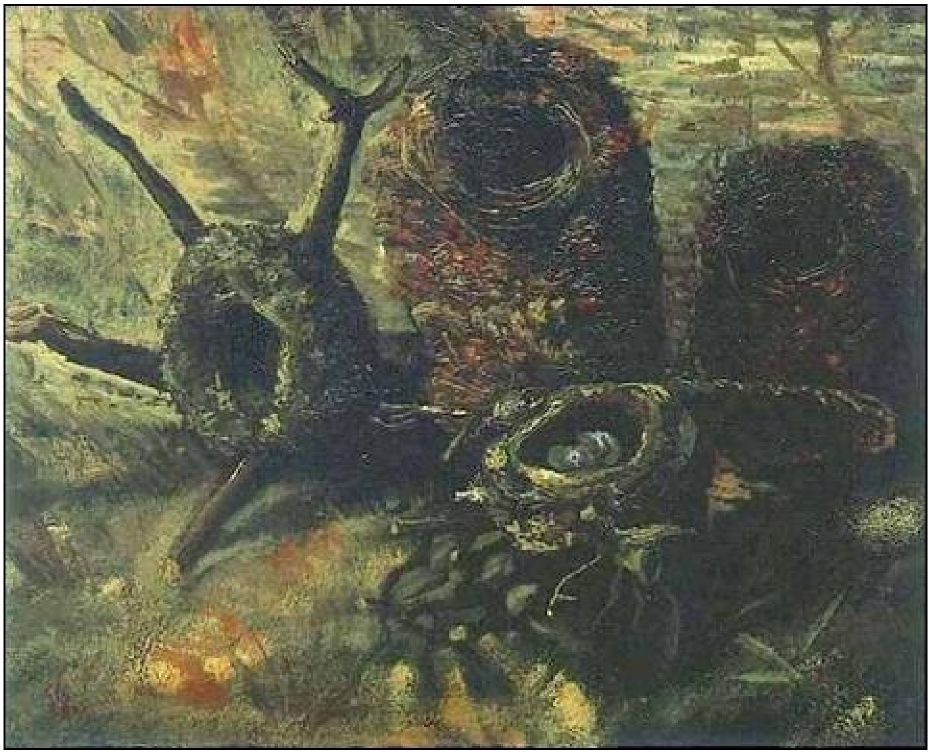
Oil on canvas on panel
58.0 x 85.0 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



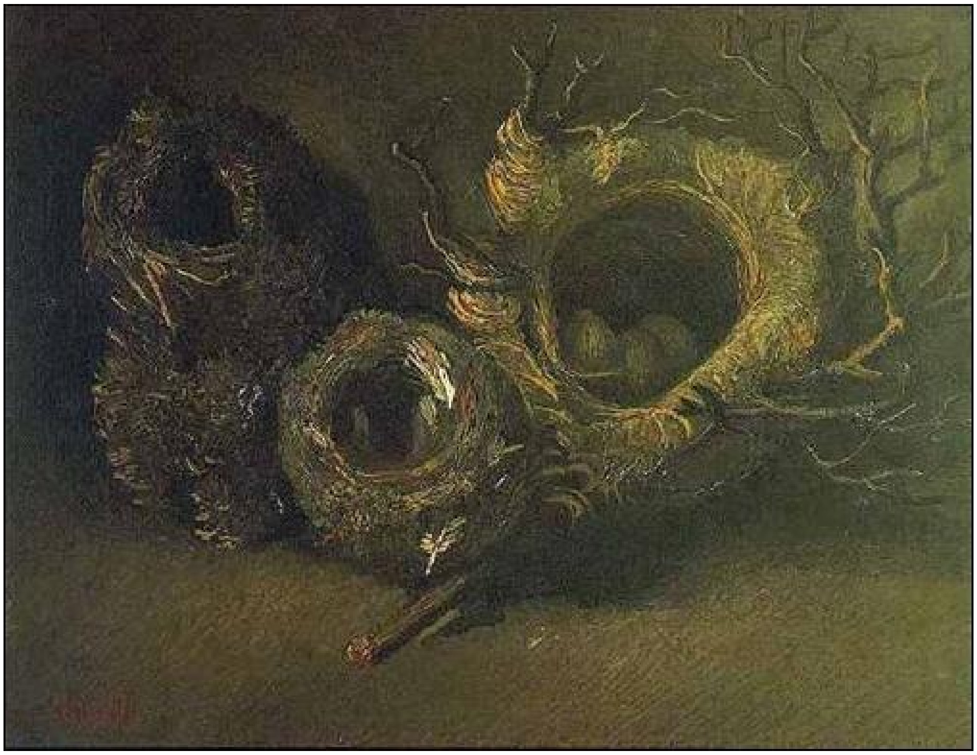
Still Life with Vegetables and Fruit
Oil on canvas
32.3 x 43.2 cm.
Nuenen: September, 1885



Still Life with a Basket of Apples and Two Pumpkins
Oil on canvas
59.0 x 84.5 cm.
Nuenen: September-October, 1885

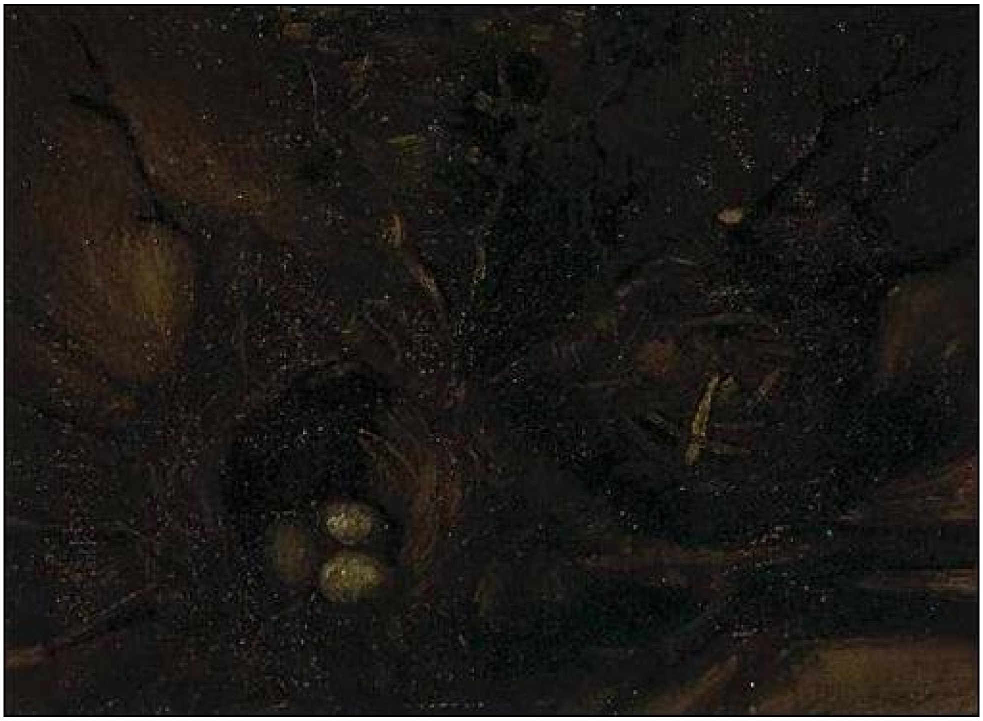


Still Life with Birds' Nests
Oil on canvas
39.3 x 46.5 cm.
Nuenen: late September-early October, 1885 and 1886-87

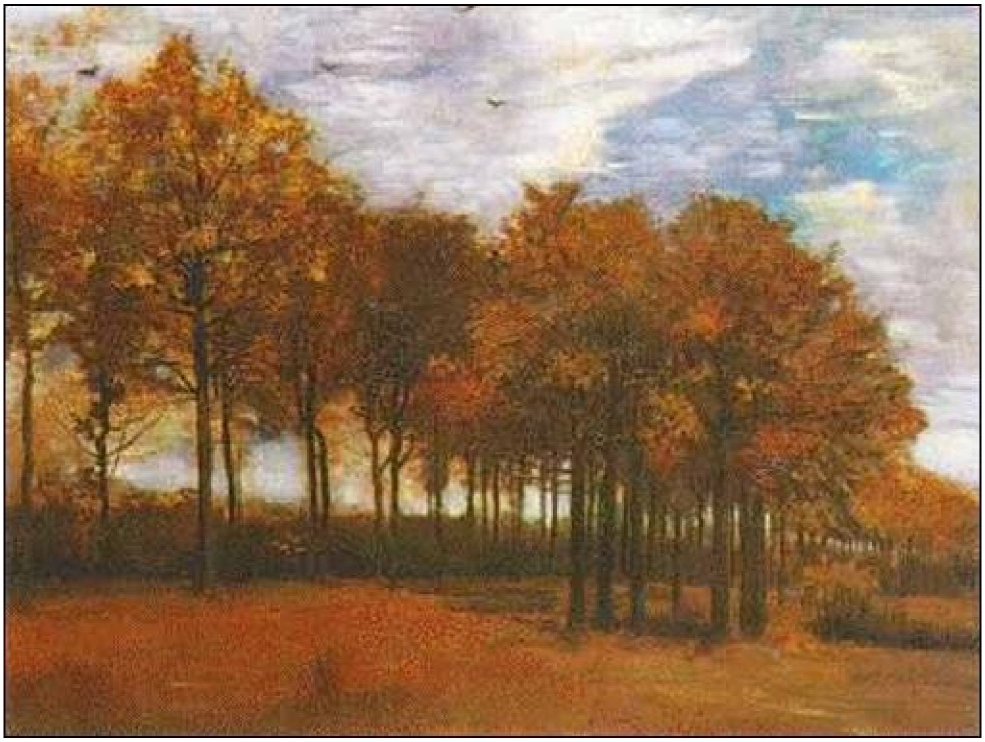


Still Life with Three Birds' Nests

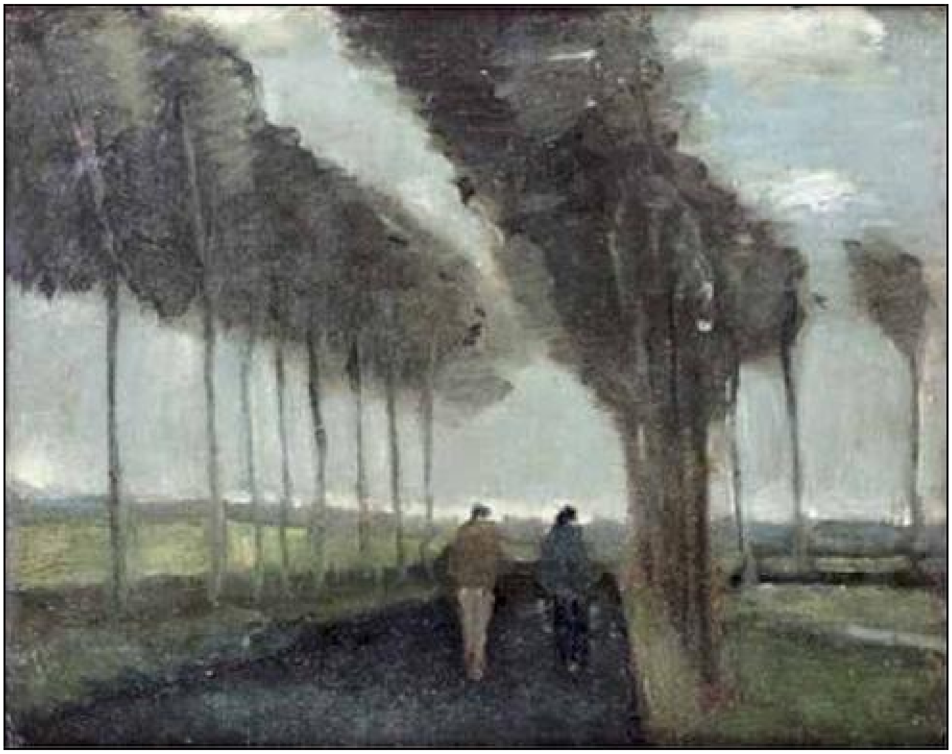
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 42.0 cm.
Nuenen: September-October, 1885



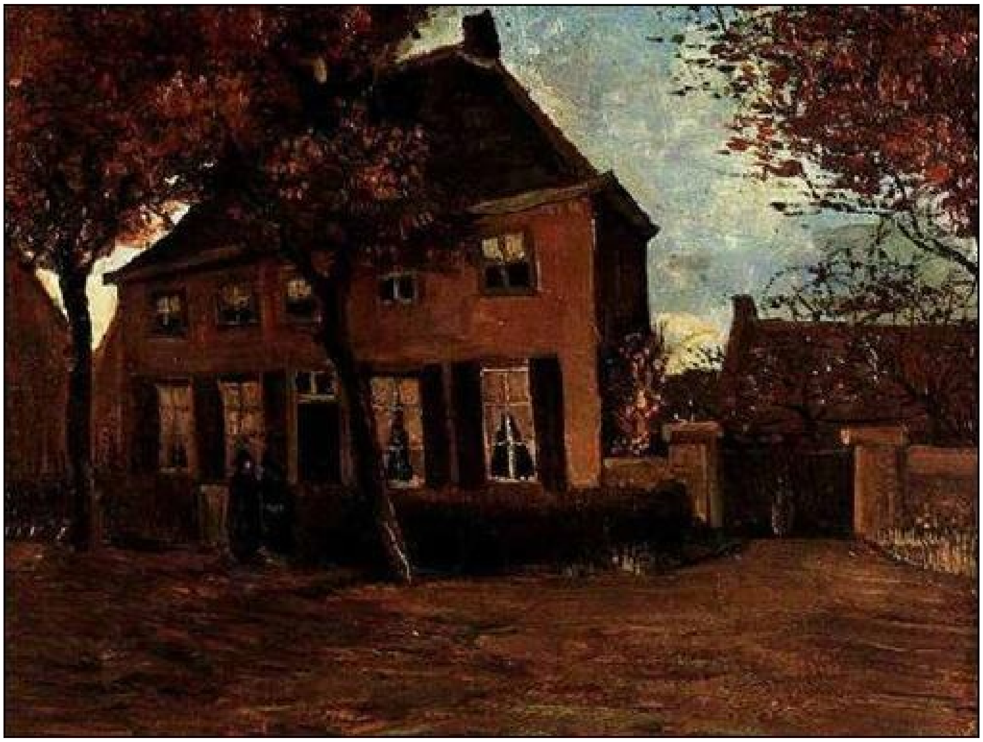
Still Life with Birds' Nests
Oil on canvas
31.4 x 43.0 cm.
Nuenen: late September-early October, 1885



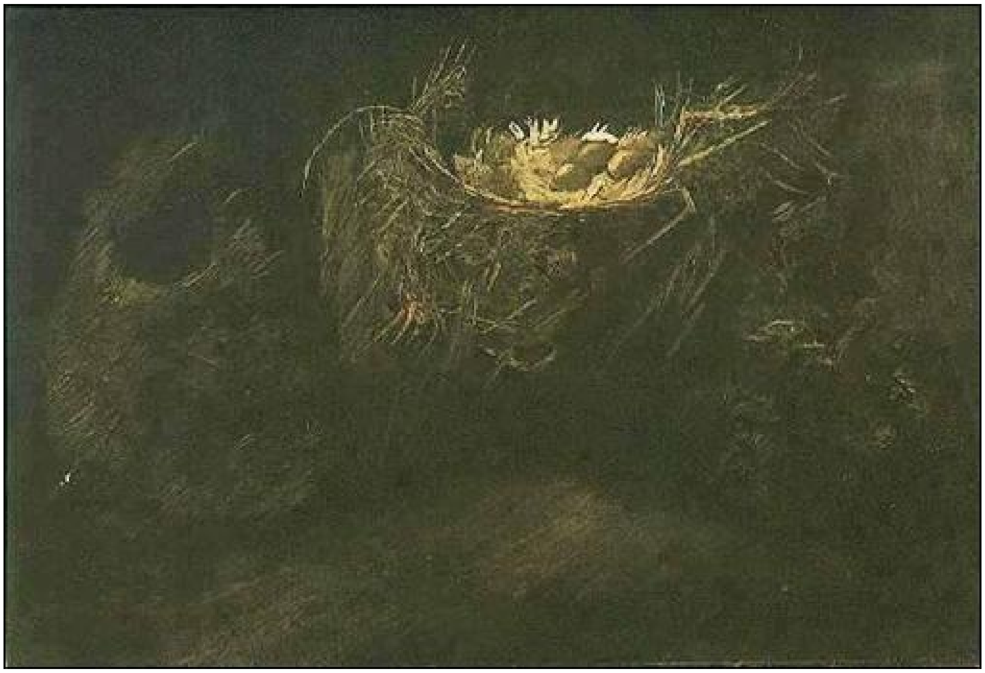
Autumn Landscape
Oil on canvas on panel
64.8 x 86.4 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1885



Country Lane with Two Figures
Oil on canvas on panel
32.0 x 39.5 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1885

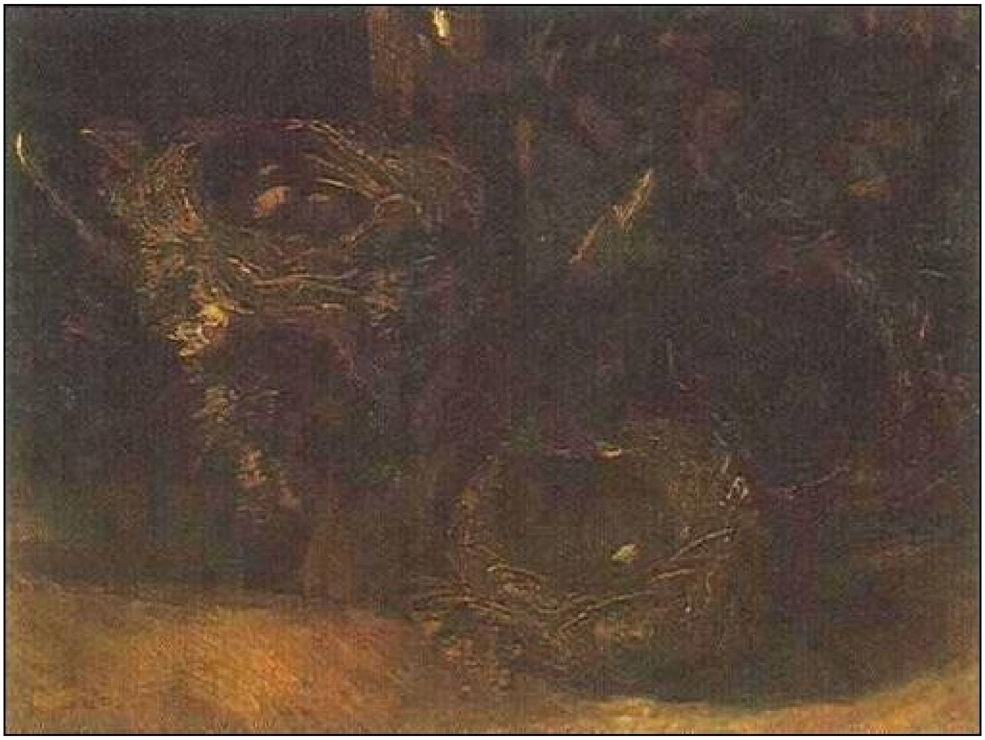


Vicarage at Nuenen, The
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 43.0 cm.
Nuenen: September-early October, 1885

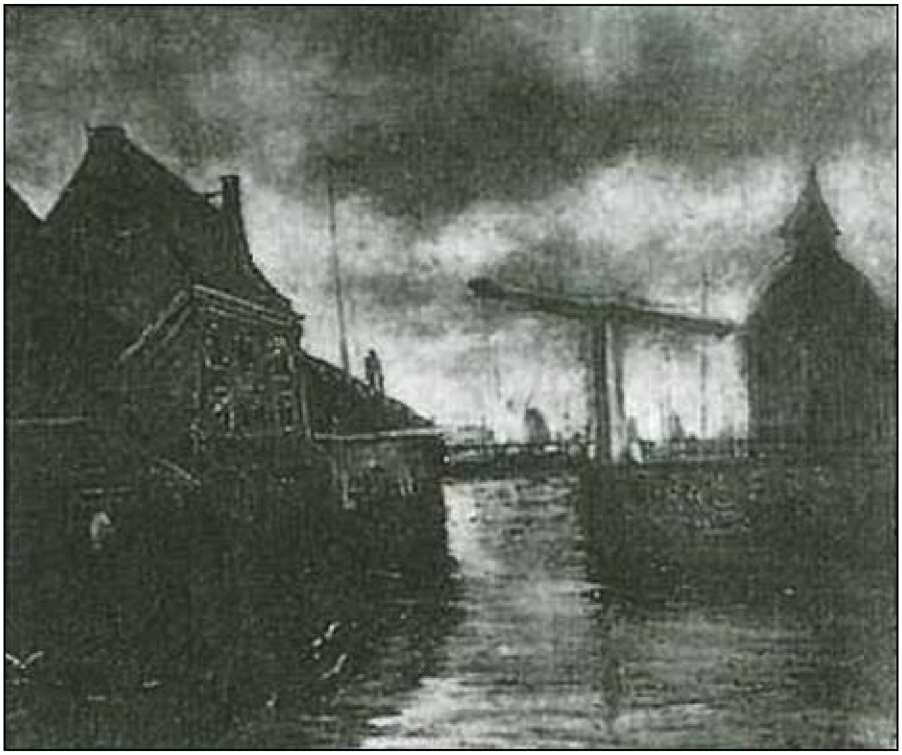


Still Life with Three Birds' Nests

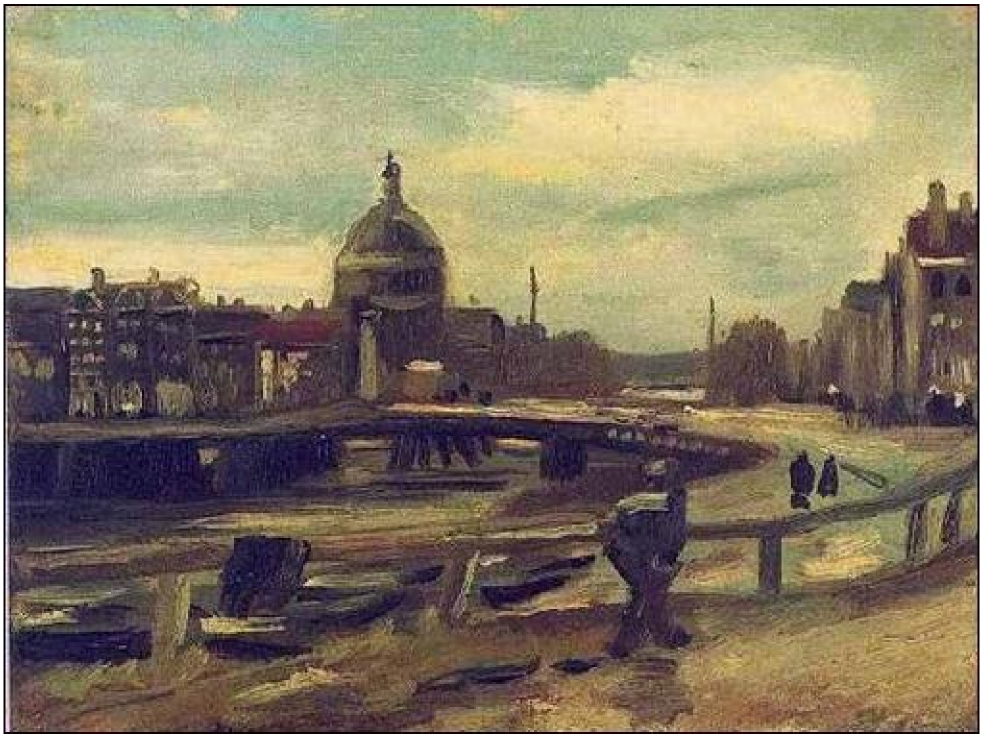
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 50.0 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1885



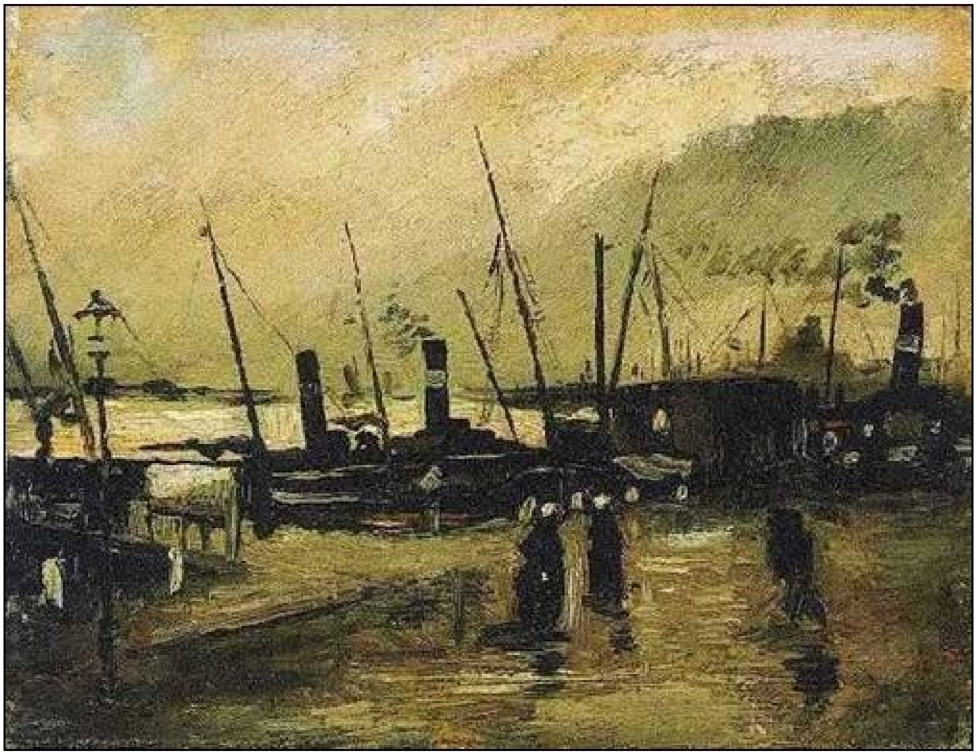
Still Life with Three Birds' Nests
Oil on canvas on panel
43.0 x 57.0 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1885



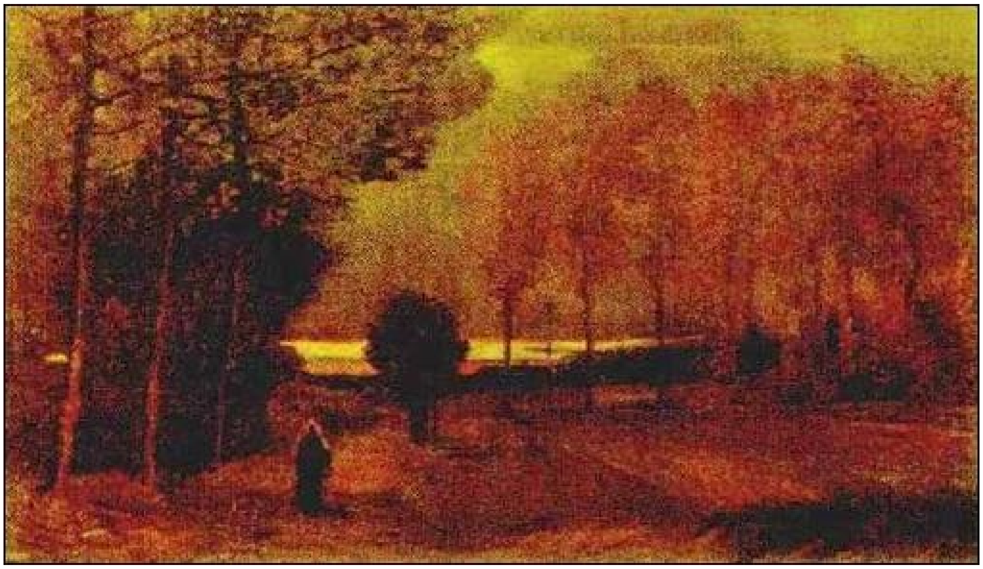
View of a Town with Drawbridge
Oil on panel
42.0 x 49.5 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1885



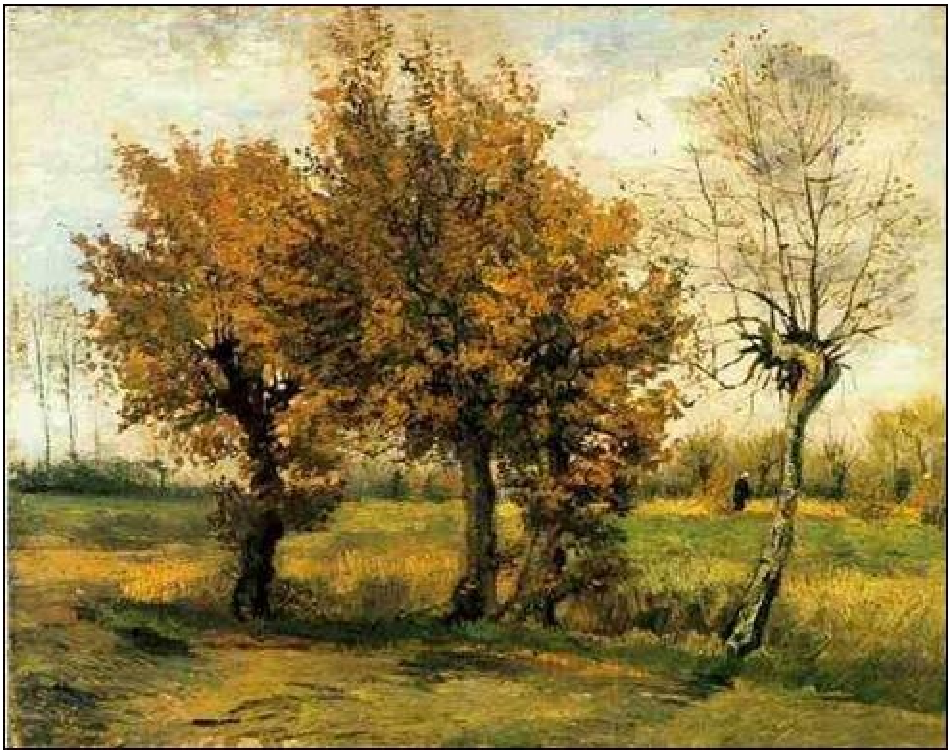
View of Amsterdam from Central Station
Oil on panel
19.0 x 25.5 cm.
Nuenen: October, 1885



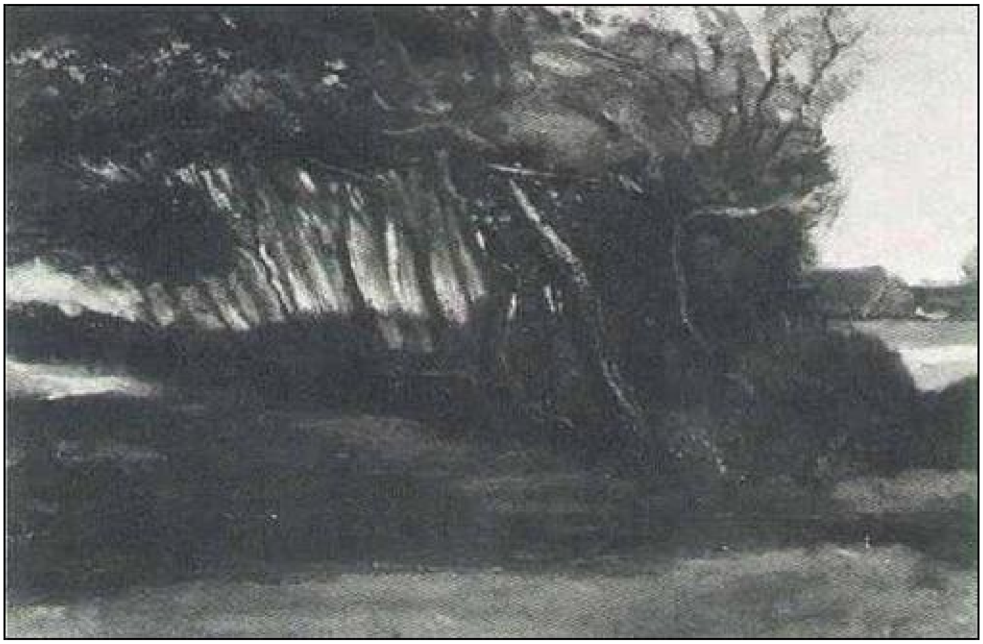
De Ruijterkade in Amsterdam, The
Oil on panel
20.3 x 27.0 cm.
Amsterdam: 8 October 1885



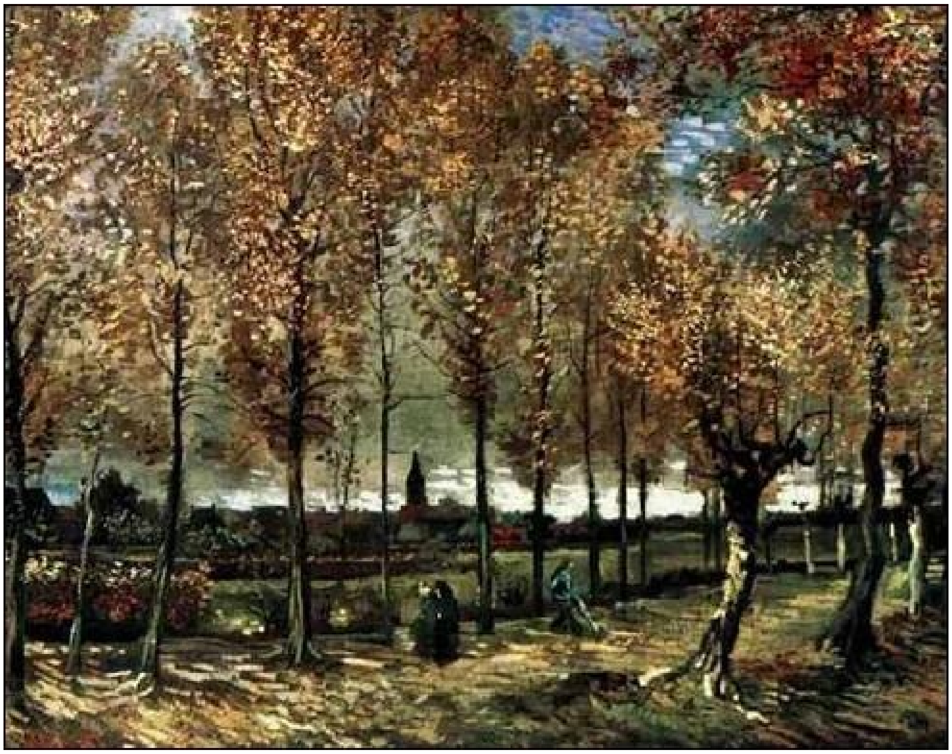
Autumn Landscape at Dusk
Oil on canvas on panel
51.0 x 93.0 cm.
Nuenen: October-November, 1885



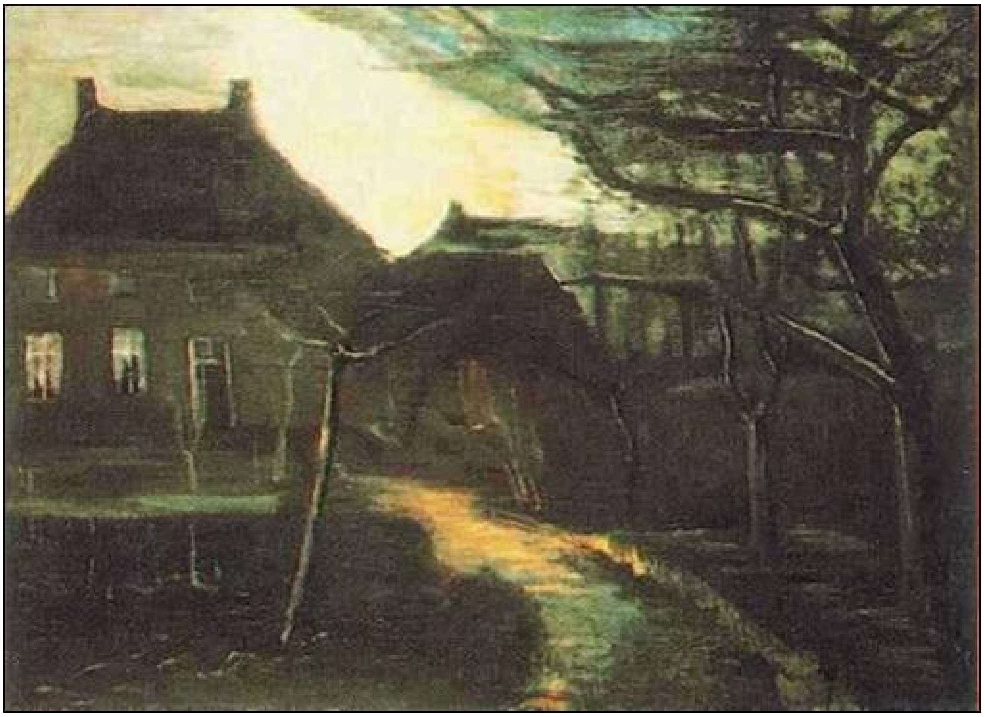
Autumn Landscape with Four Trees
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 89.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1885



Landscape with Windblown Trees
Oil on paper on panel
32.0 x 50.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1885

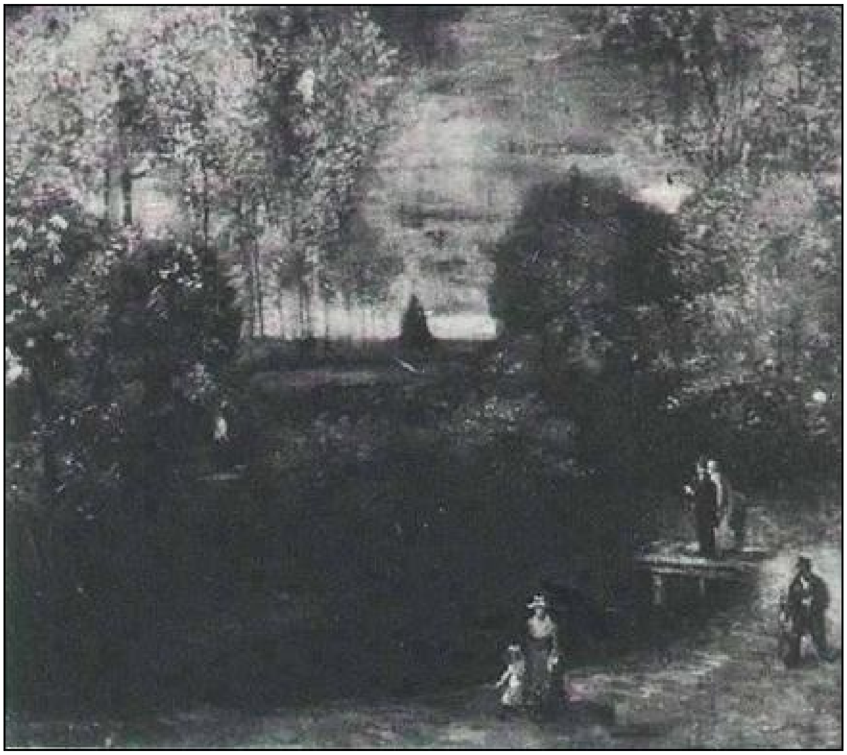


Lane with Poplars
Oil on canvas
78.0 x 98.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1885



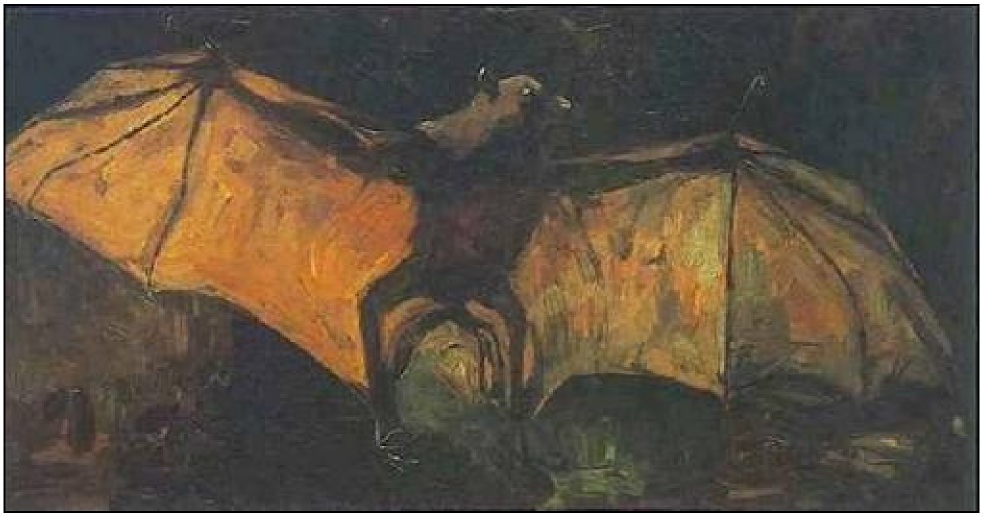
Parsonage at Nuenen by Moonlight, The

Oil on canvas
41.0 x 54.5 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1885

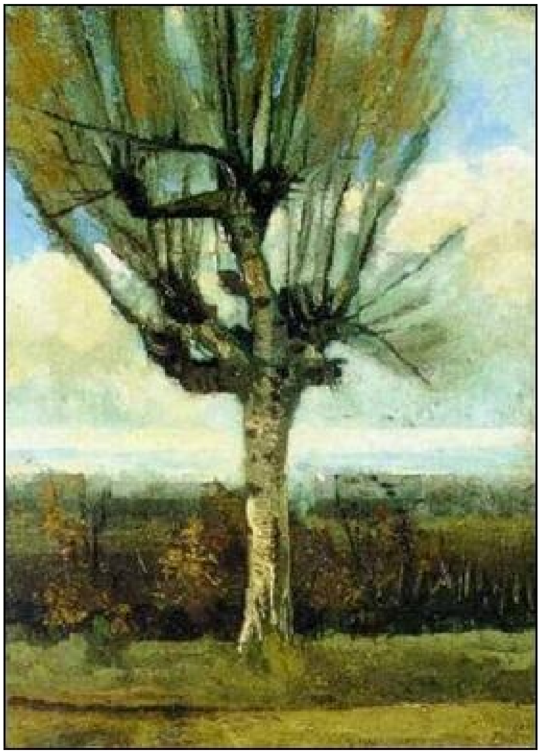


Parsonage Garden at Nuenen with Pond and Figures, The

Oil on panel
92.0 x 104.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1885

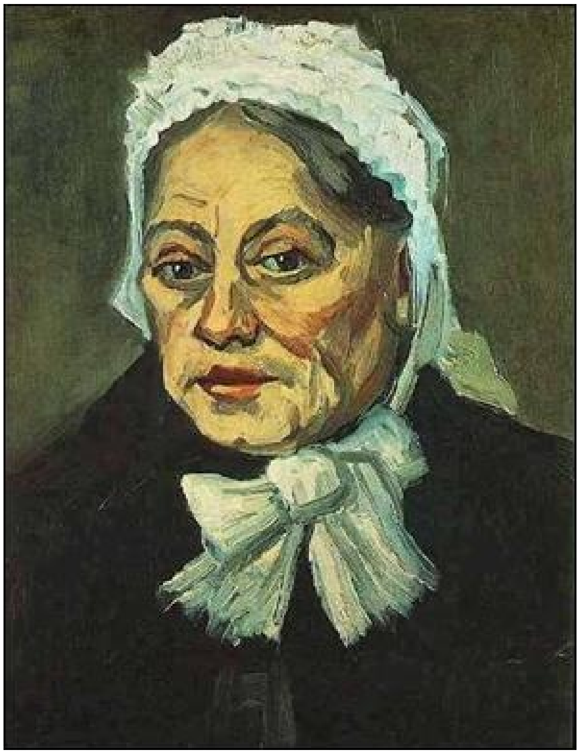


Flying Fox
Oil on canvas
41.5 x 79.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1885

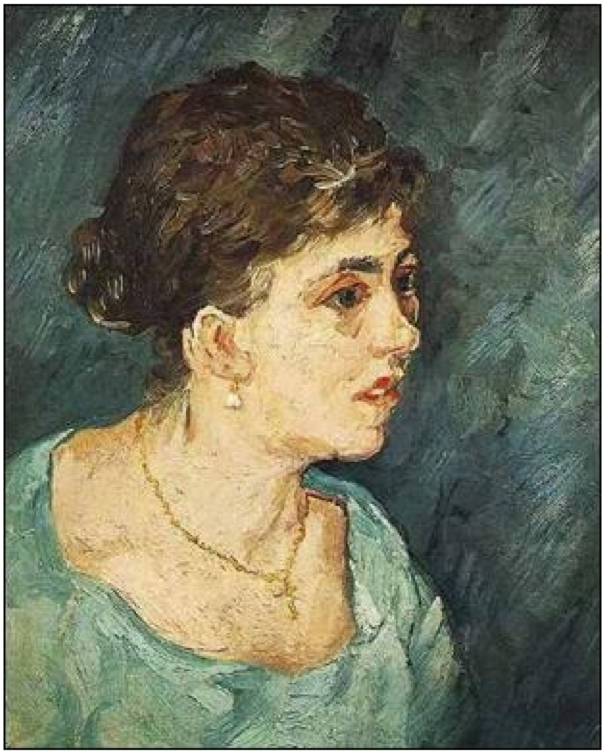


Willow, The
Oil on canvas
42.0 x 30.0 cm.
Nuenen: November, 1885

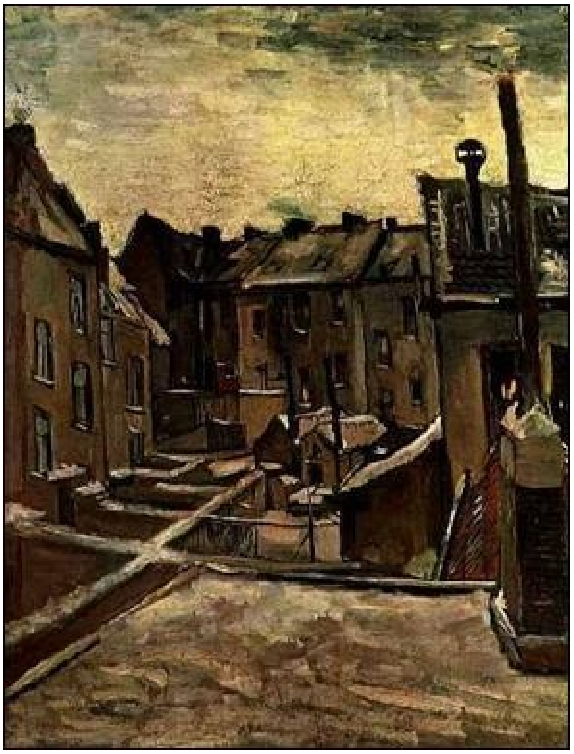
Antwerp Works



Head of an Old Woman with White Cap
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 40.0 cm.
Antwerp: December, 1885

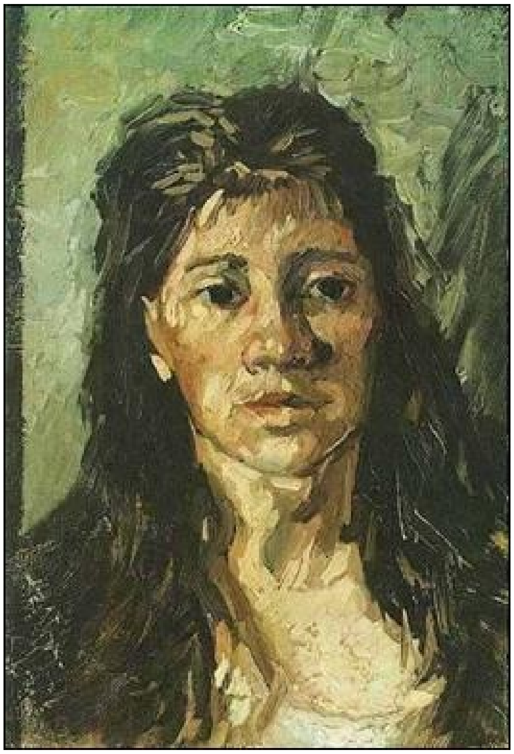


Portrait of Woman in Blue
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.5 cm.
Antwerp: December, 1885

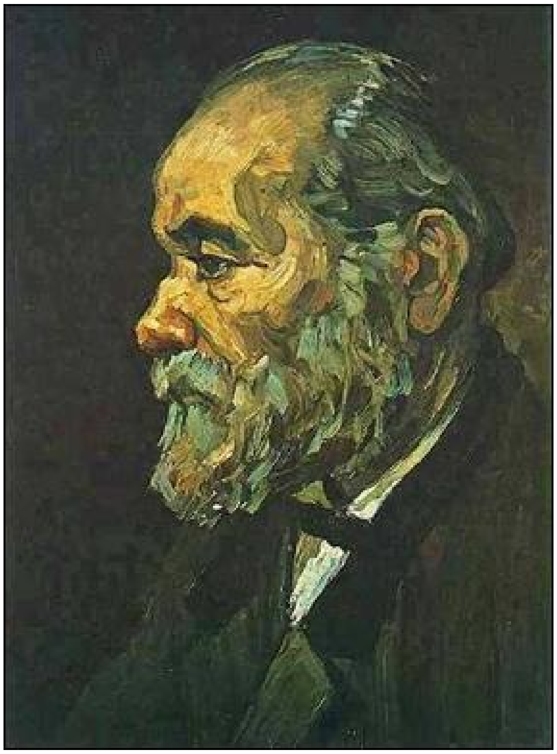


Backyards of Old Houses in Antwerp in the Snow

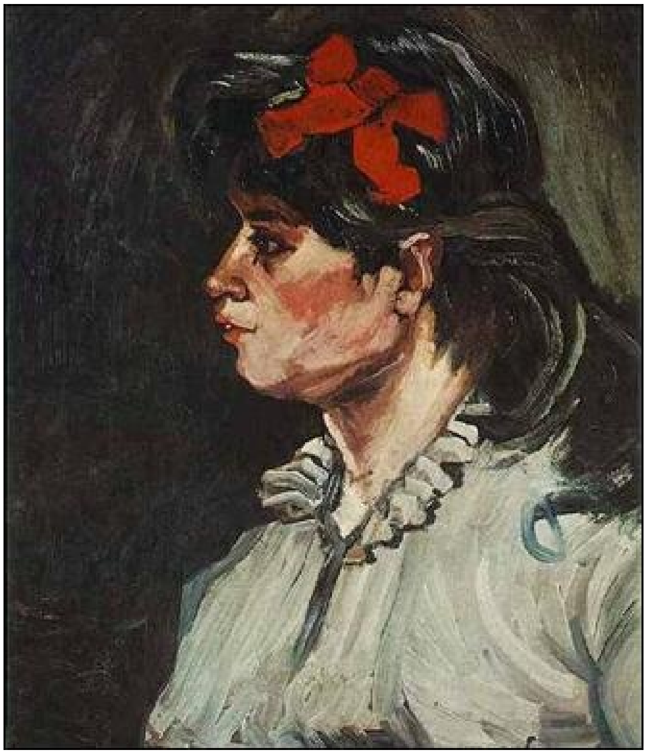
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 33.5 cm.
Antwerp: December, 1885



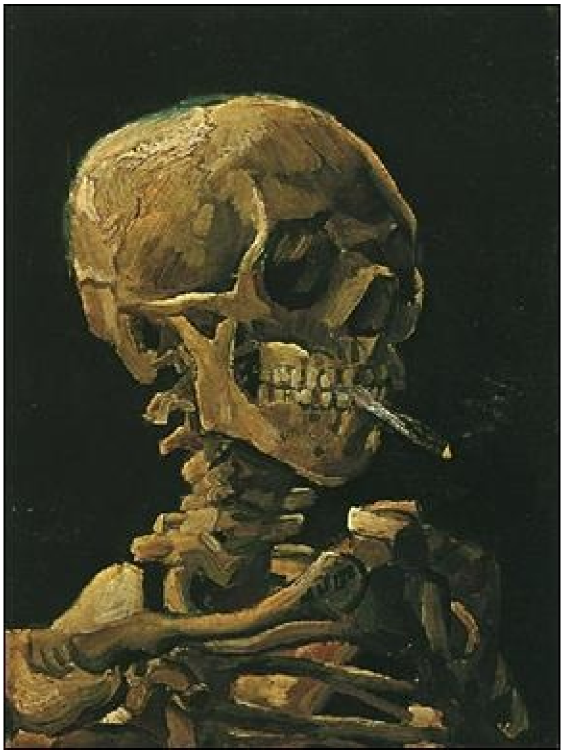
Head of a Woman with her Hair Loose
Oil on canvas
35.0 x 24.0 cm.
Antwerp: December, 1885



Portrait of an Old Man with Beard
Oil on canvas
44.5 x 33.5 cm.
Antwerp: December, 1885

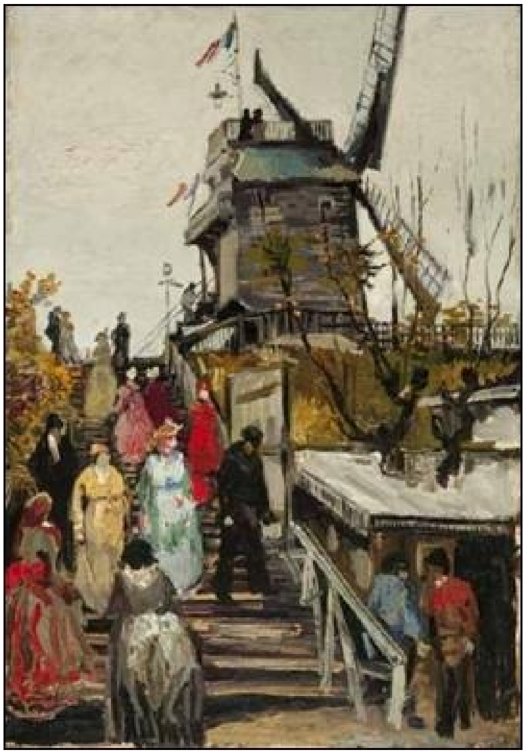


Portrait of a Woman with Red Ribbon
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 50.0 cm.
Antwerp: December, 1885

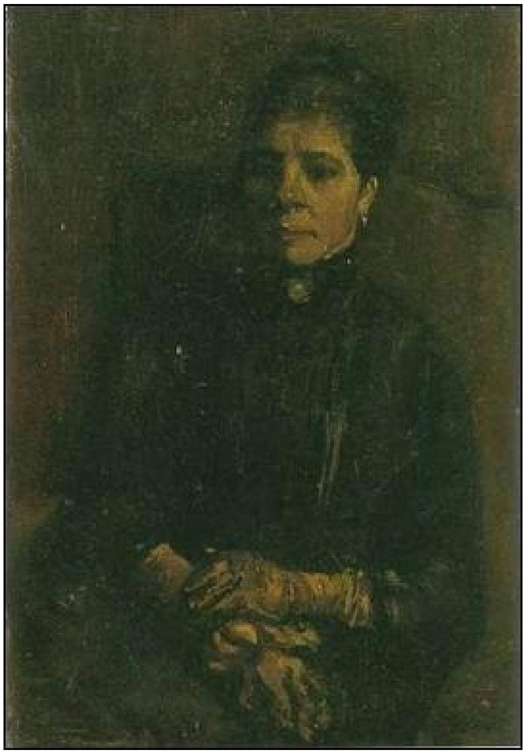


Skull with Burning Cigarette
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 24.5 cm.
Antwerp: Winter, 1885/86

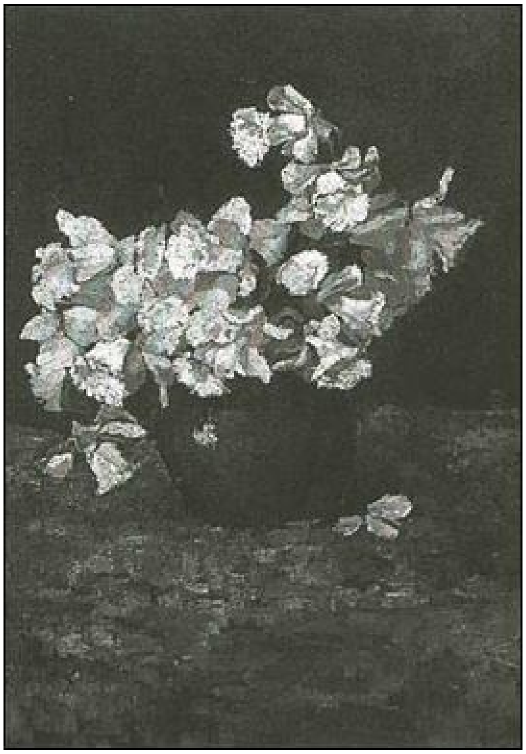
Paris Works



Le Blute-Fin Mill
Oil on canvas
55.2 x 38 cm.
Paris: 1886

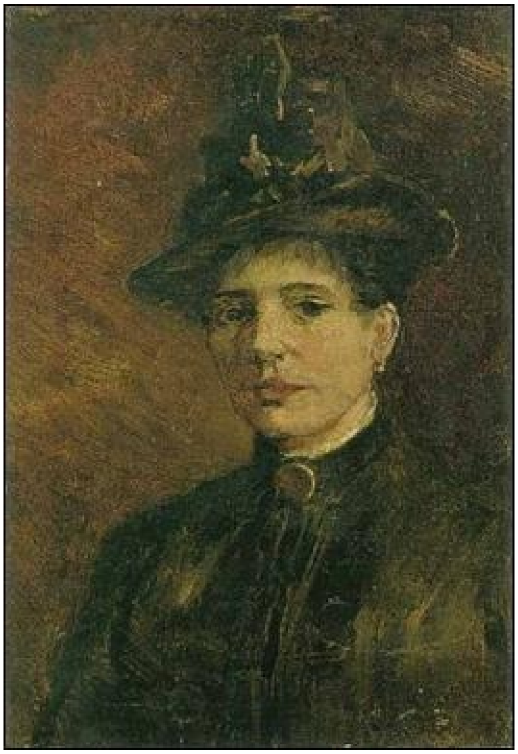


Portrait of a Woman Seated
Oil on canvas
31.5 x 21.5 cm.
Paris: 1886

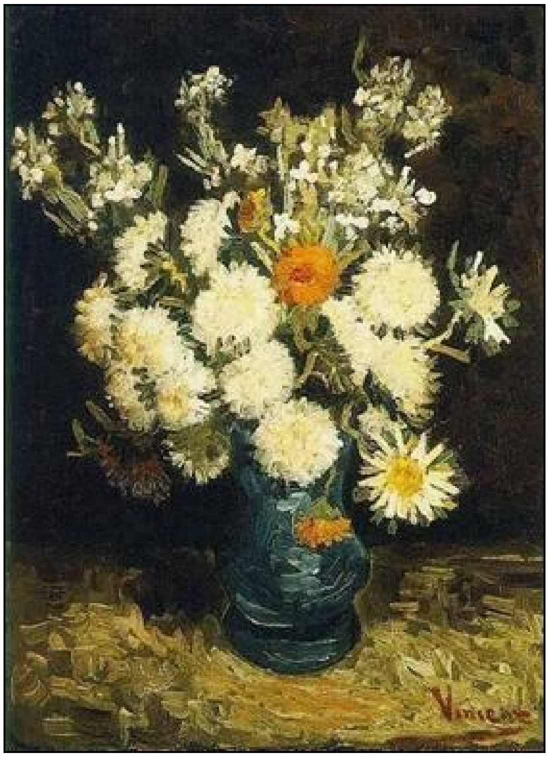


Bowl with Daffodils

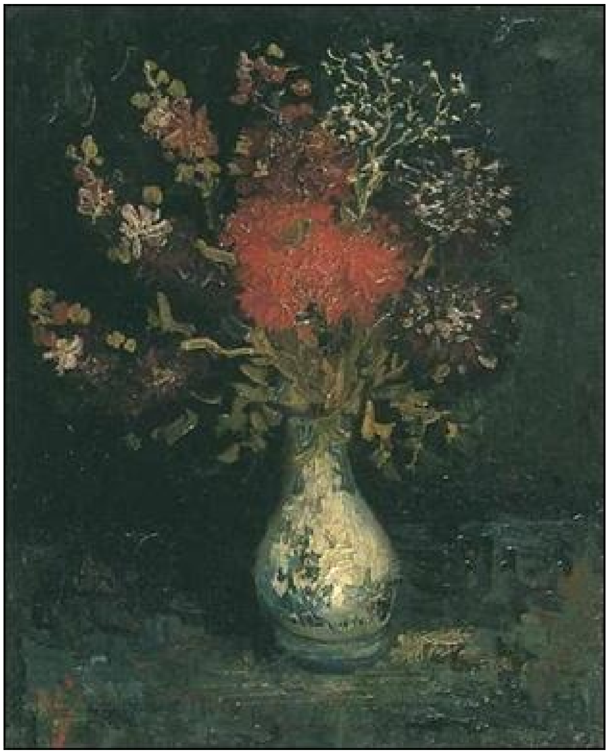
Cardboard on panel
44.0 x 30.0 cm.
Paris: 1886



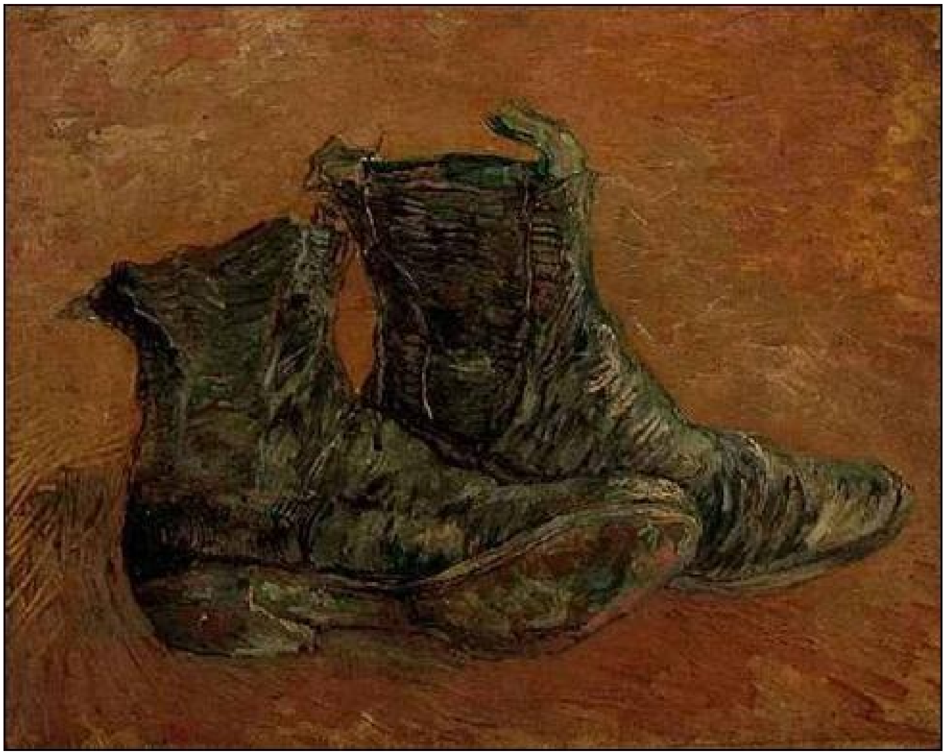
Portrait of a Woman with Hat
Oil on canvas
27.0 x 18.5 cm.
Paris: 1886



Flowers in a Blue Vase
Oil on canvas
58.0 x 43.5 cm.
Paris: 1886-87

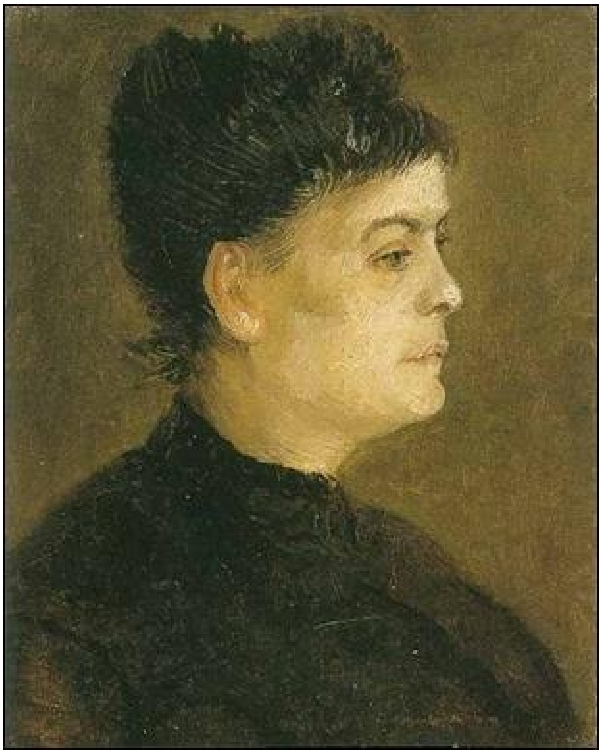


Vase with Flowers
Oil on canvas
41.3 x 33.0 cm.
Paris: 1886-87

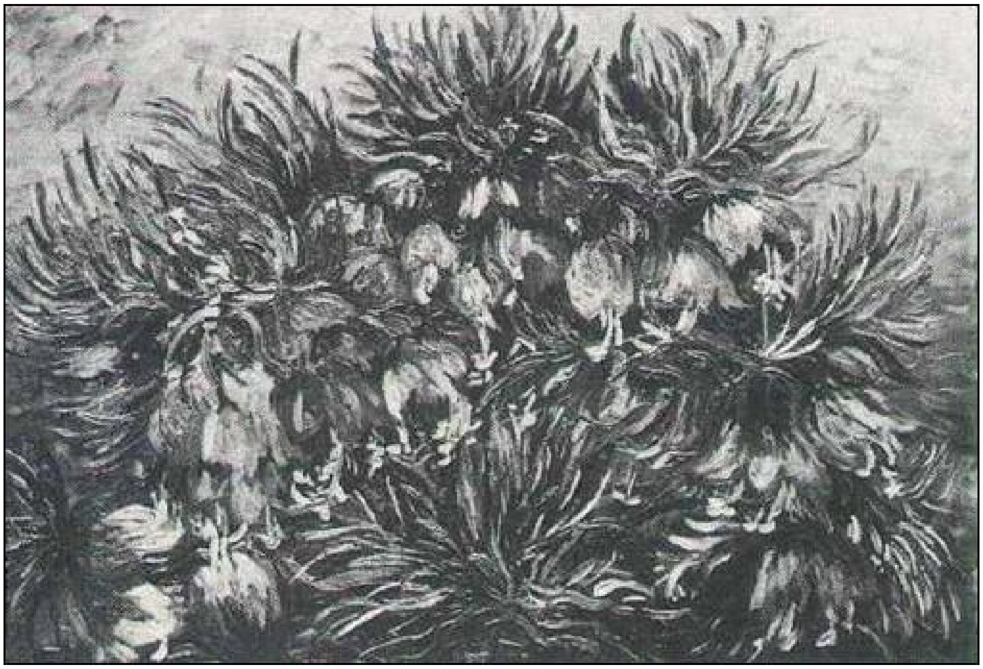


Pair of Shoes, A

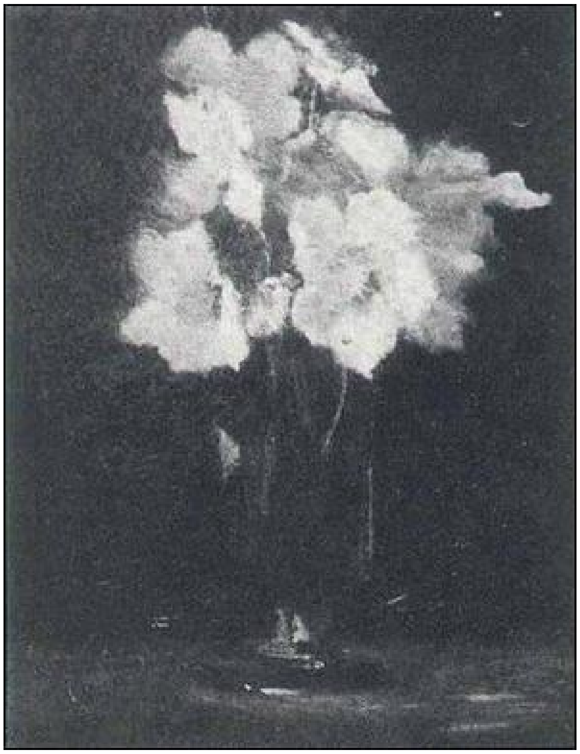
Oil on paper on cardboard
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: first half 1886



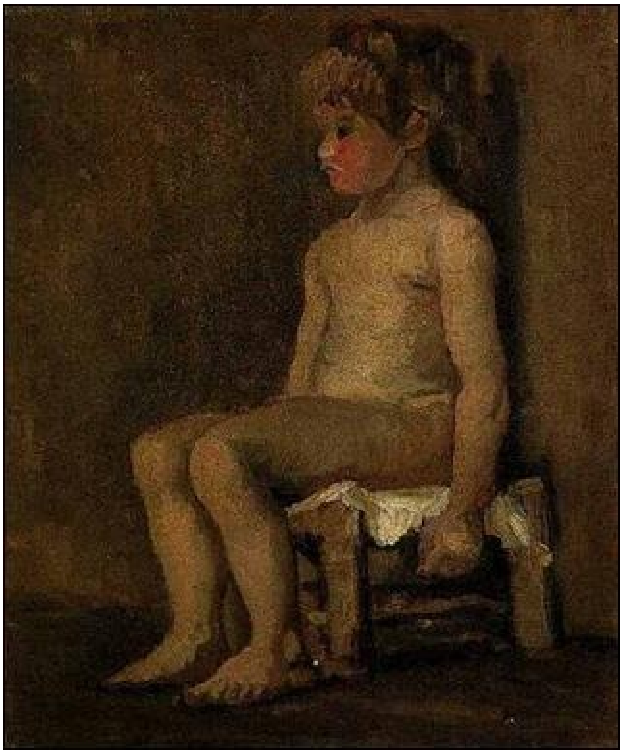
Portrait of a Woman, Facing Right
Oil on canvas
26.5 x 21.0 cm.
Paris: first half 1886



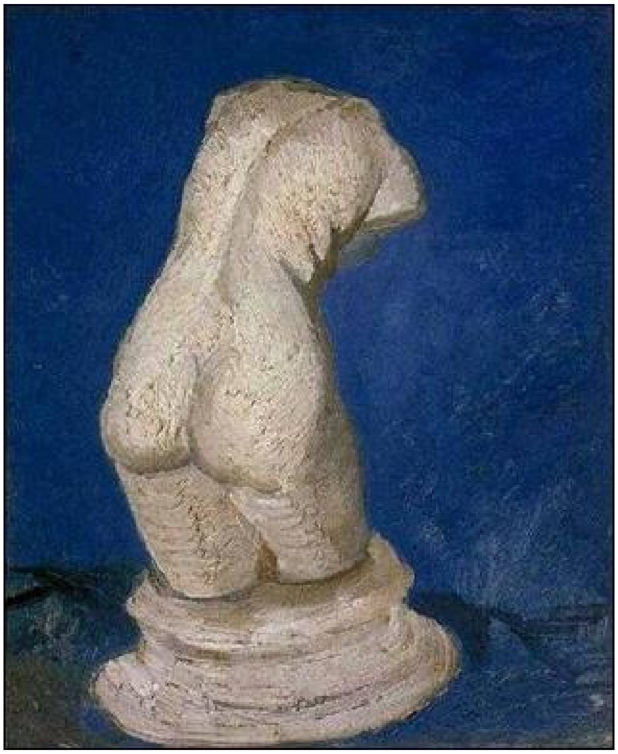
Fritillaries
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 55.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



Glass with Hellebores
Oil on canvas on panel
31.0 x 22.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

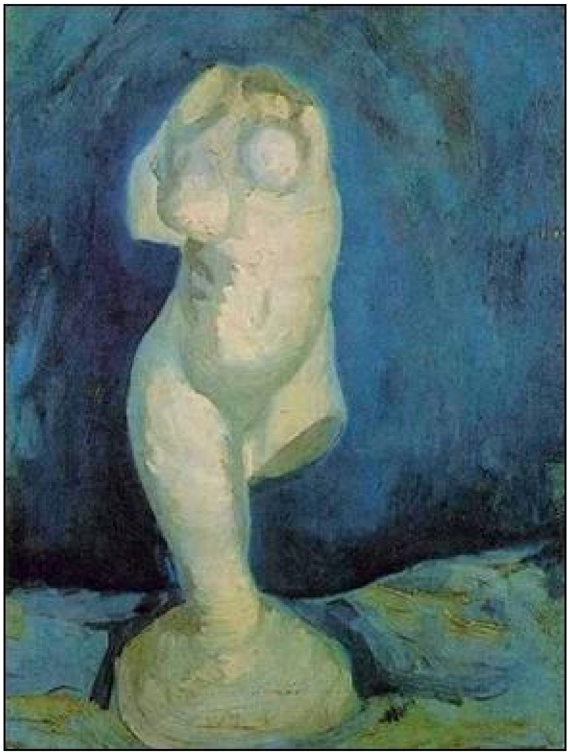


Nude Study of a Little Girl, Seated
Oil on canvas
27.0 x 22.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



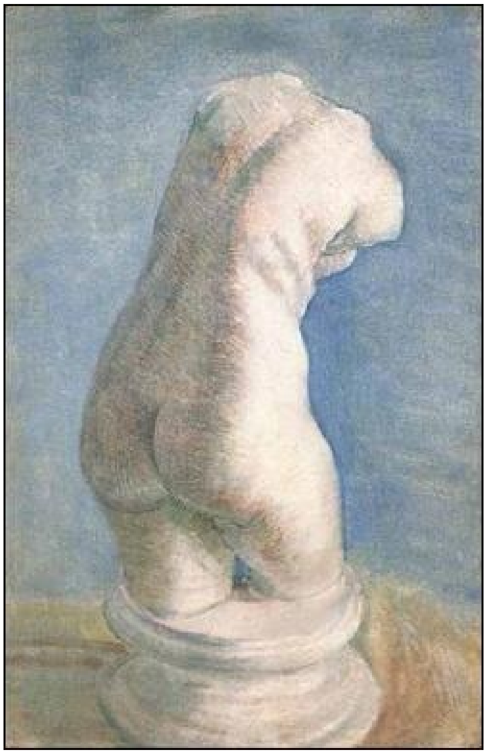
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso

Oil on canvas
47.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

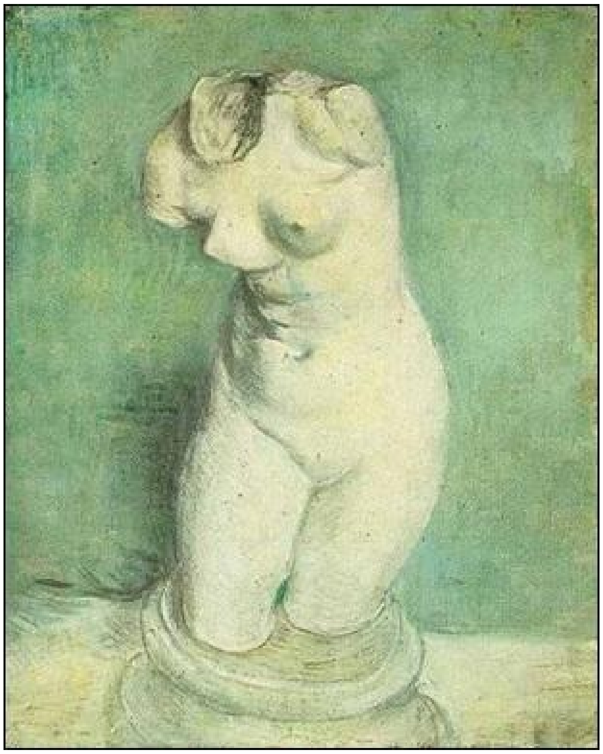


Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso

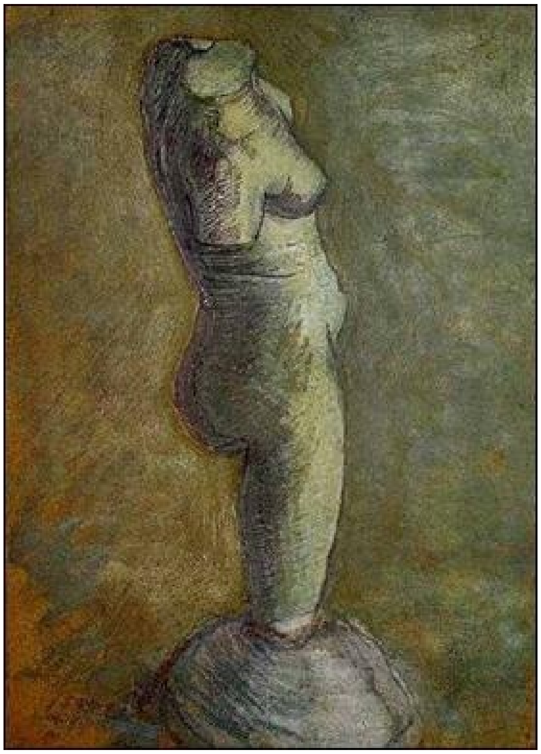
Oil on cardboard on multiplex board
35.0 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

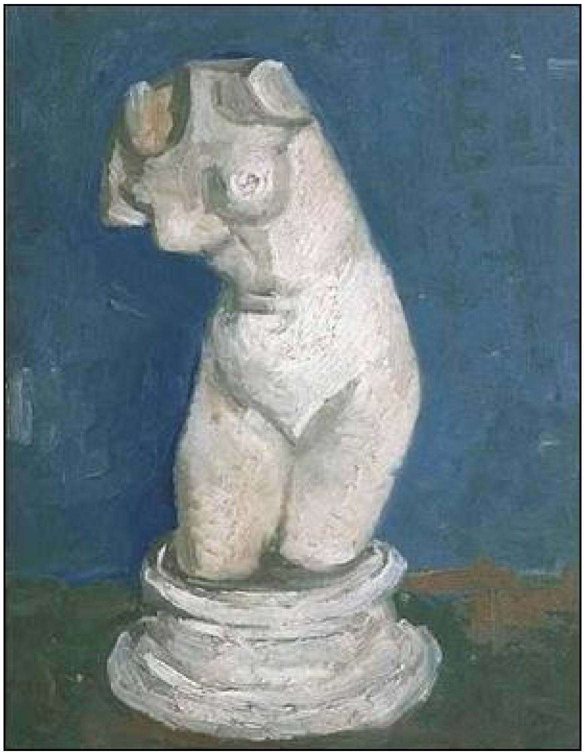


Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 32.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

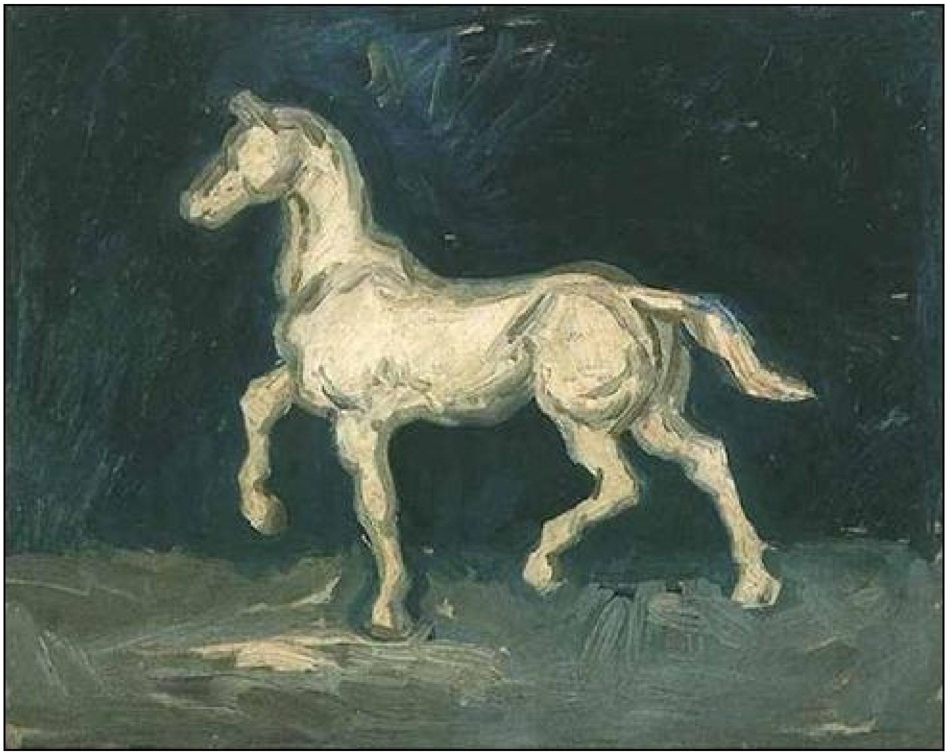


Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso

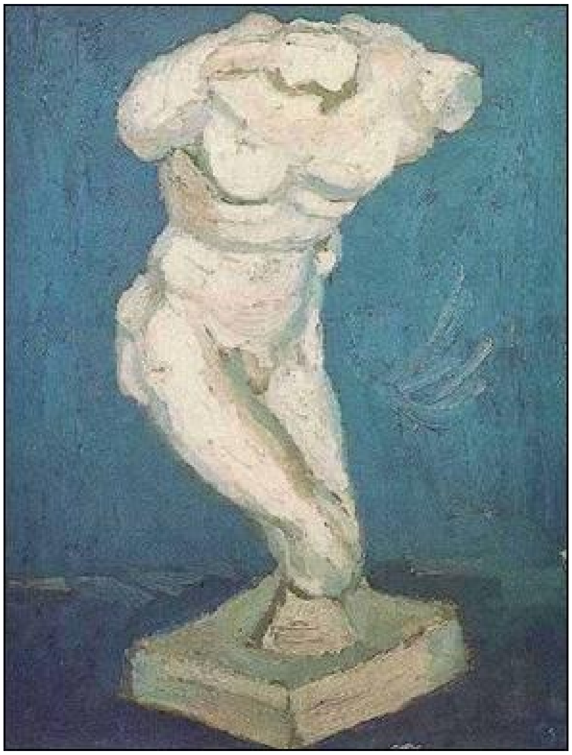
Oil on cardboard on multiplex board
32.5 x 24.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Oil on canvas
35.0 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

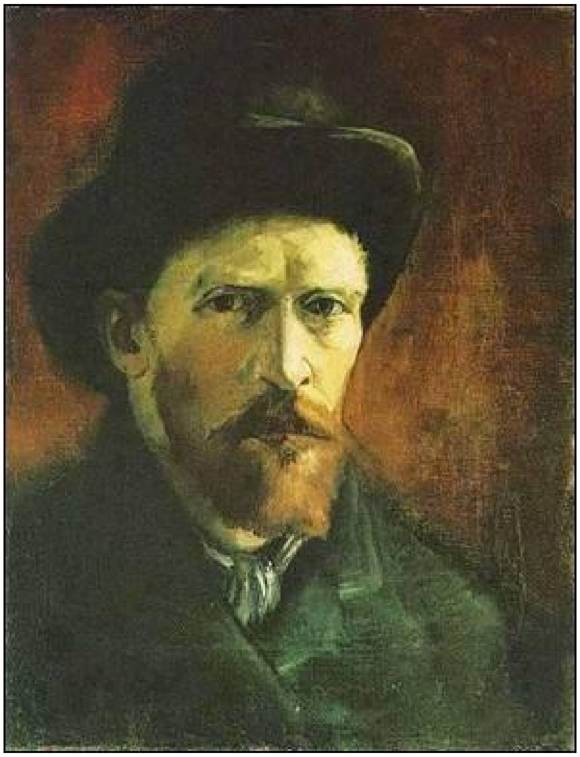


Plaster Statuette of a Horse
Oil on cardboard on multiplex board
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

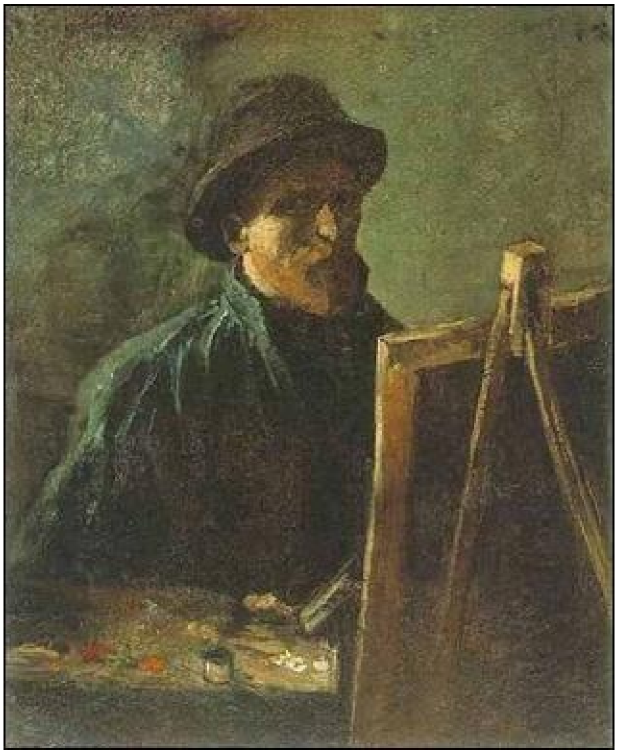


Plaster Statuette of a Male Torso

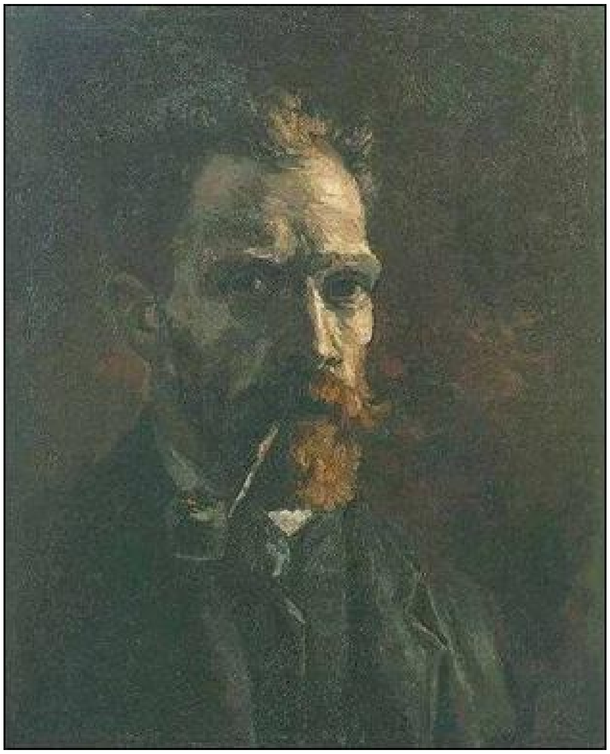
Oil on cardboard on multiplex board
35.0 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



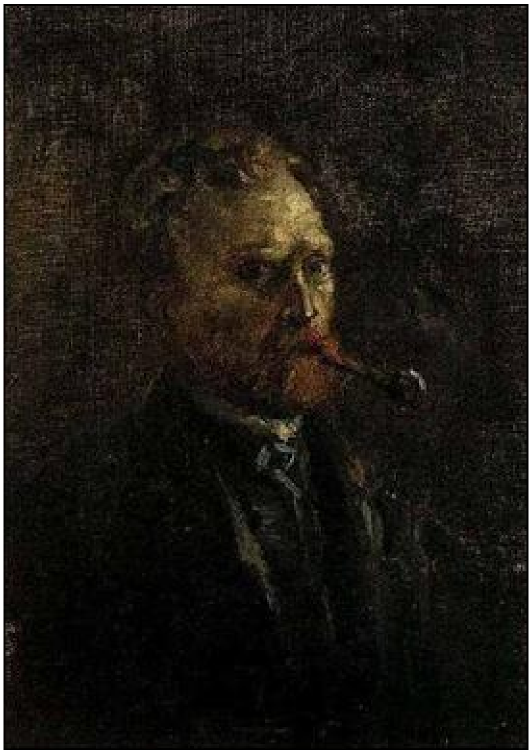
Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat
Oil on canvas
41.5 x 32.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



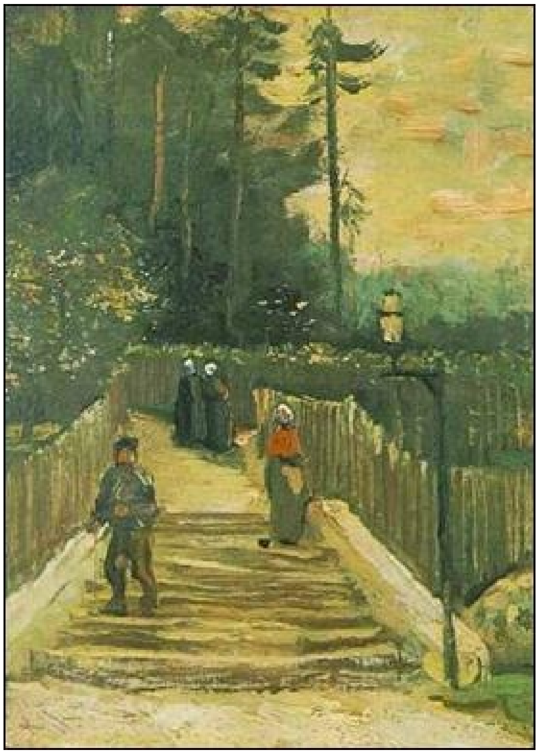
Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat at the Easel
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 38.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



Self-Portrait with Pipe
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

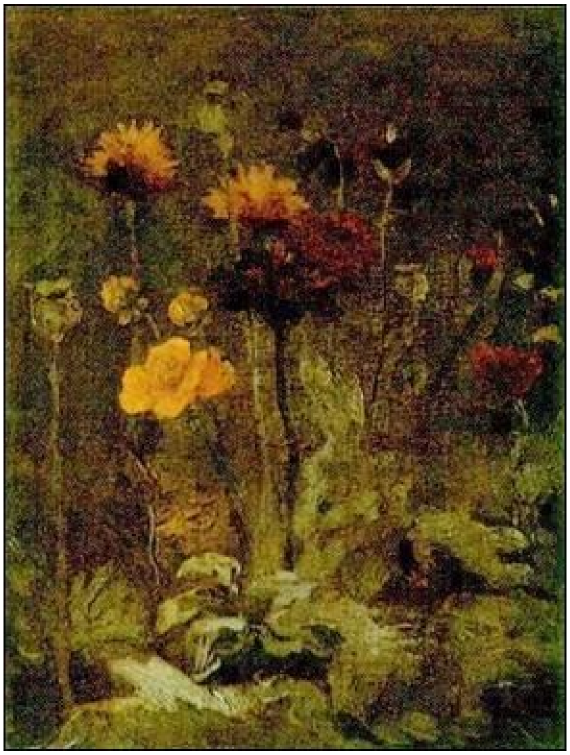


Self-Portrait with Pipe
Oil on canvas
27.0 x 19.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886

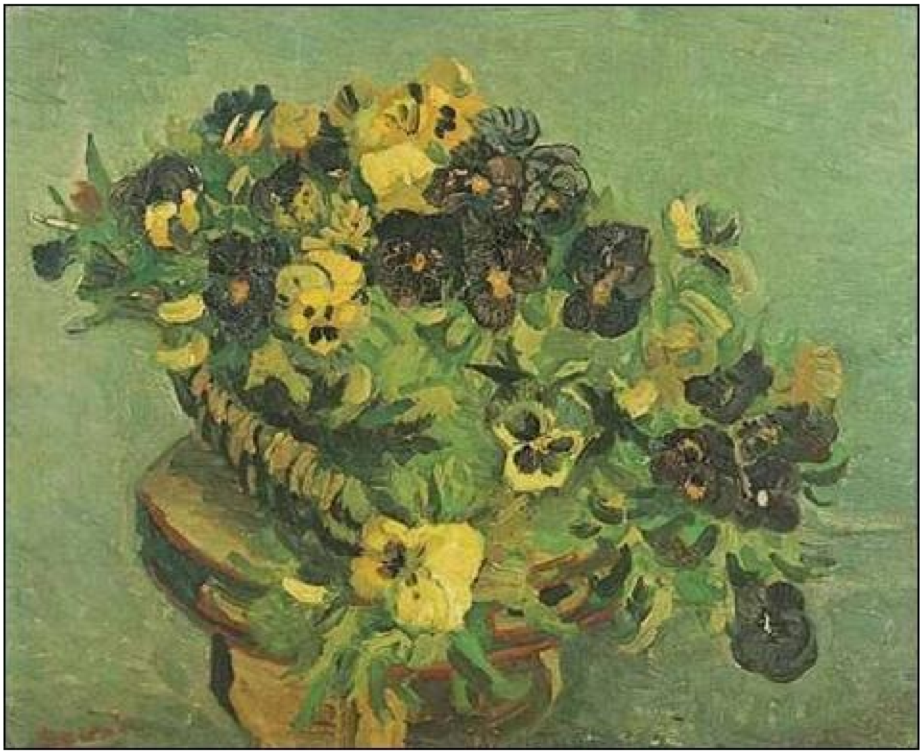


Sloping Path in Montmartre

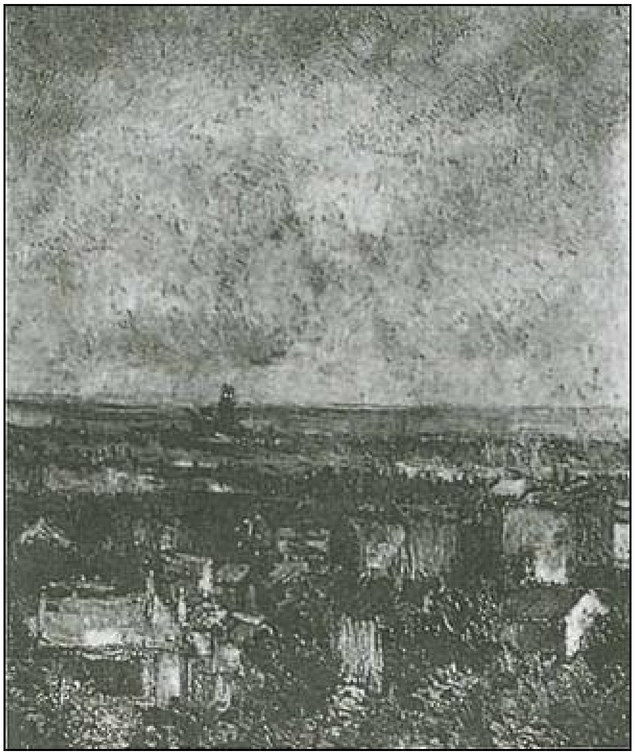
Oil on cardboard on multiplex board
22.0 x 16.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



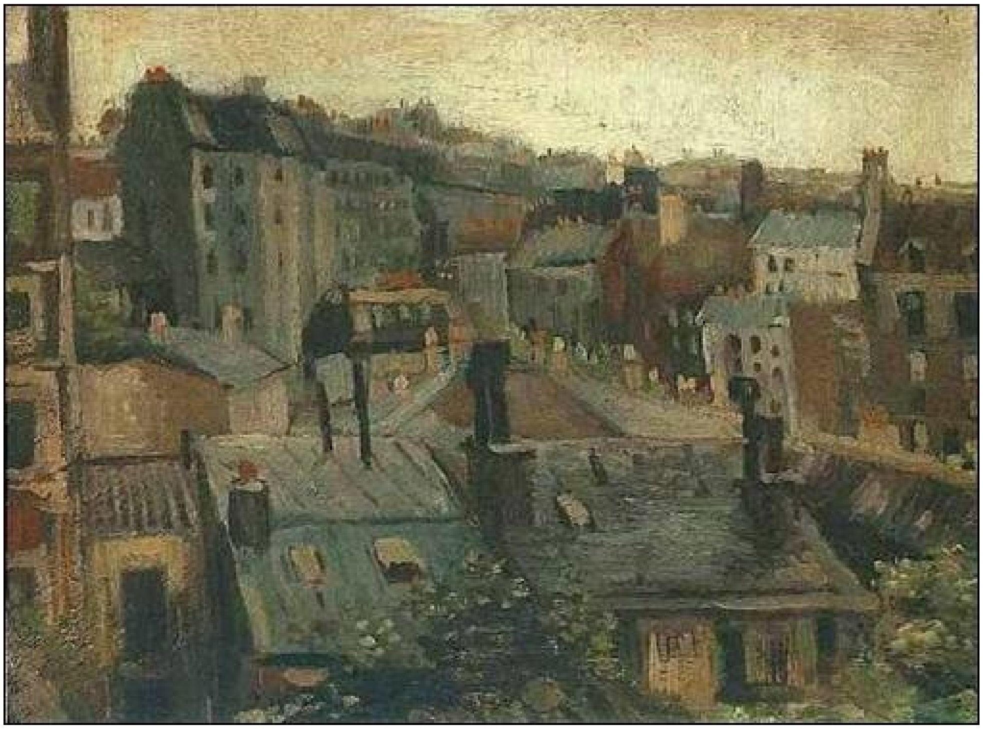
Still Life with Scabiosa and Ranunculus
Oil on canvas
26.0 x 20.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



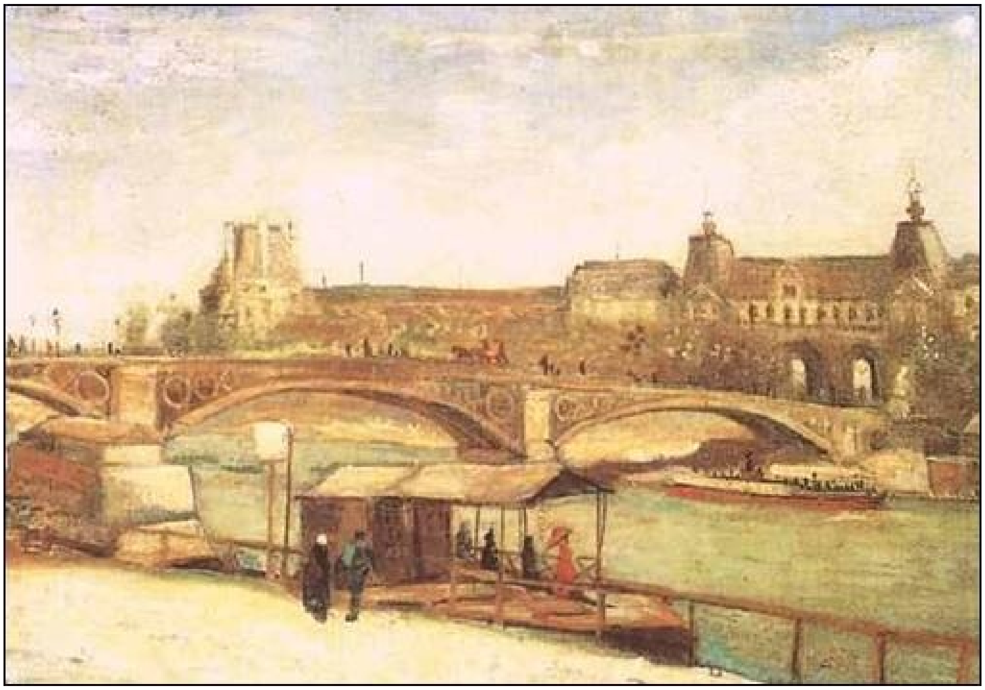
Tambourine with Pansies
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 55.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



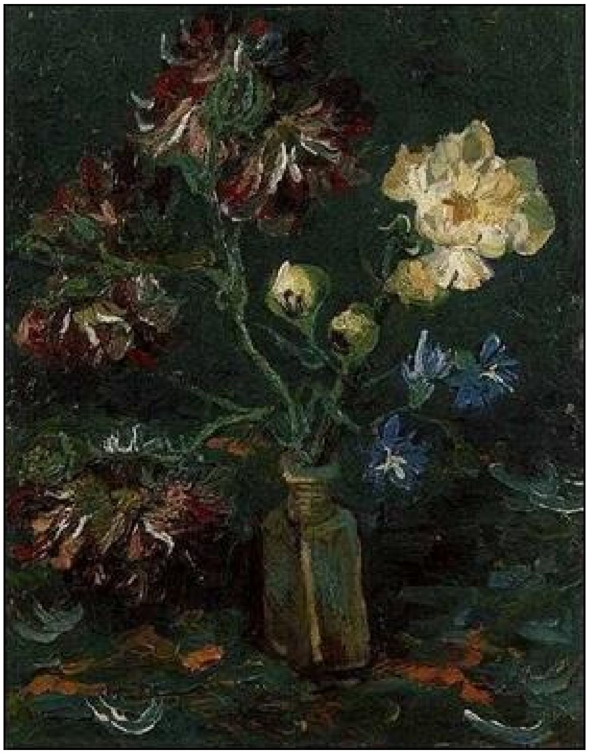
View of Paris from near Montmartre
Oil on canvas
44.5 x 37.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



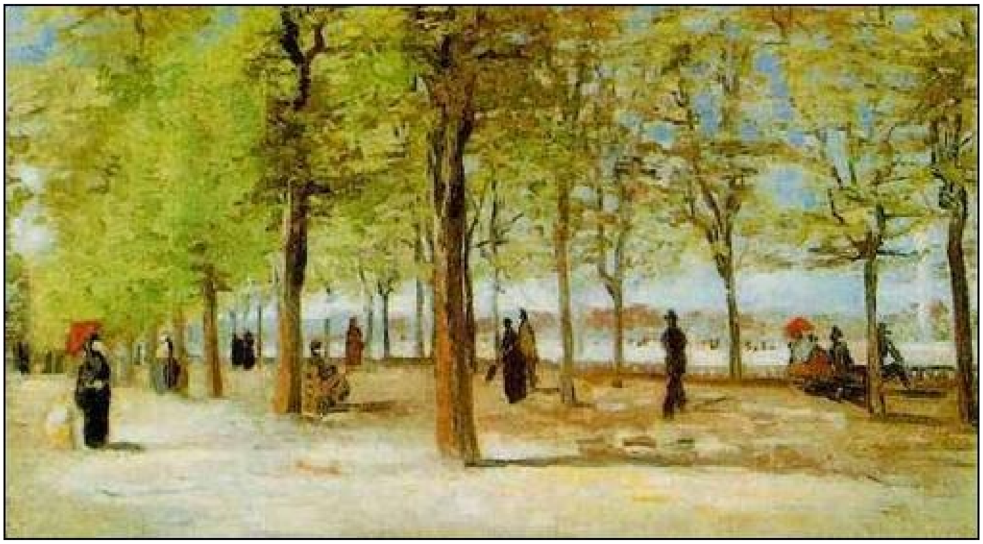
View of Roofs and Backs of Houses
Oil on canvas
30.0 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1886



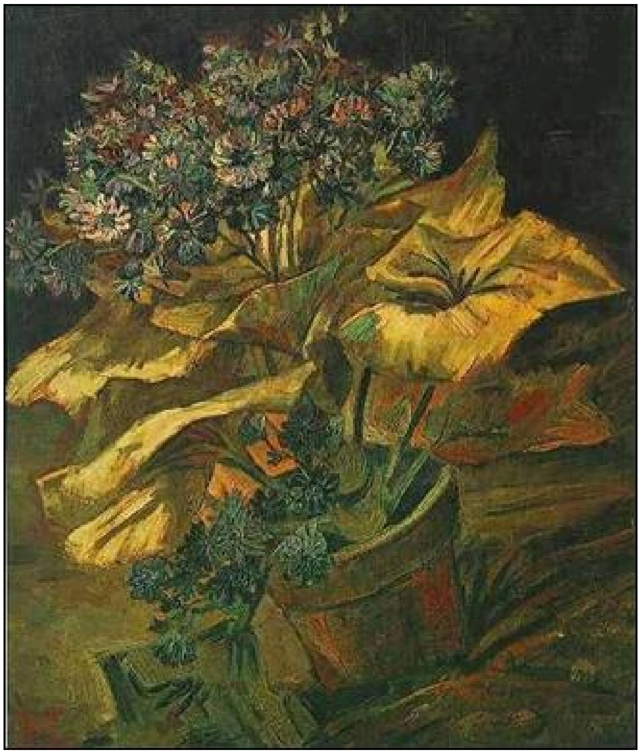
Pont du Carrousel and the Louvre, The
Oil on canvas
31.0 x 44.0 cm.
Paris: June, 1886



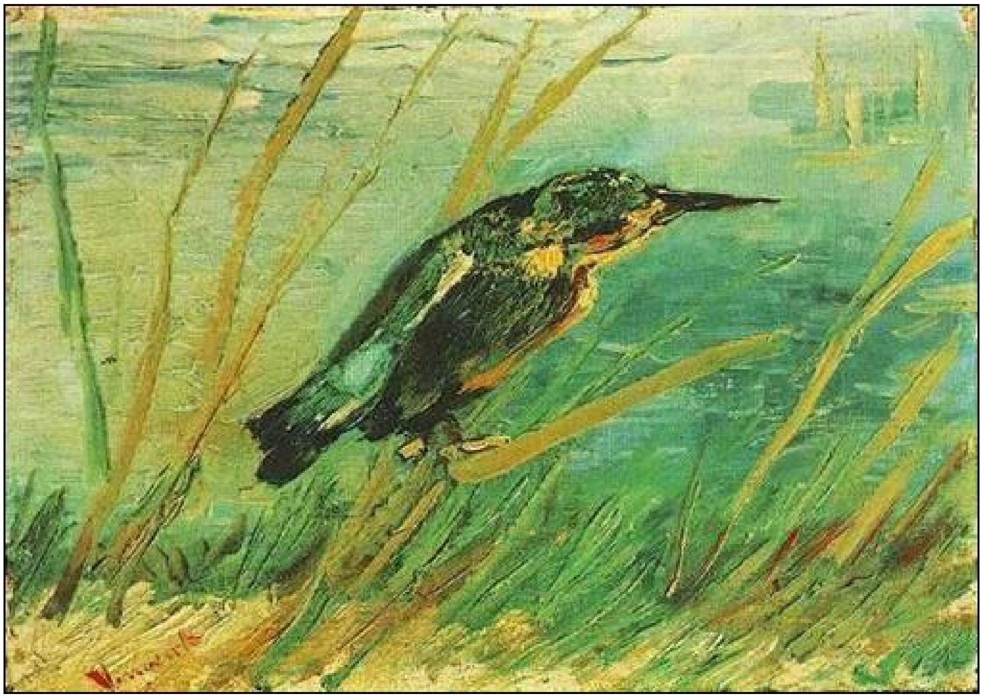
Vase with Myosotis and Peonies
Oil on cardboard
34.5 x 27.5 cm.
Paris: June, 1886



Lane at the Jardin du Luxembourg
Oil on canvas
27.5 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1886

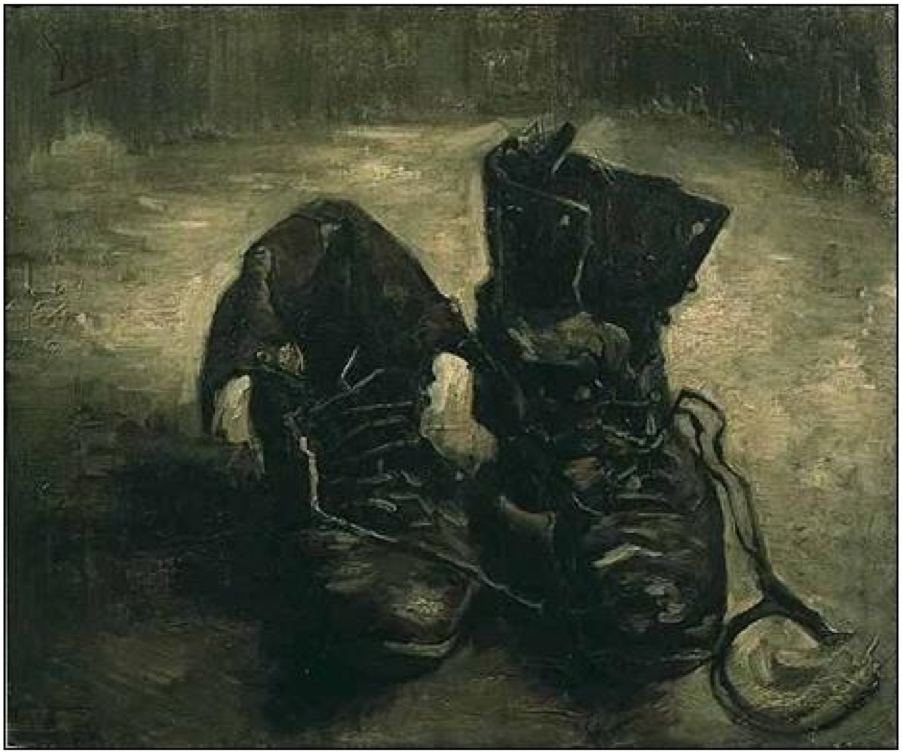


Cineraria in a Flowerpot
Oil on canvas
54.5 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: July-August, 1886

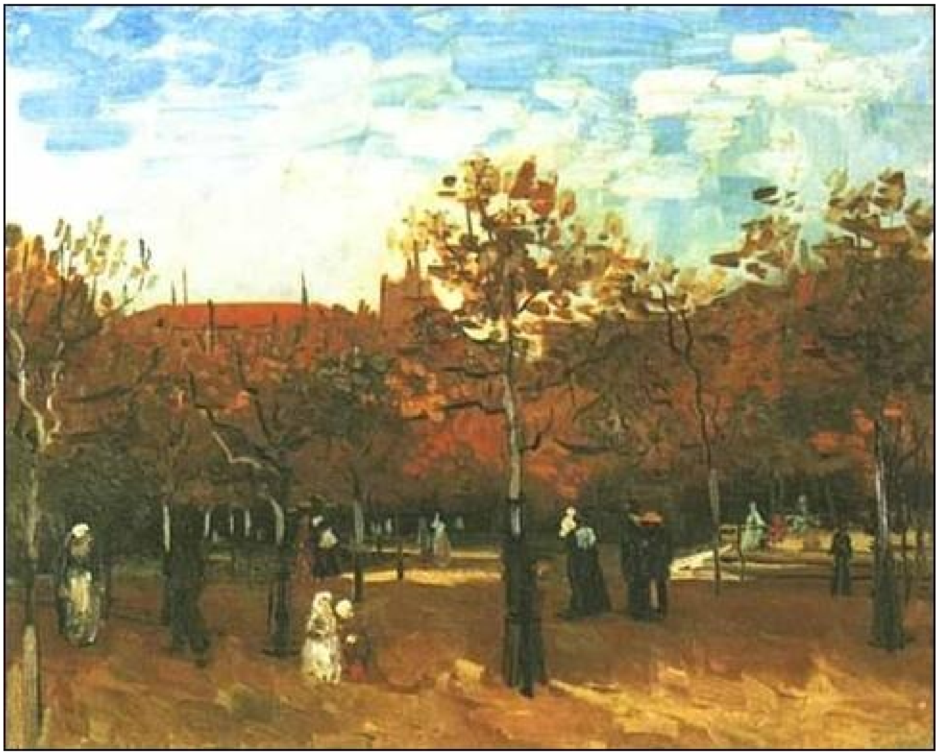


Kingfisher, The

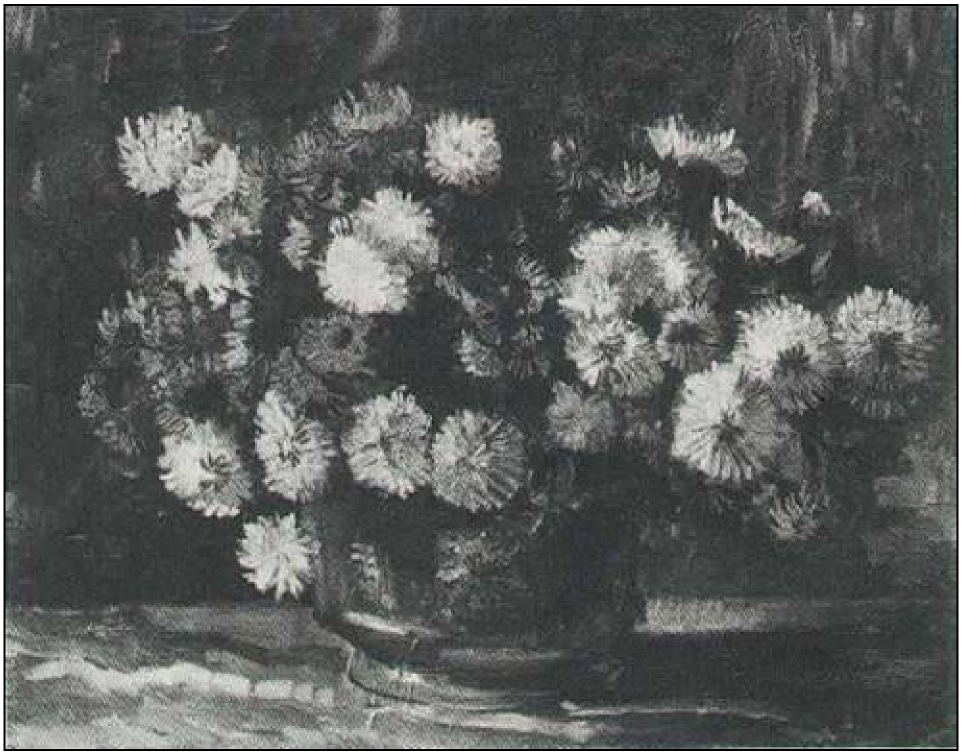
Oil on canvas
19.0 x 26.5 cm.
Paris: Second half, 1886



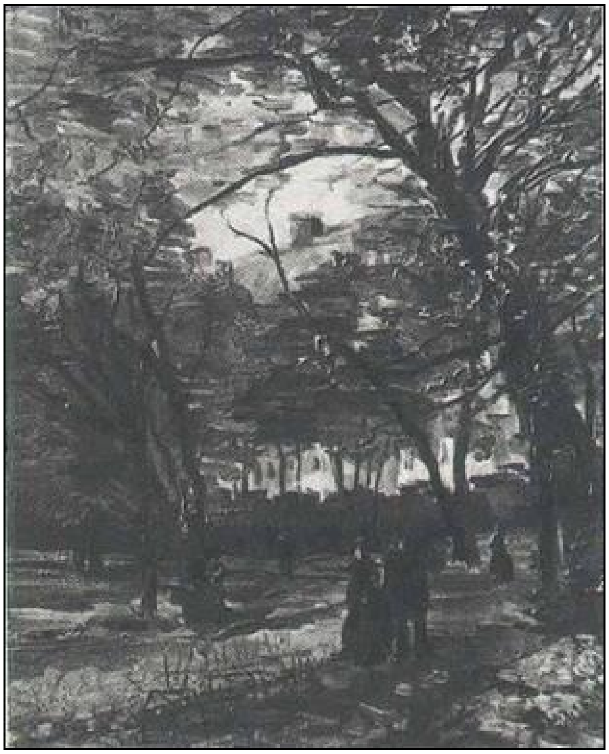
Pair of Shoes, A
Oil on canvas
37.5 x 45.0 cm.
Paris: second half 1886



Bois de Boulogne with People Walking, The
Oil on canvas
37.5 x 45.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

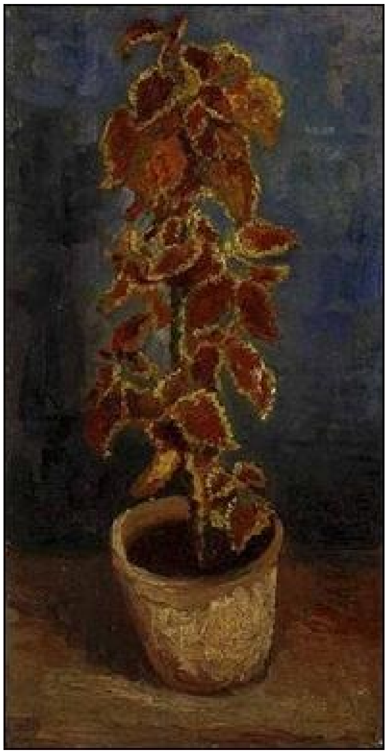


Bowl with Chrysanthemums
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

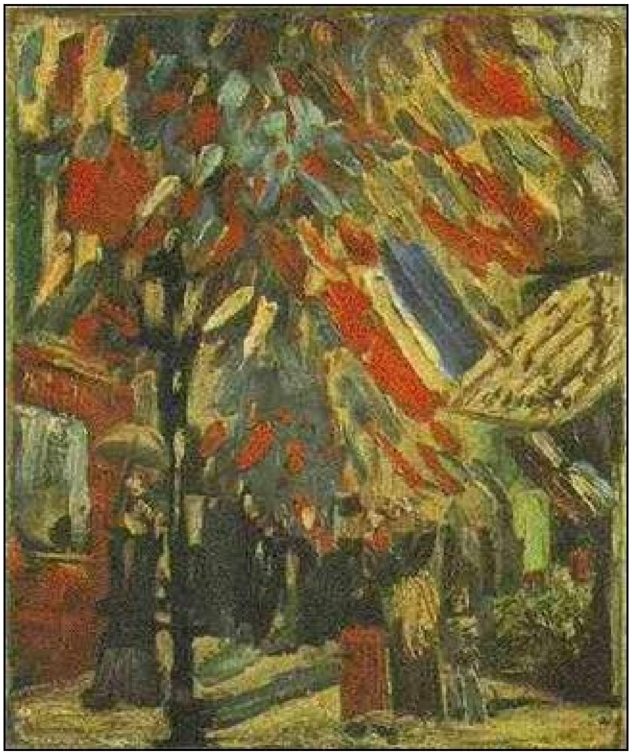


Bois de Boulogne with People Walking, The

Oil on canvas
46.5 x 37.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

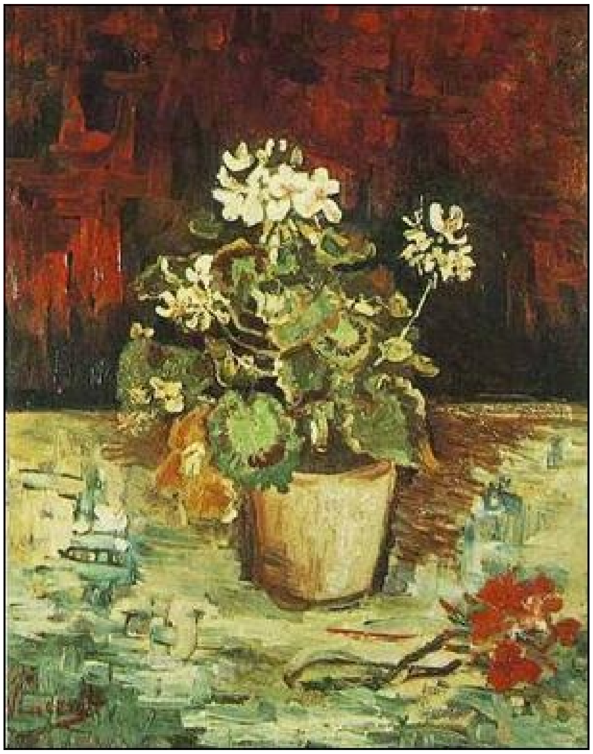


Coleus Plant in a Flowerpot
Oil on canvas
42.0 x 22.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

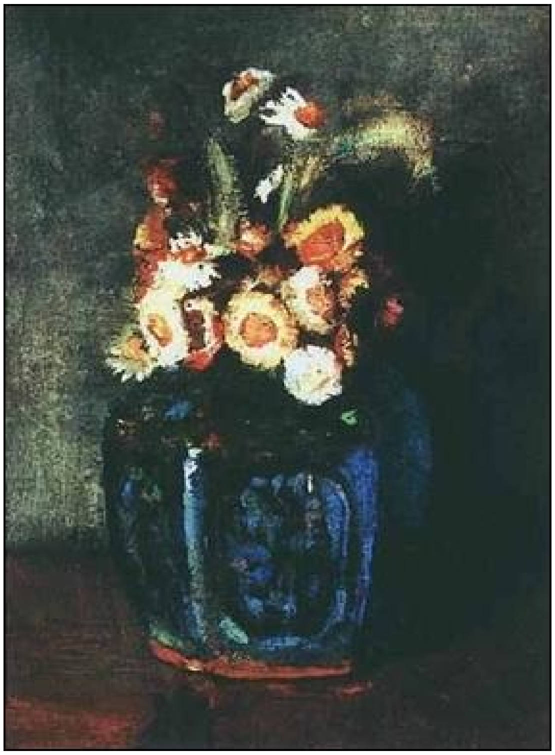


Fourteenth of July Celebration in Paris, The

Oil on canvas
44.0 x 39.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

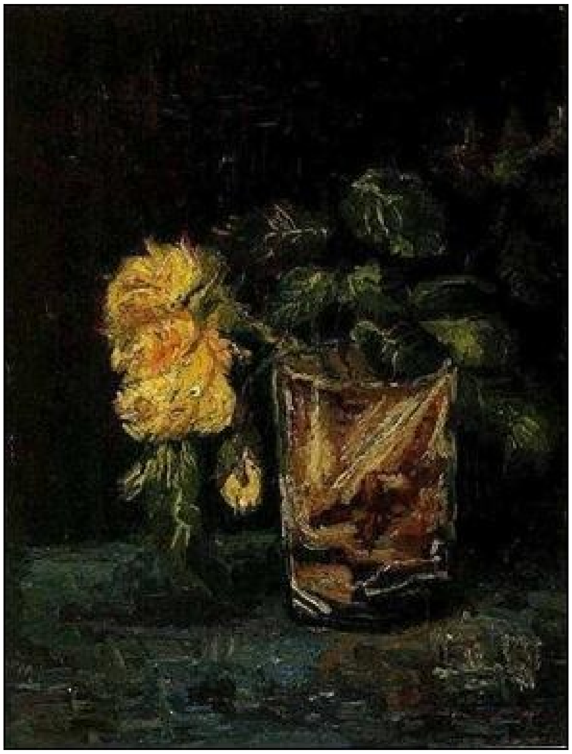


Geranium in a Flowerpot
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

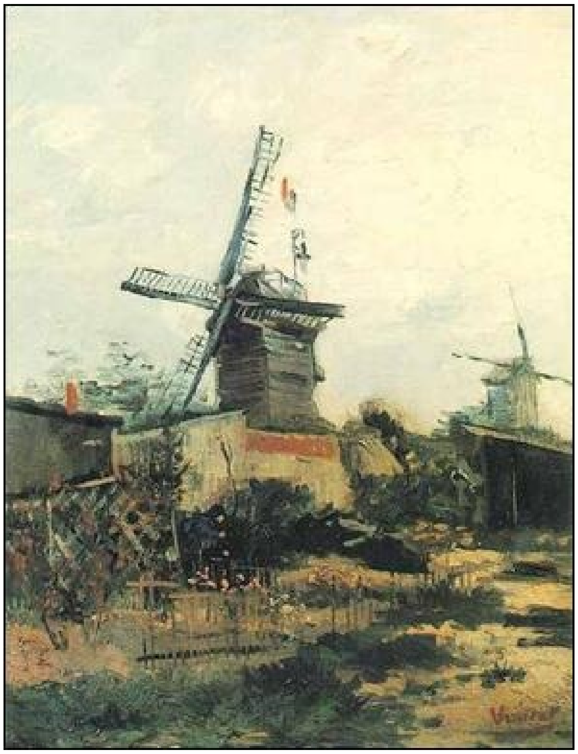


Ginger Jar Filled with Chrysanthemums

Oil on canvas on panel
40.0 x 29.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

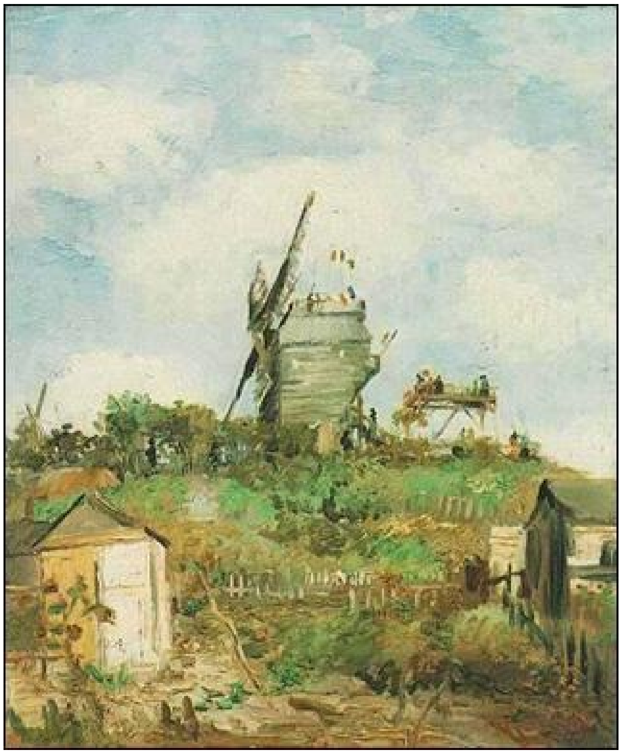


Glass with Roses
Oil on cardboard on multiplex board
35.0 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

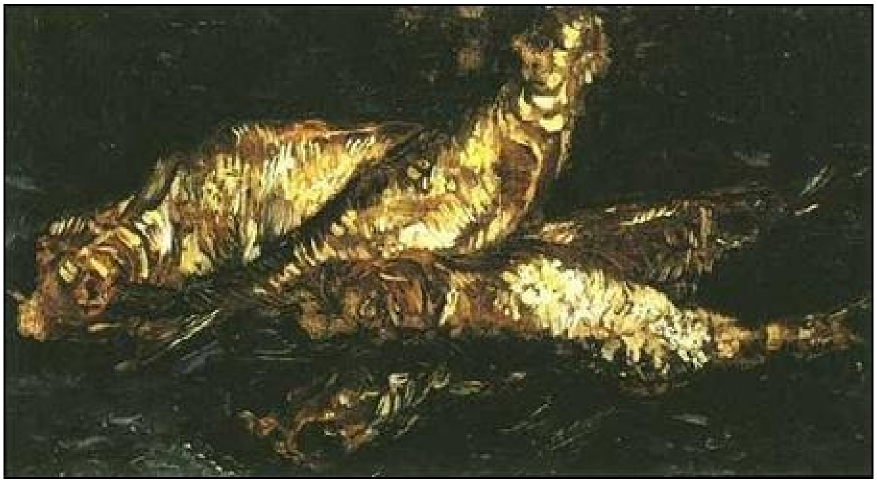


Le Moulin de Blute-Fin

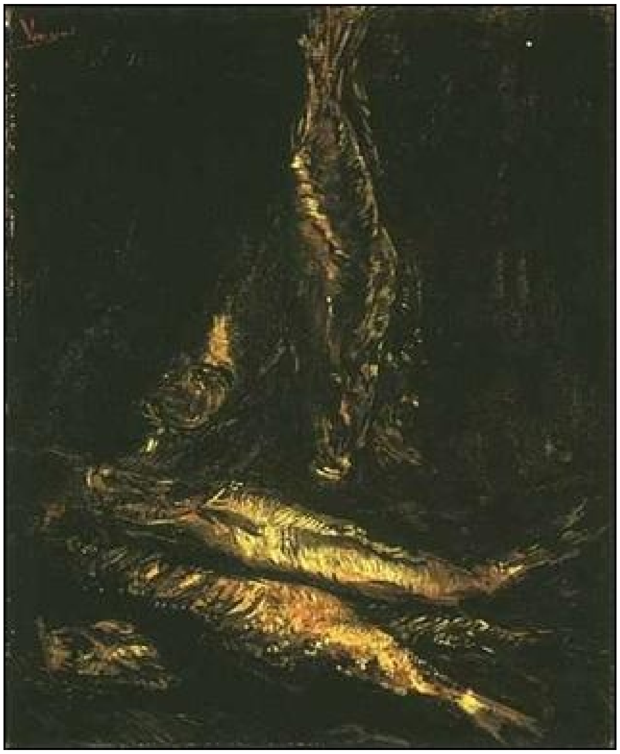
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



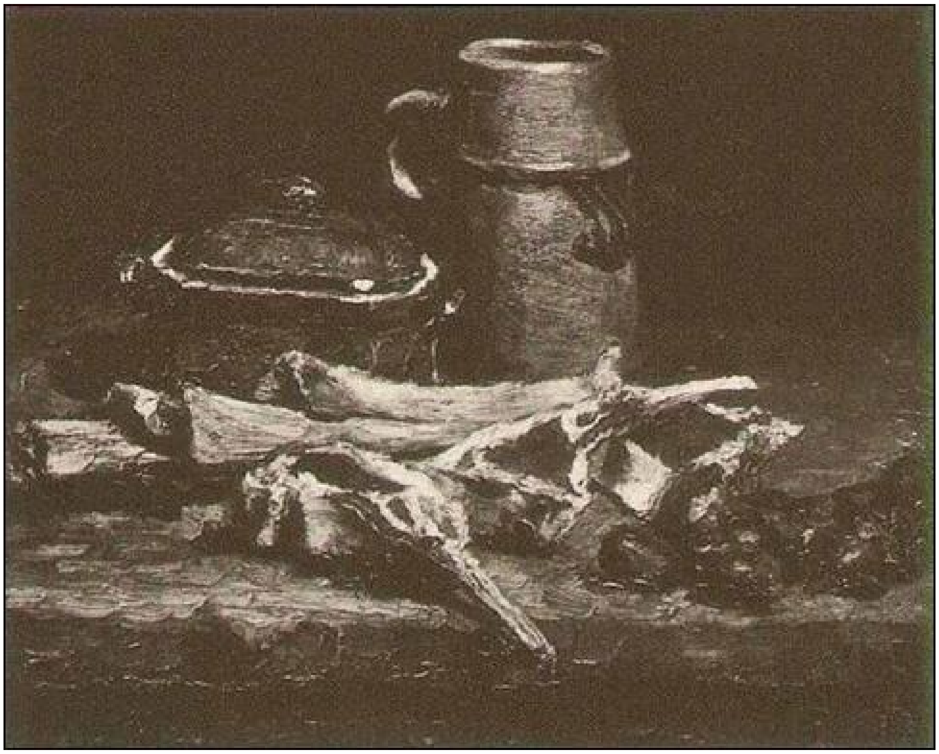
Le Moulin de la Galette
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



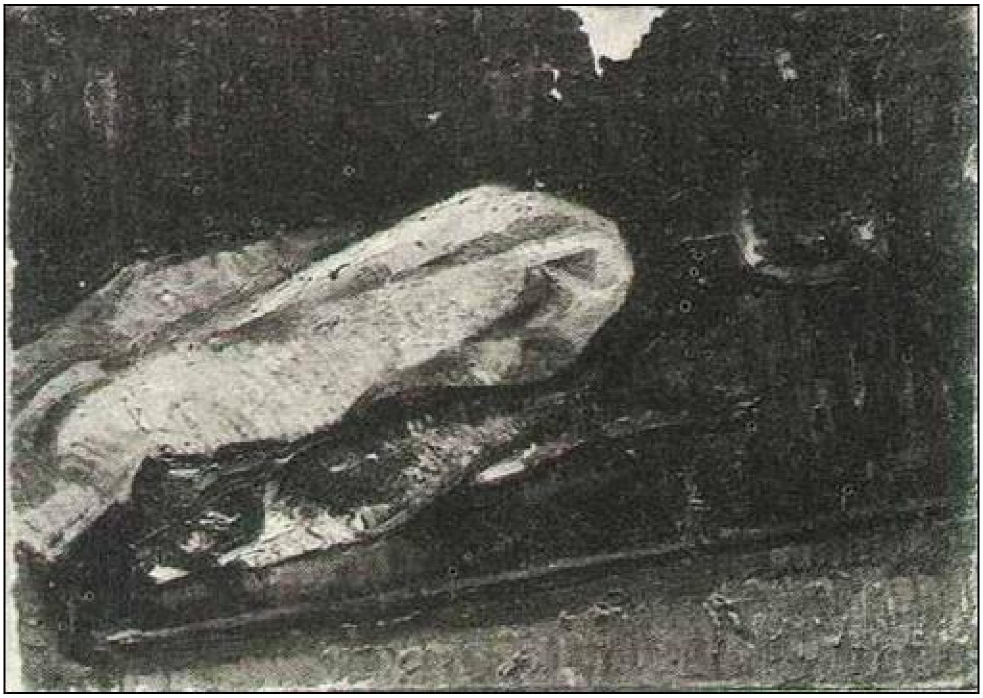
Still Life with Bloaters
Oil on canvas
21.0 x 42.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



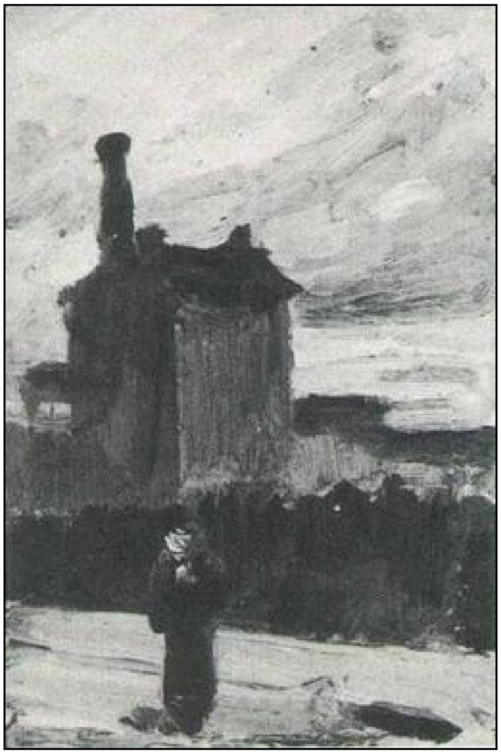
Still Life with Bloaters
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



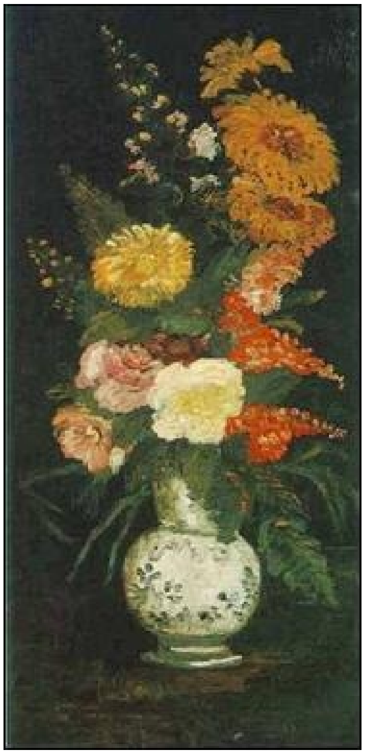
Still Life with Meat, Vegetables and Pottery
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



Still Life with Two Herrings, a Cloth and a Glass
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

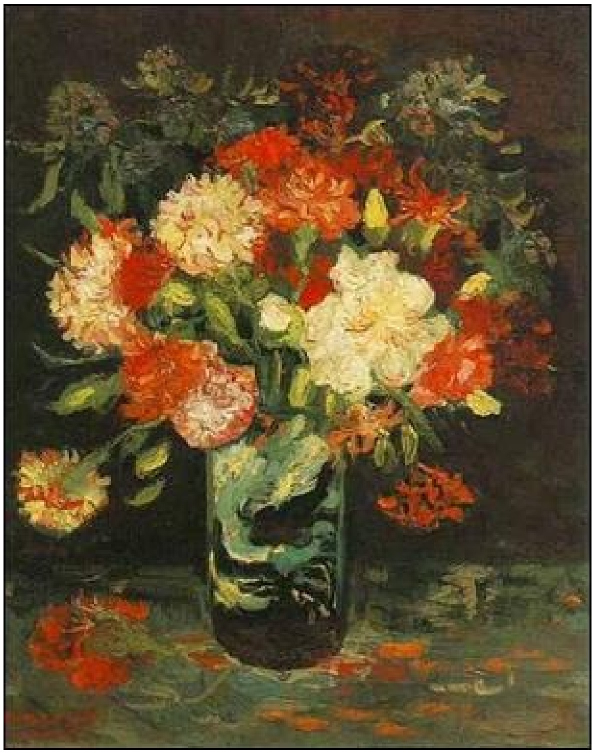


Twilight, before the Storm: Montmartre
Oil on cardboard
15.0 x 10.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

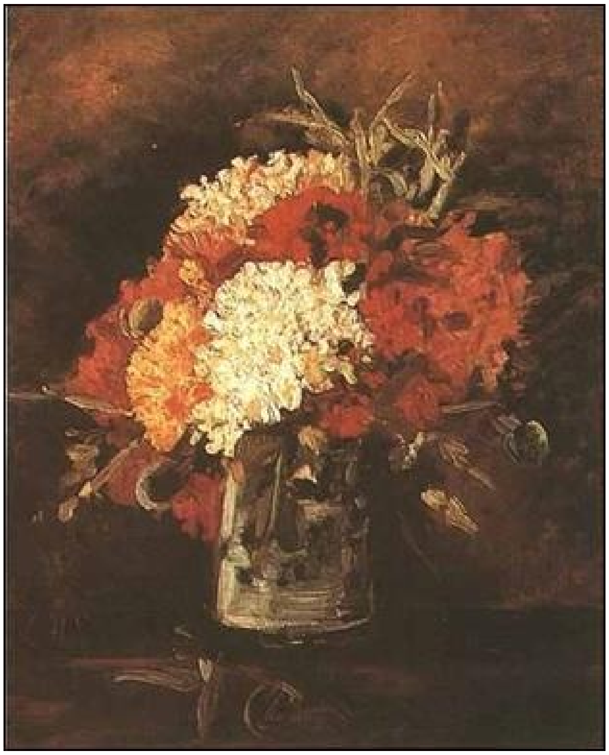


Vase with Asters, Salvia and Other Flowers

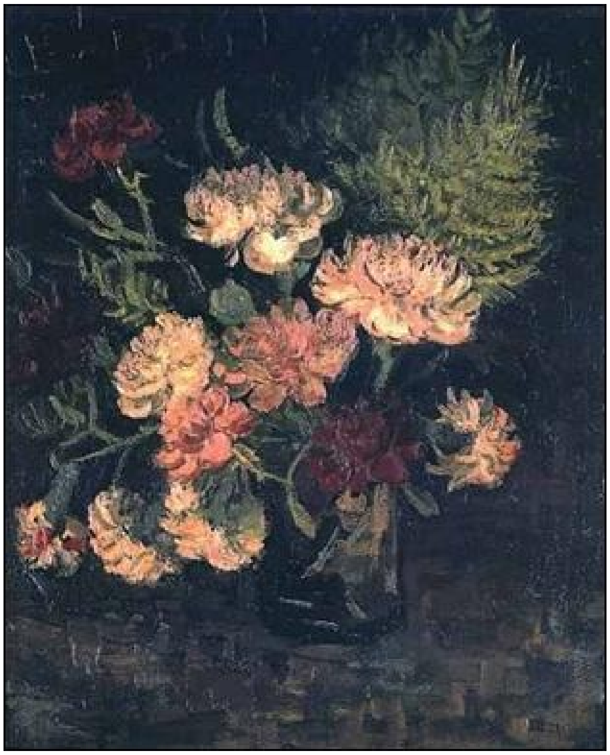
Oil on canvas
70.5 x 34.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



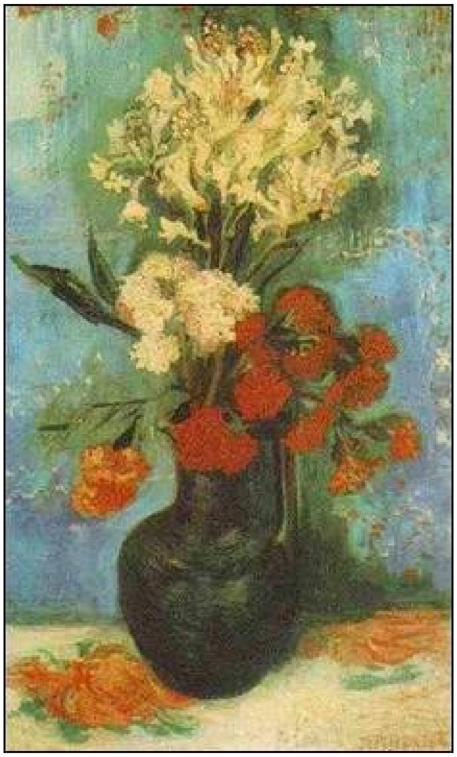
Vase with Carnations
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 37.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



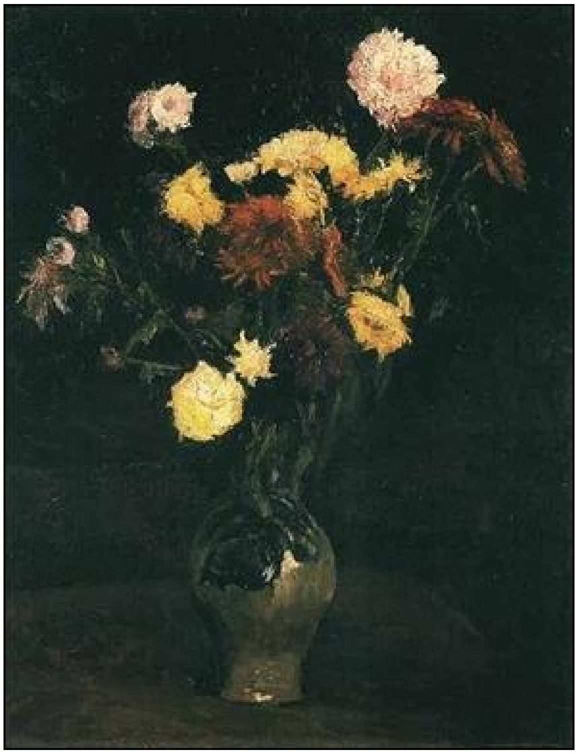
Vase with Carnations
Oil on canvas
40.0 x 32.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



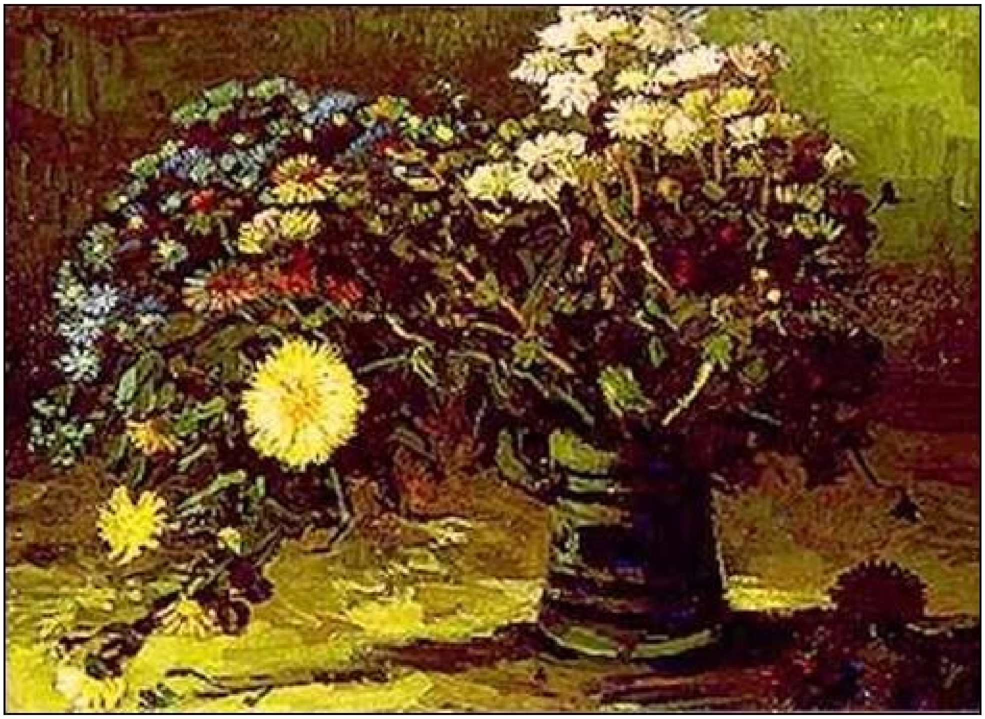
Vase with Carnations
Oil on canvas
43.2 x 35.6 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



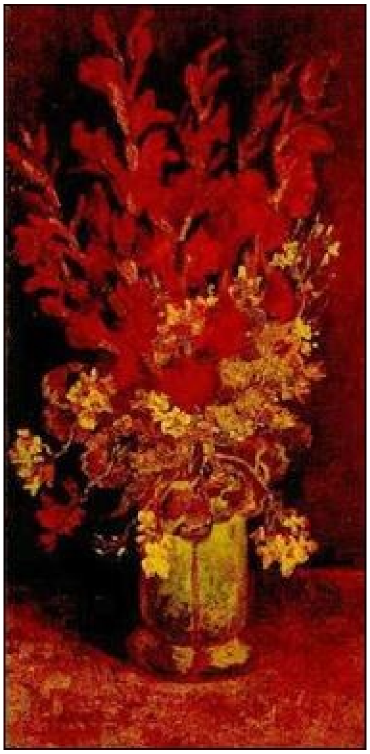
Vase with Carnations and Other Flowers
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



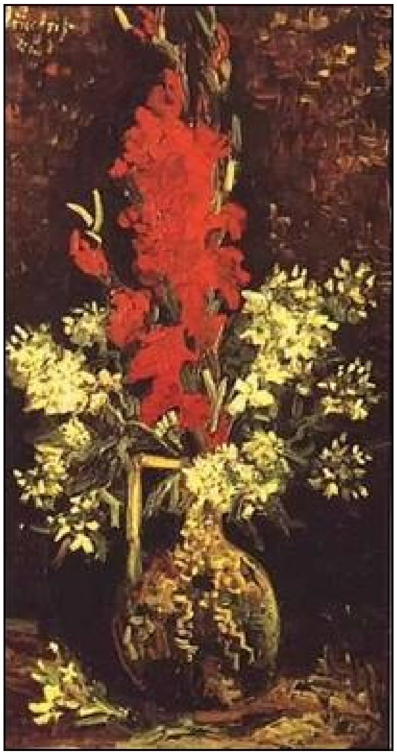
Vase with Carnations and Zinnias
Oil on canvas on panel
61.0 x 50.2 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



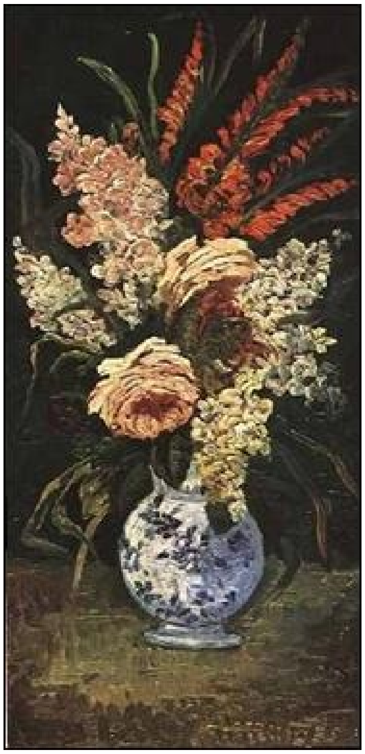
Vase with Daisies
Oil on paper on panel
40.0 x 56.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



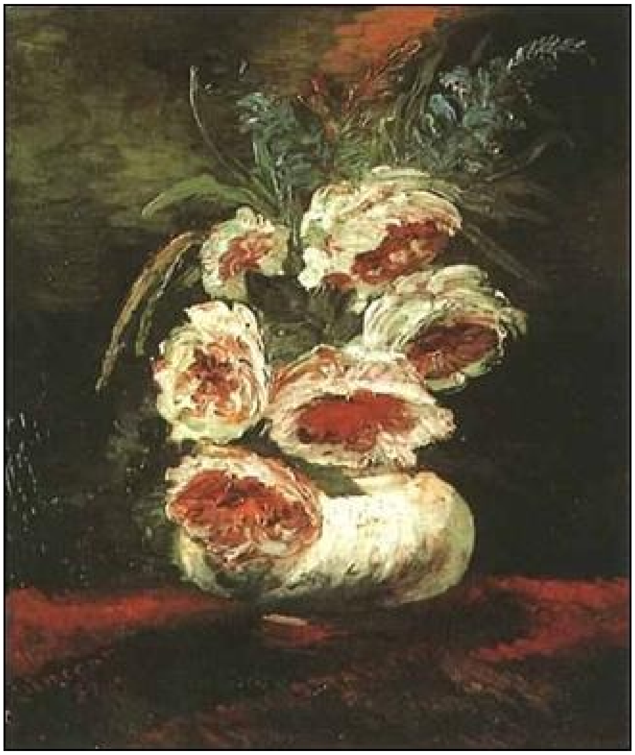
Vase with Gladioli and Carnations
Oil on canvas
78.5 x 40.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



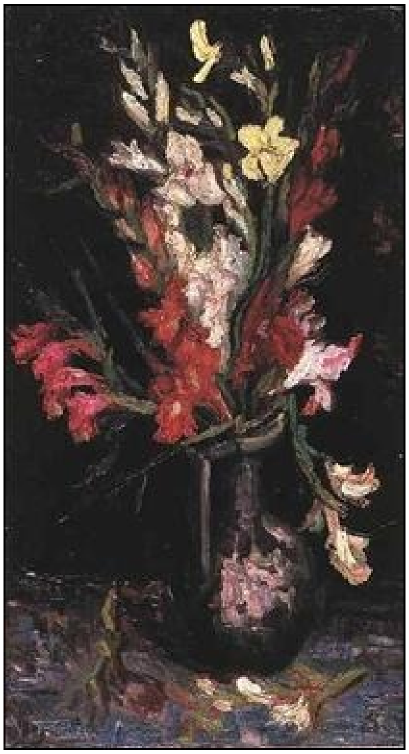
Vase with Gladioli and Carnations
Oil on canvas
65.5 x 35.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



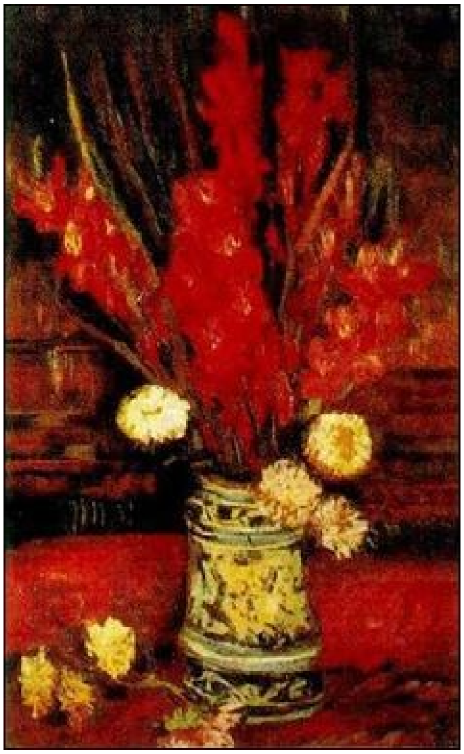
Vase with Gladioli and Lilac
Oil on canvas
69.0 x 33.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



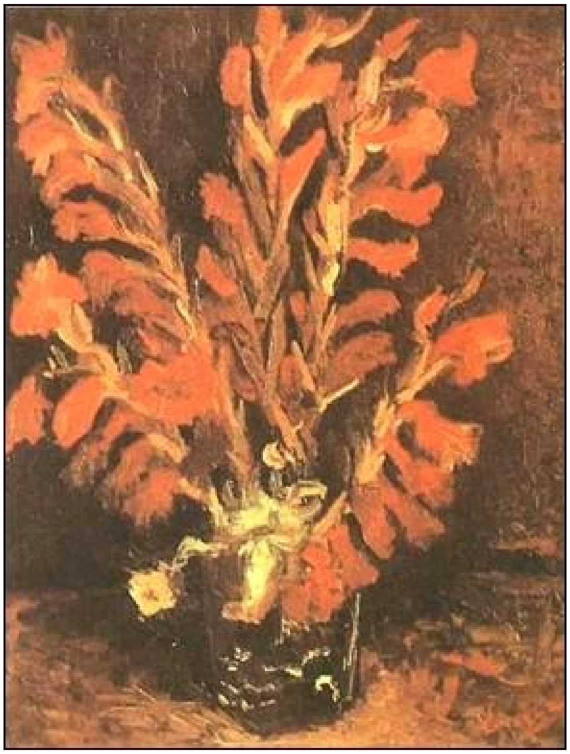
Vase with Peonies
Oil on canvas
34.0 x 45.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



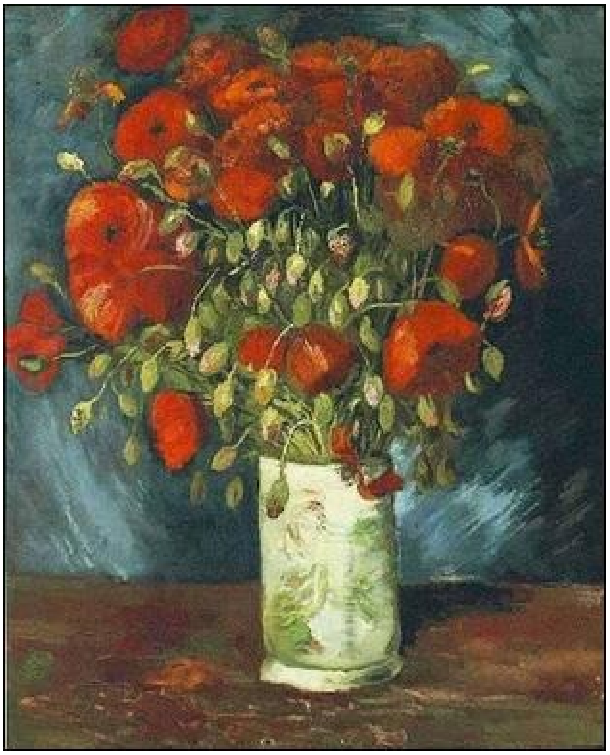
Vase with Red Gladioli
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 35.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



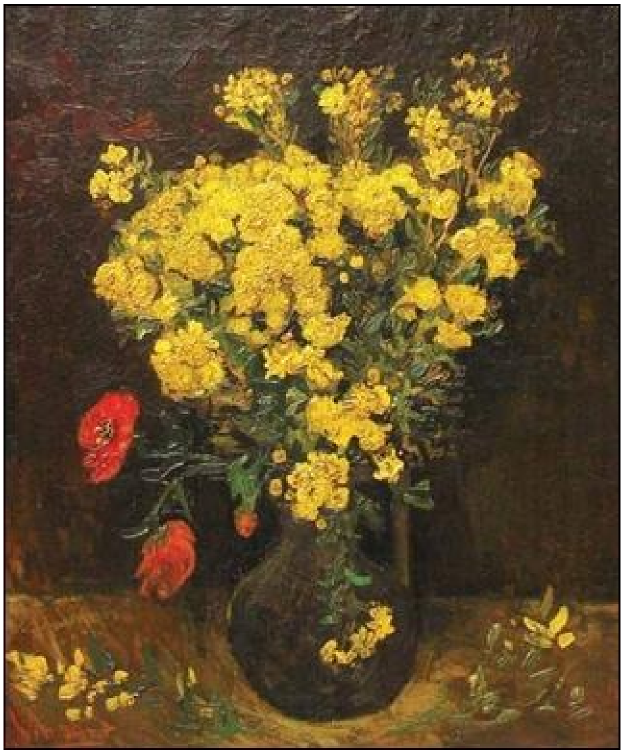
Vase with Red Gladioli
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 40.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



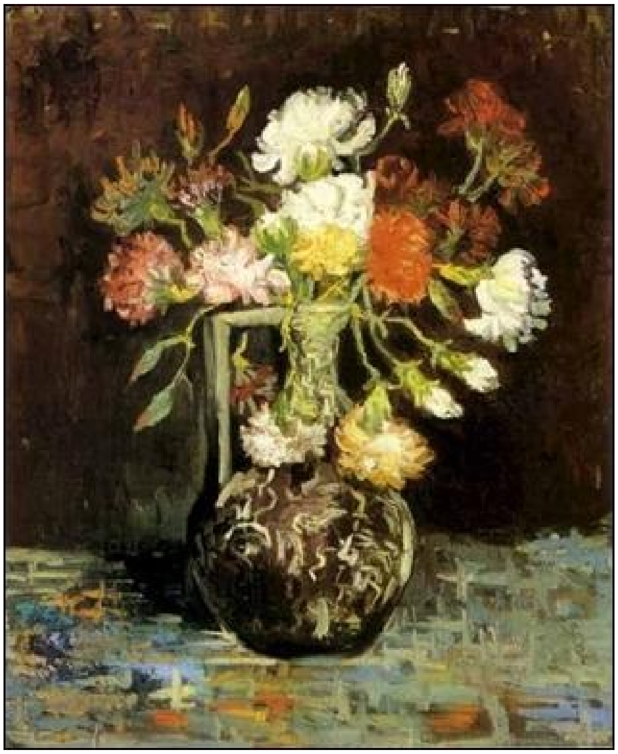
Vase with Red Gladioli
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 39.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



Vase with Red Poppies
Oil on canvas
56.0 x 46.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

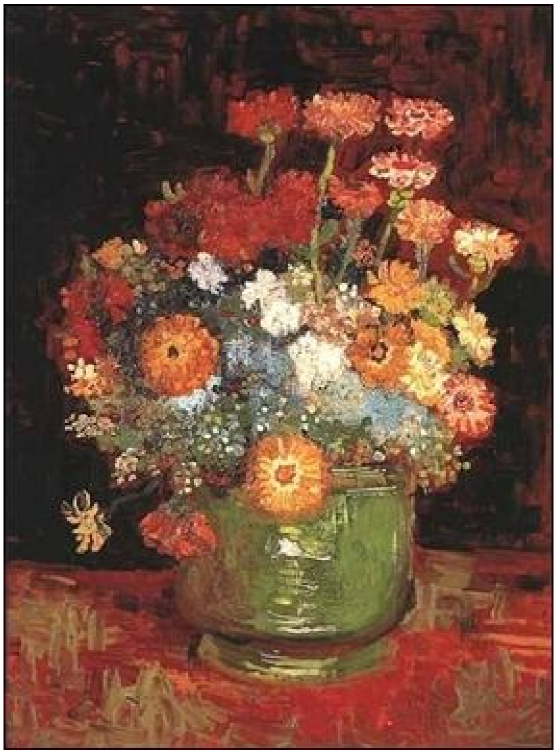


Vase with Viscaria
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886

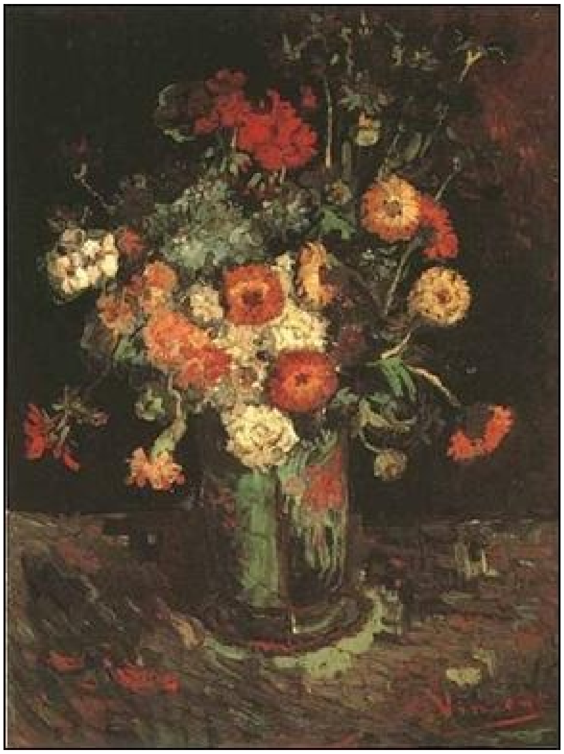


Vase with White and Red Carnations

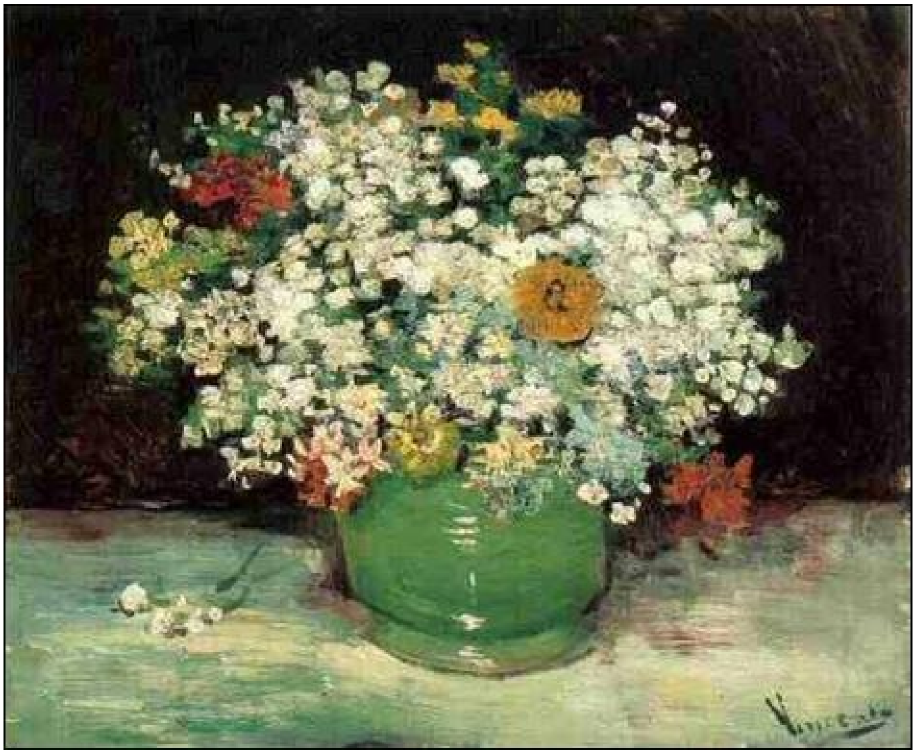
Oil on canvas
58.0 x 45.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



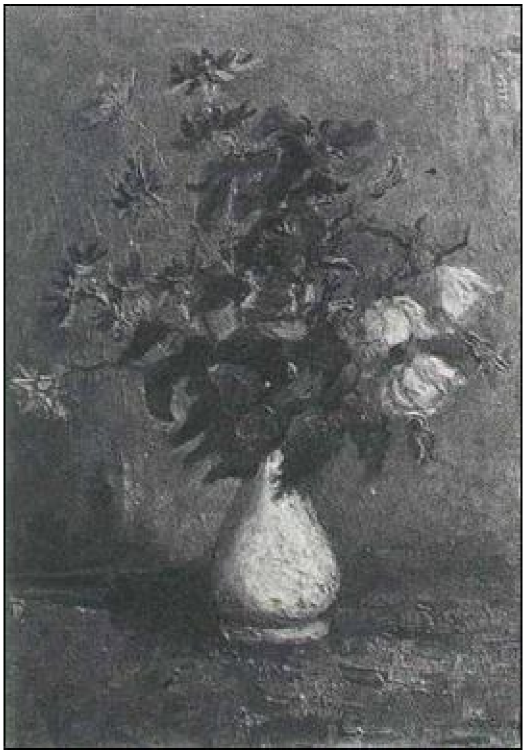
Vase with Zinnias
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 48.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



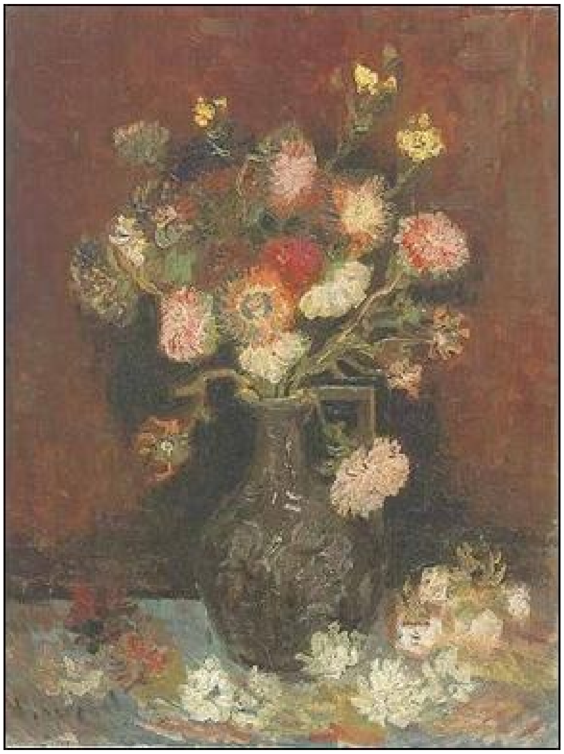
Vase with Zinnias and Geraniums
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 45.9 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



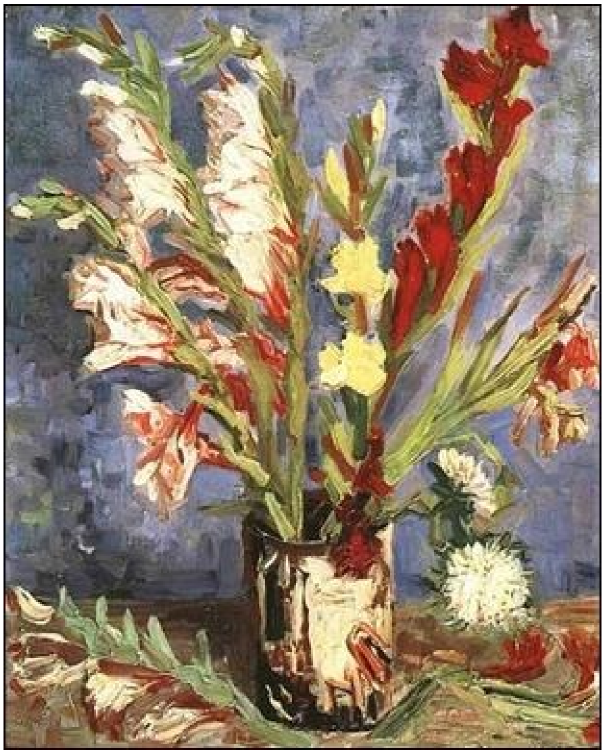
Vase with Zinnias and Other Flowers
Oil on canvas
50.2 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



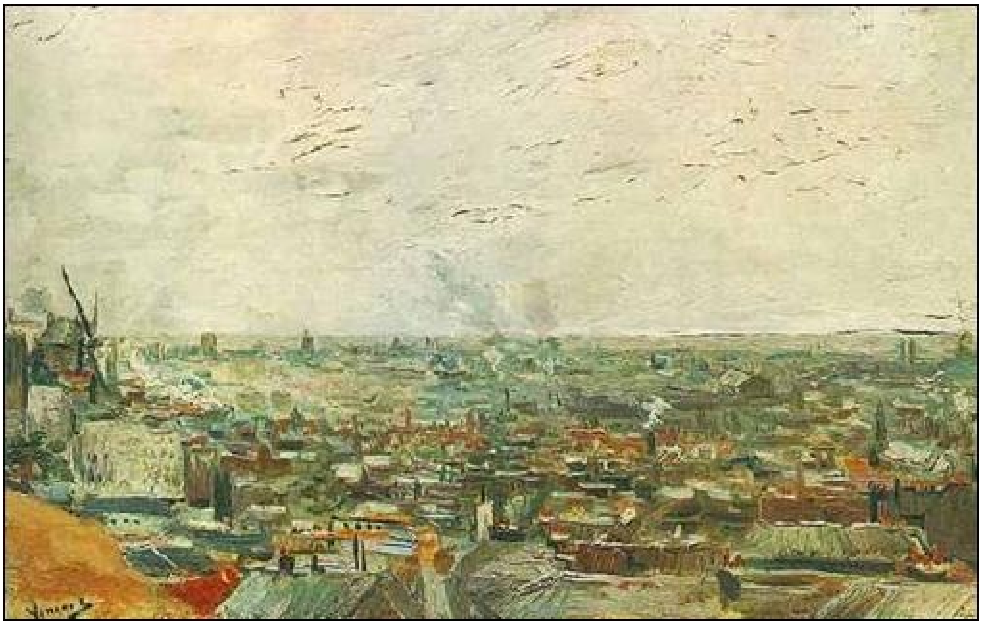
White Vase with Roses and Other Flowers
Oil on canvas
37.0 x 25.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1886



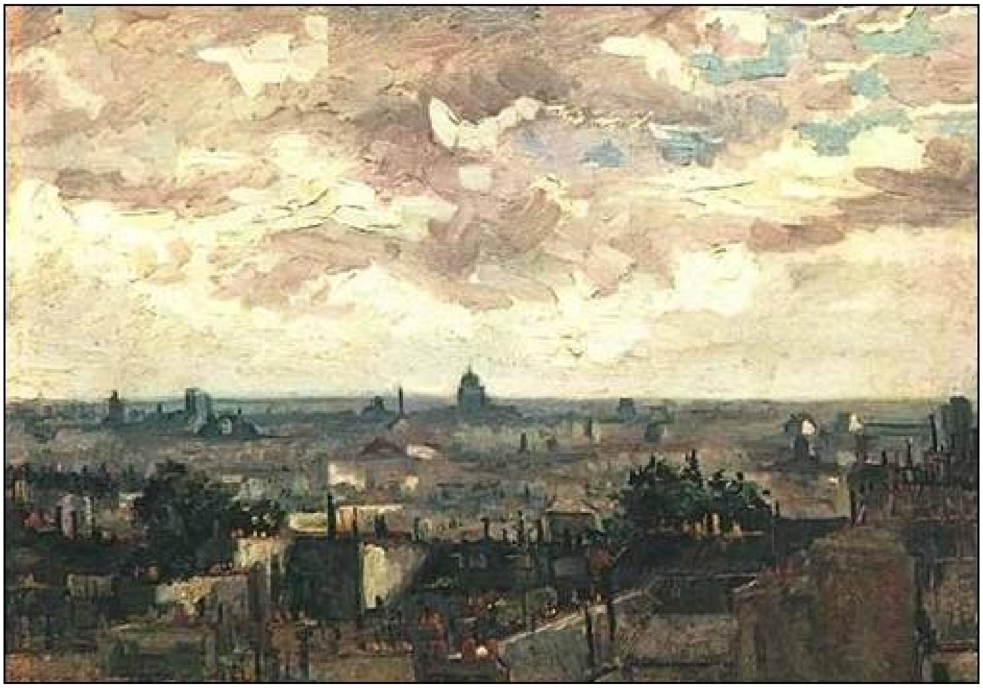
Vase with Asters and Phlox
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: late Summer, 1886



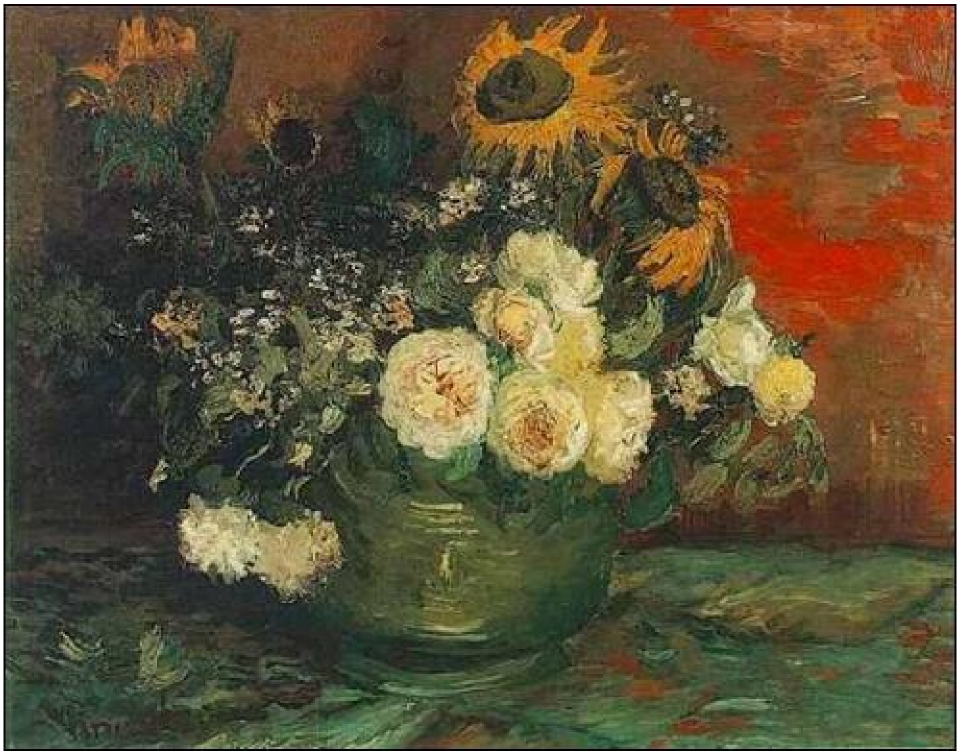
Vase with Gladioli
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 38.5 cm.
Paris: late Summer, 1886



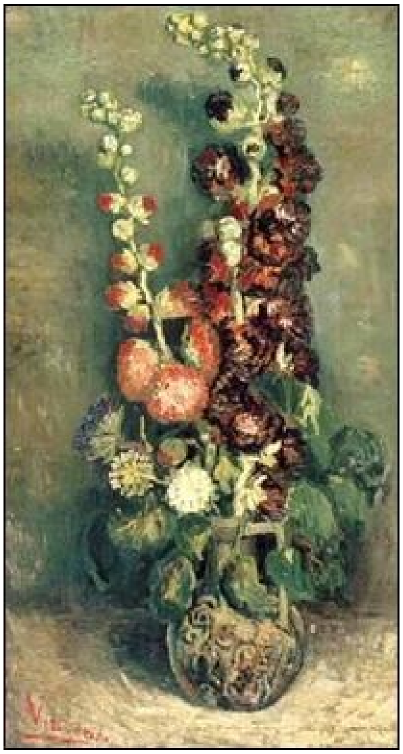
View of Paris from Montmartre
Oil on canvas
38.5 x 61.5 cm.
Paris: late Summer, 1886



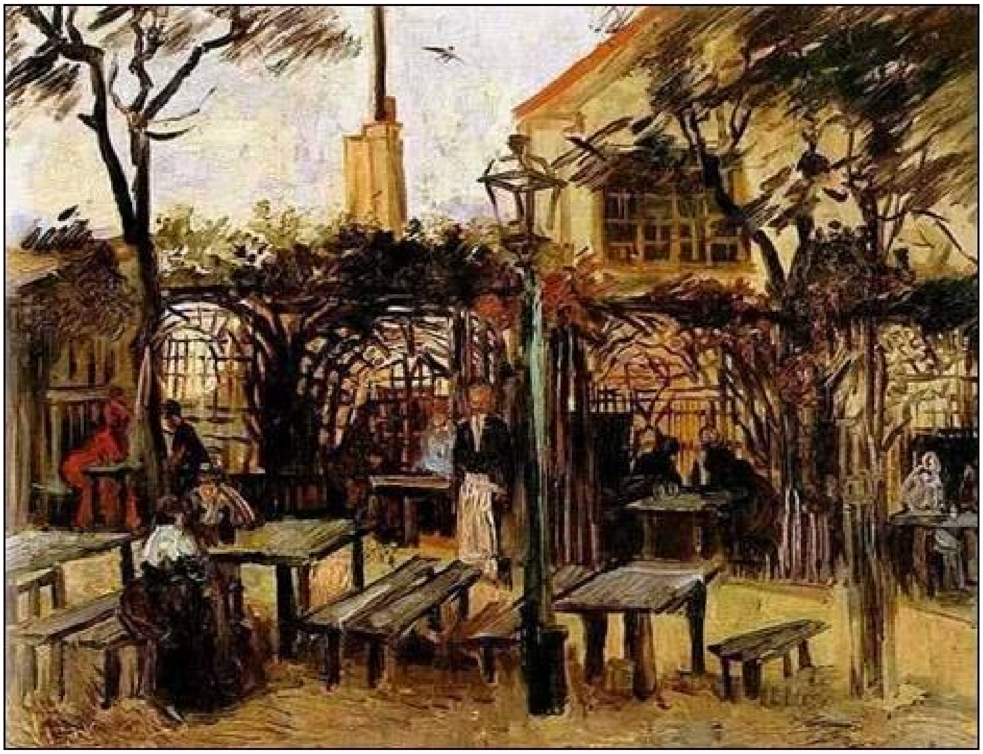
View of the Roofs of Paris
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 72.5 cm.
Paris: late Summer, 1886



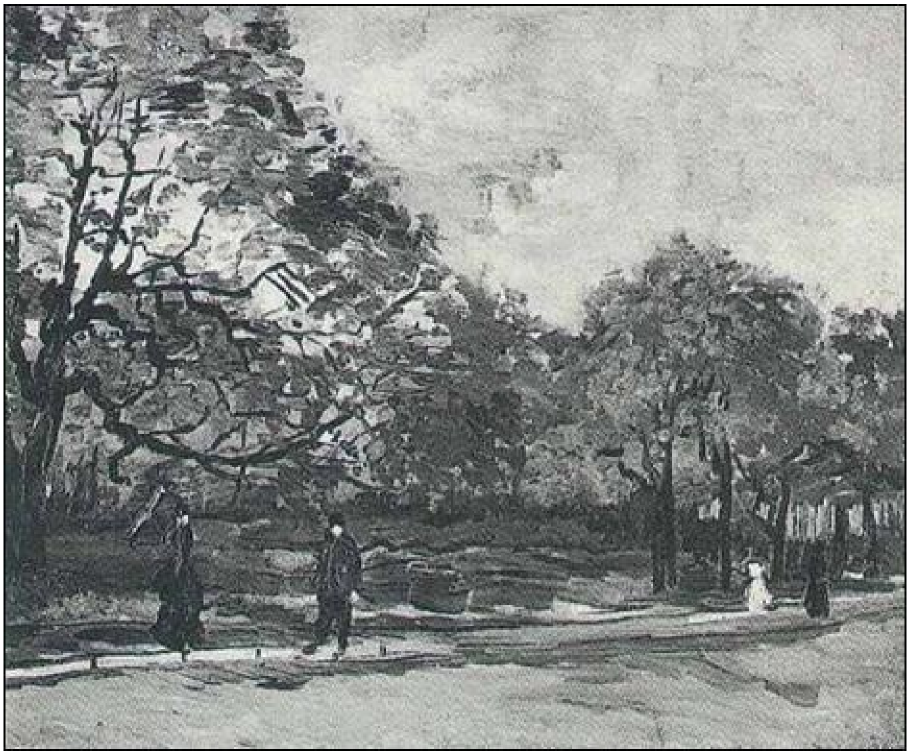
Bowl with Sunflowers, Roses and Other Flowers
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: August-September, 1886



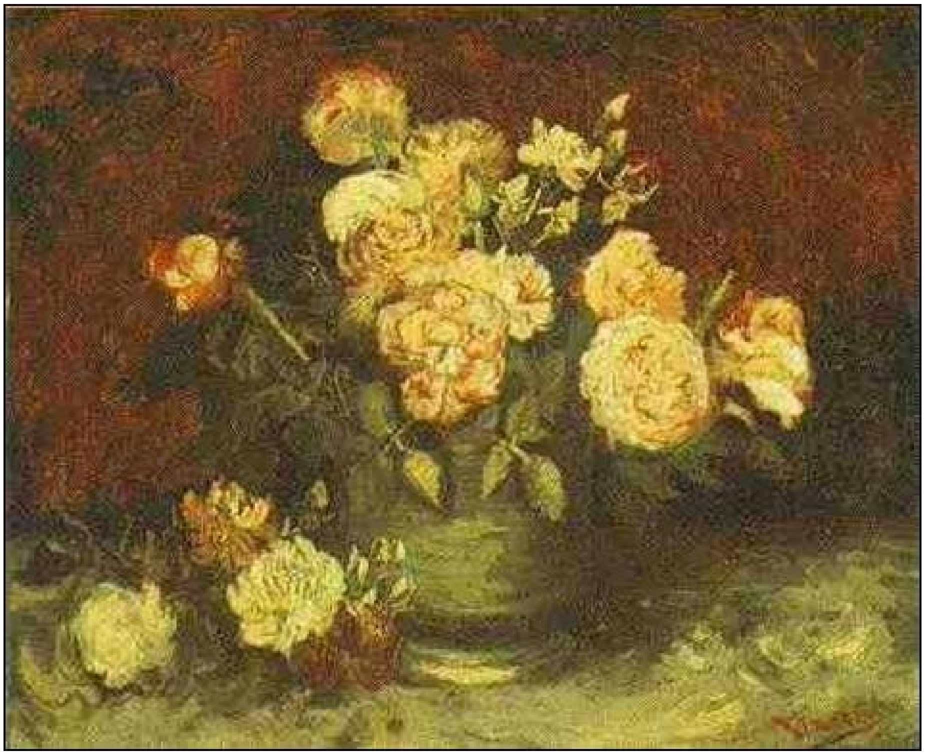
Vase with Hollyhocks
Oil on canvas
91.0 x 50.5 cm.
Paris: August-September, 1886



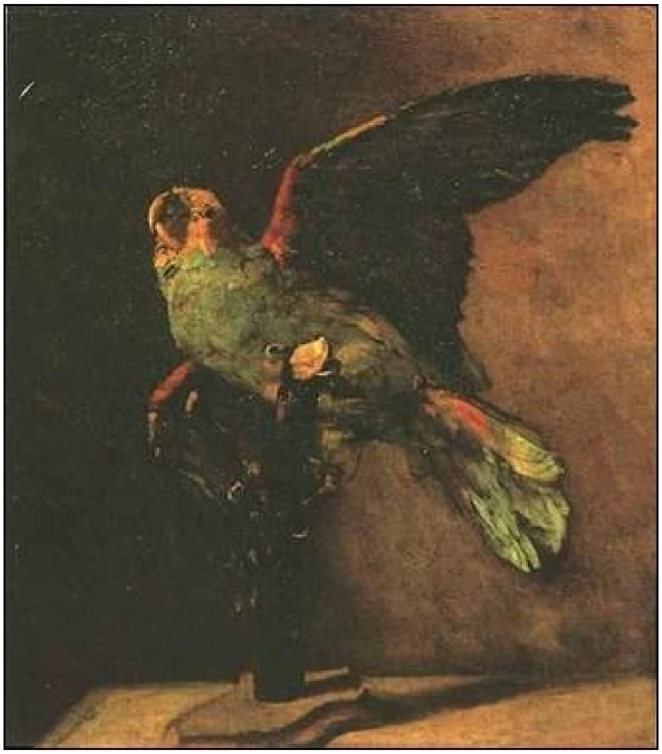
Terrace of a Café on Montmartre (La Guinguette)
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 64.0 cm.
Paris: October, 1886



Bois de Boulogne with People Walking, The
Oil on canvas
37.5 x 45.5 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886

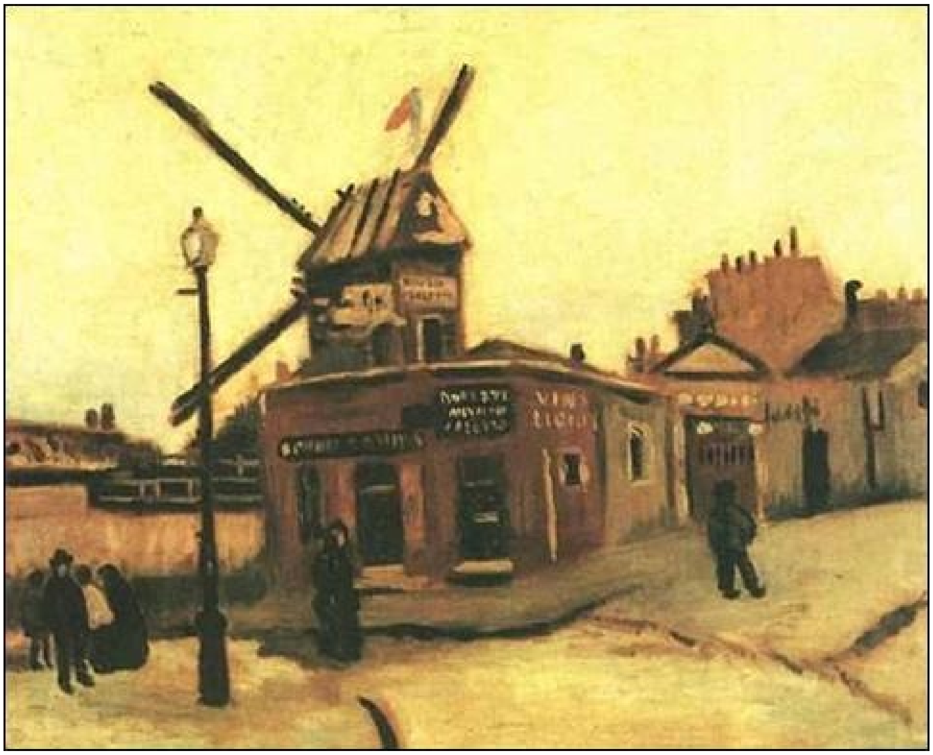


Bowl with Peonies and Roses
Oil on canvas
59.0 x 71.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886

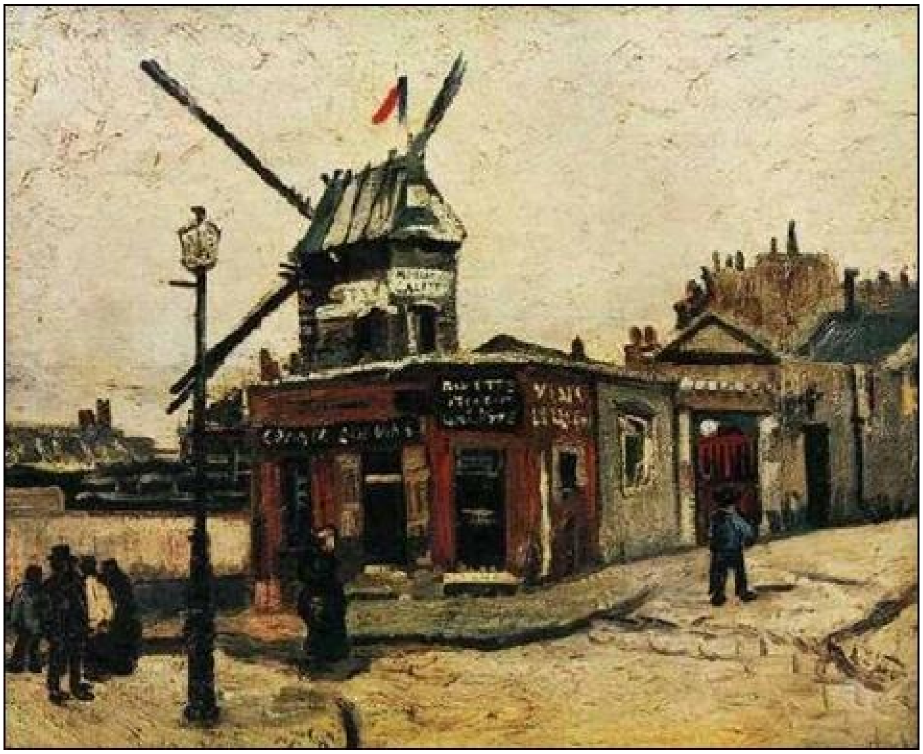


Green Parrot, The

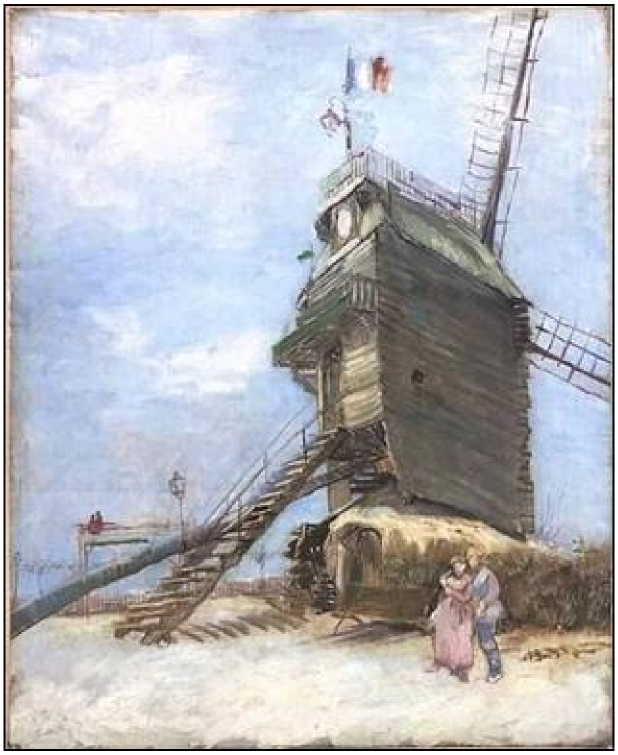
Oil on canvas on panel
48.0 x 43.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



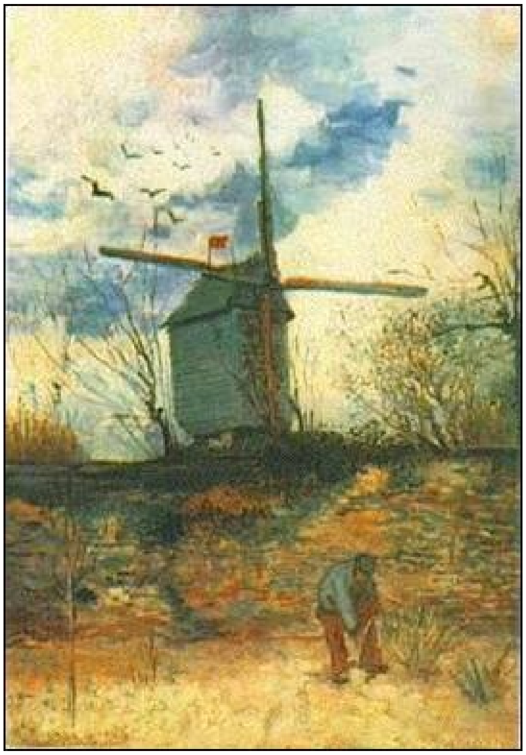
Le Moulin de la Galette
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



Le Moulin de la Galette
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 46.5 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



Le Moulin de la Galette
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 50.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886

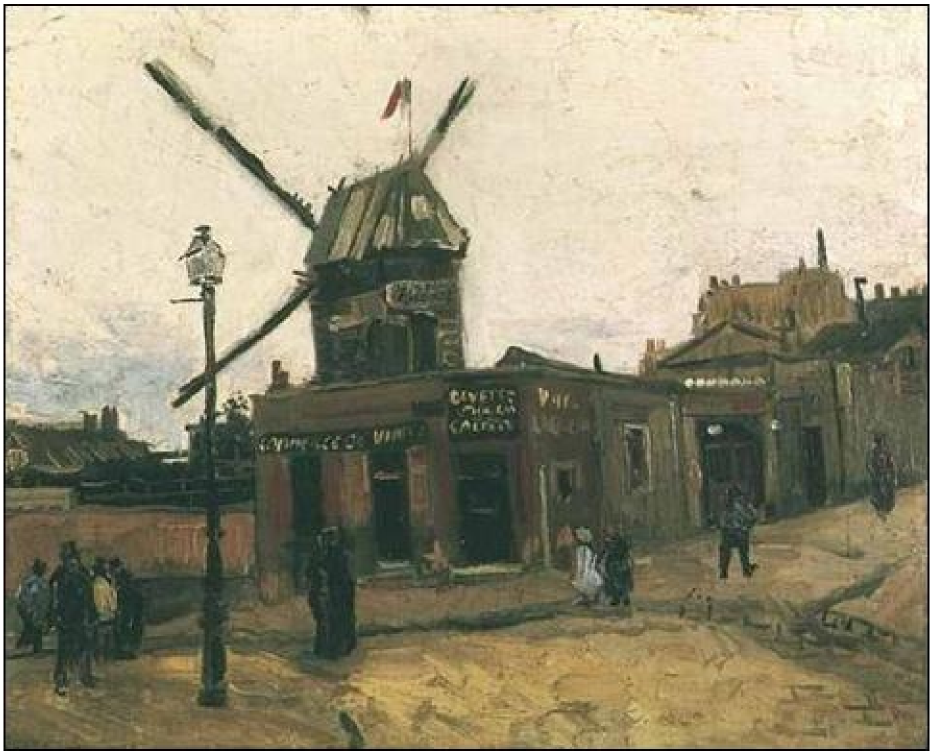


Le Moulin de la Galette

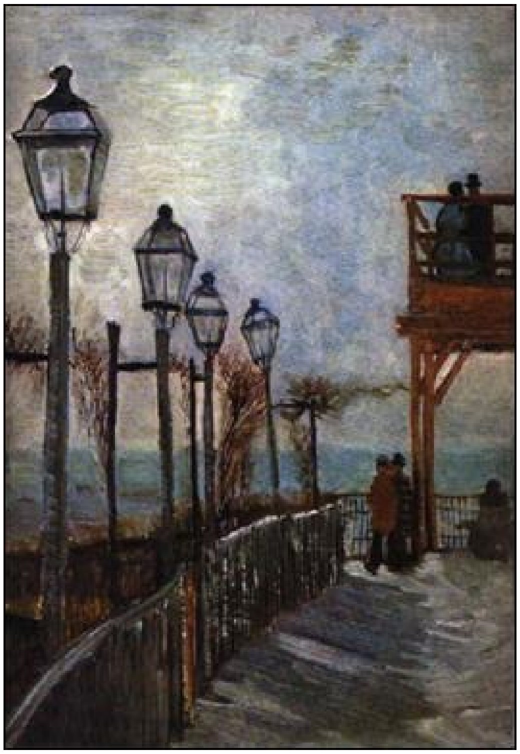
Oil on canvas

55.0 x 38.5 cm.

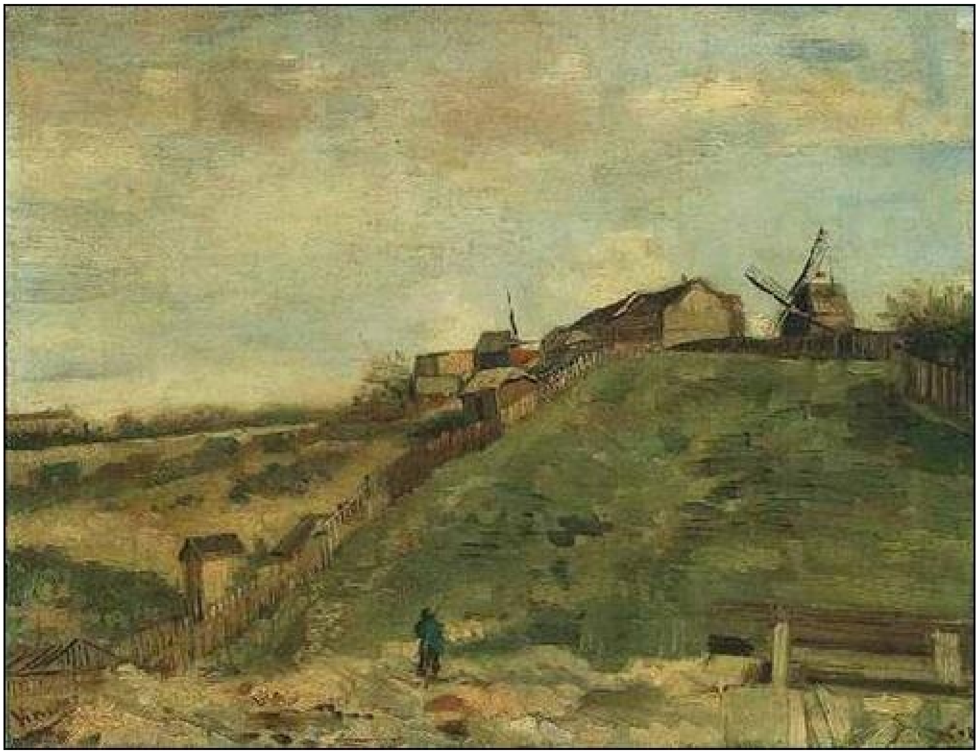
Paris: Autumn, 1886



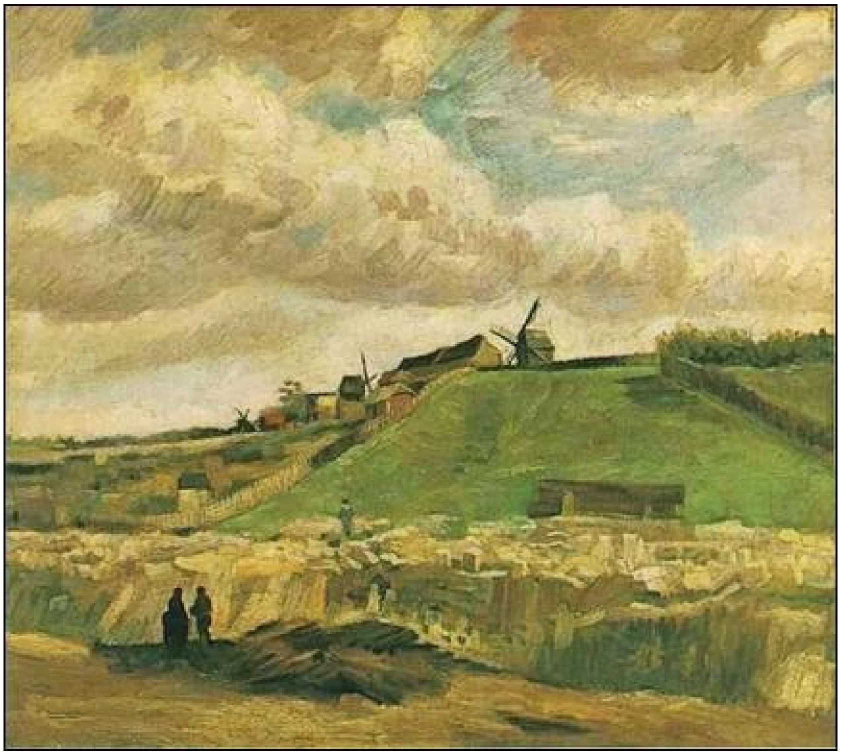
Le Moulin de la Galette
Oil on canvas
38.5 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



Montmartre
Canvas on panel
43.6 x 33.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886

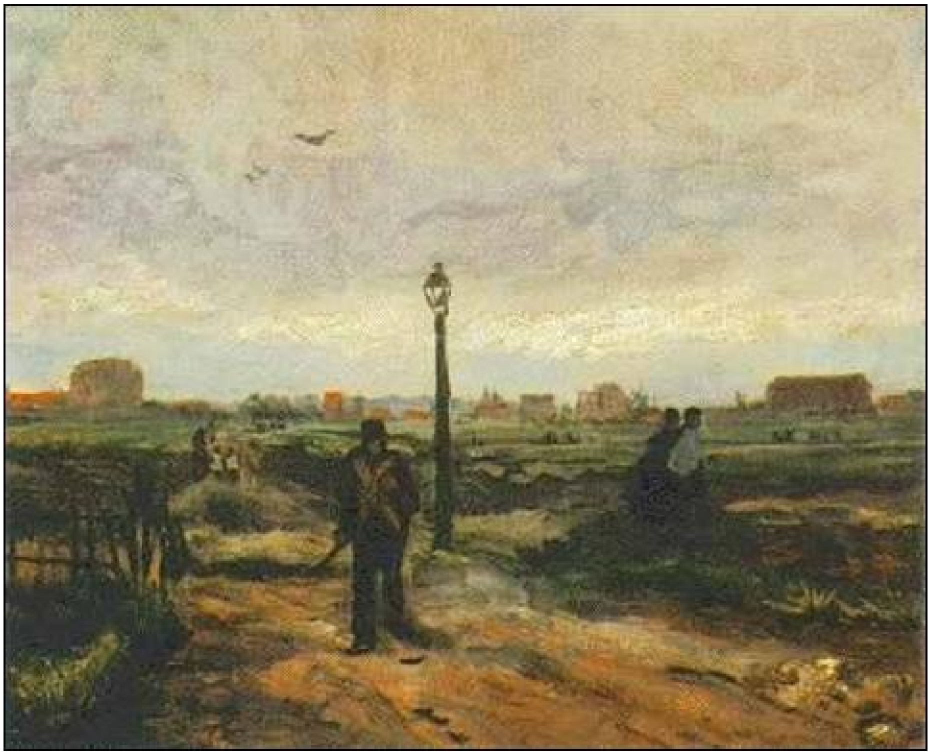


Montmartre: Quarry, the Mills
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886

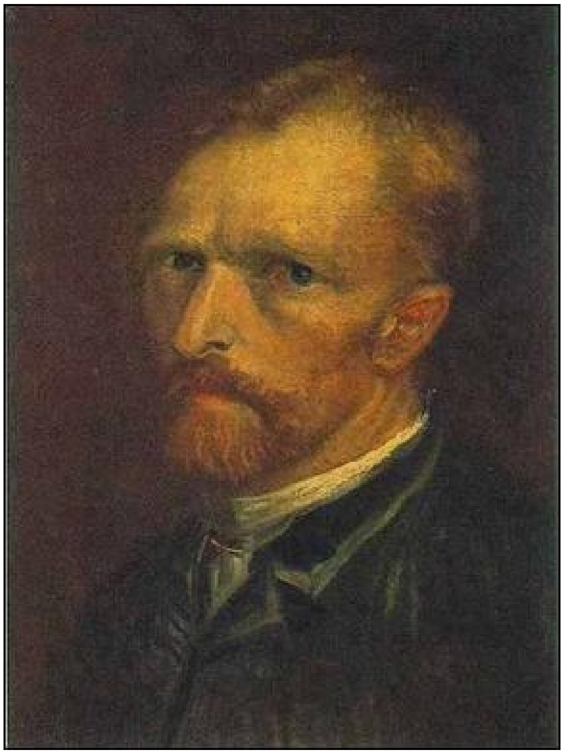


Hill of Montmartre with Quarry, The

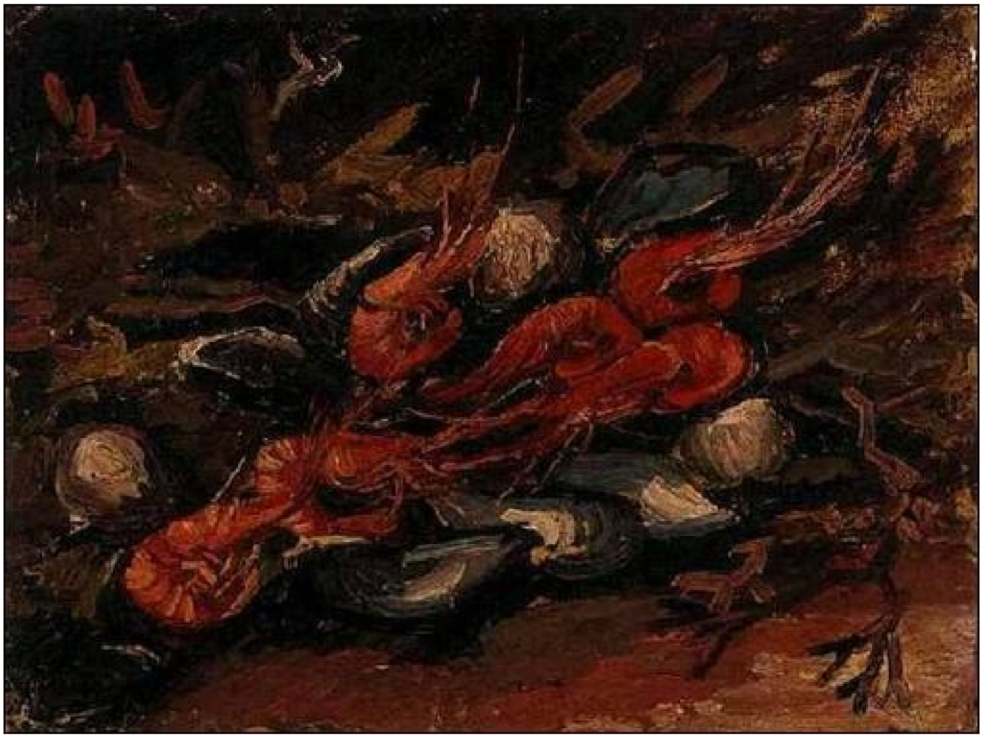
Oil on canvas
56.0 x 62.5 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



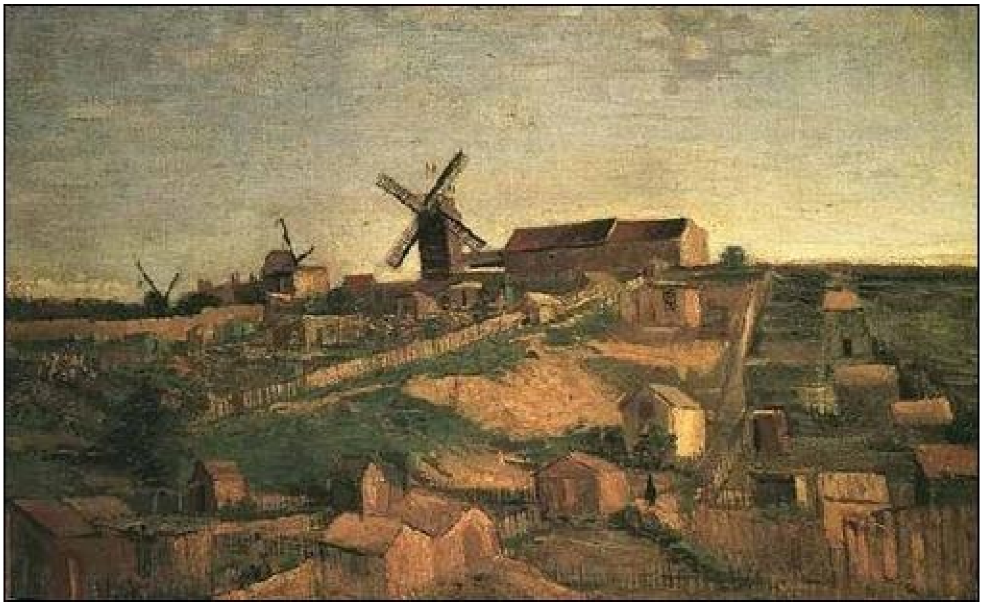
Outskirts of Paris
Oil on canvas on cardboard
45.7 x 54.6 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



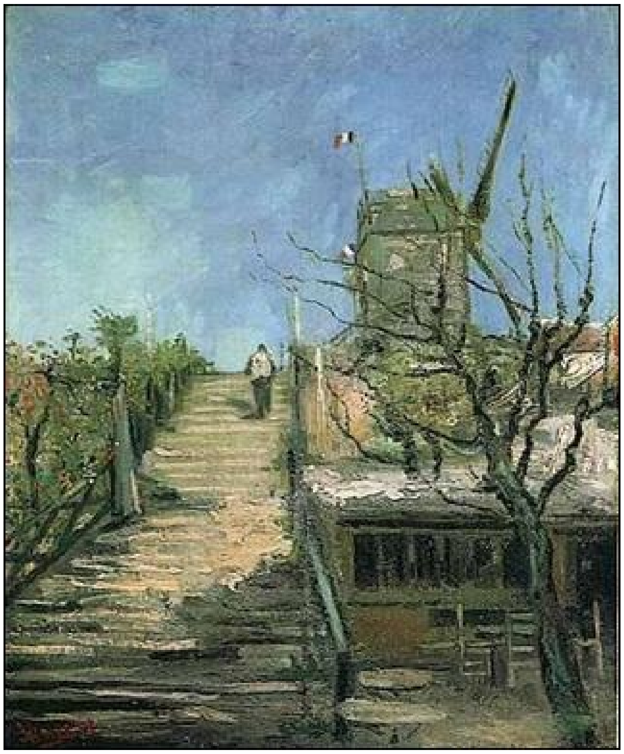
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
39.5 x 29.5 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



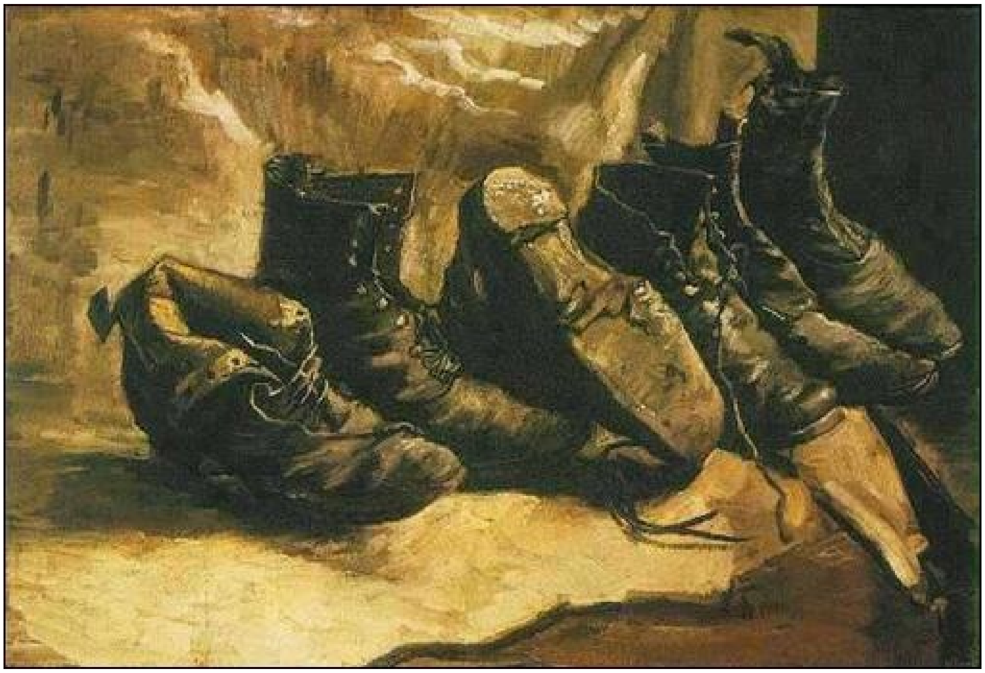
Still Life with Mussels and Shrimps
Oil on canvas
26.5 x 34.5 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



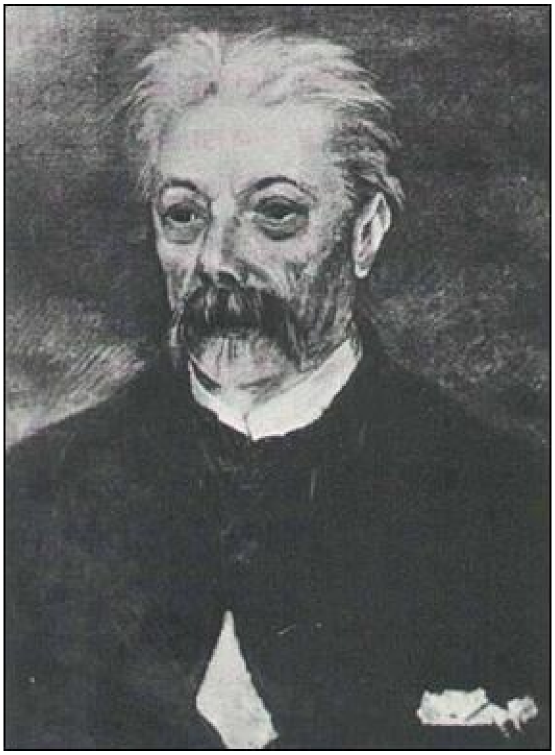
View of Montmartre with Windmills
Oil on canvas
36.0 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



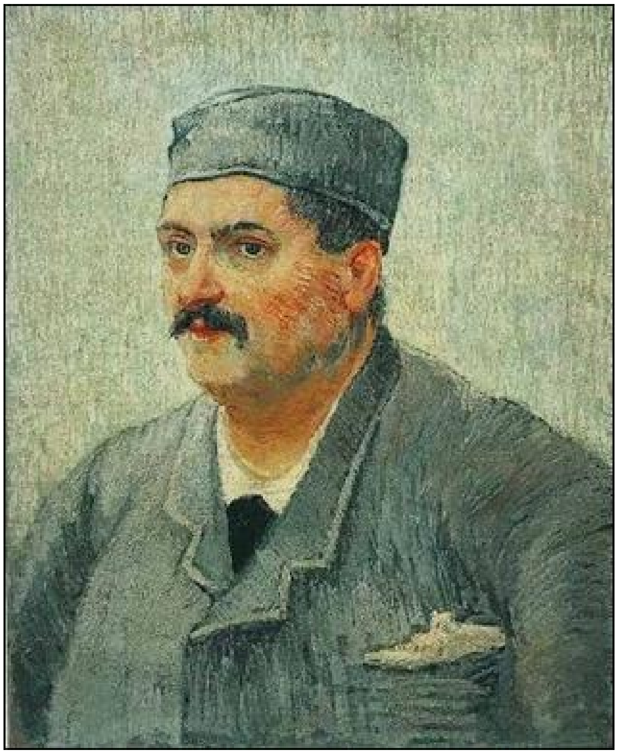
Windmill on Montmartre
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1886



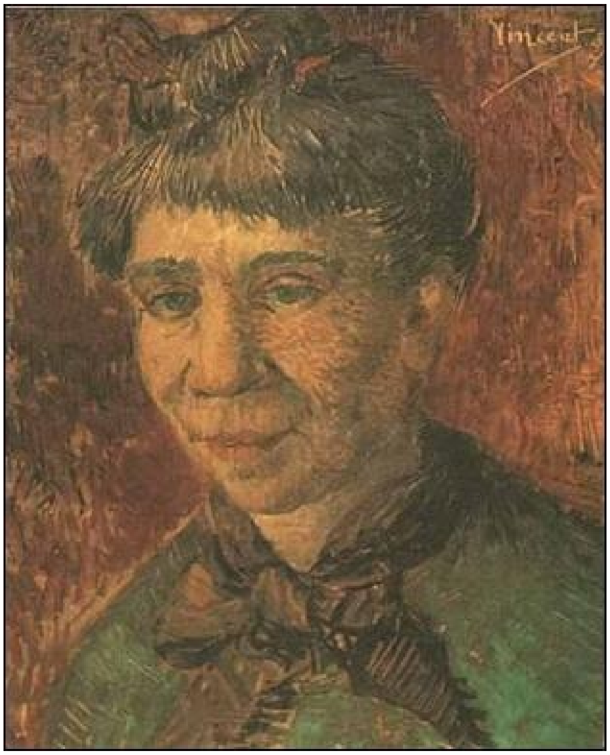
Three Pairs of Shoes
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 72.0 cm.
Paris: December, 1886



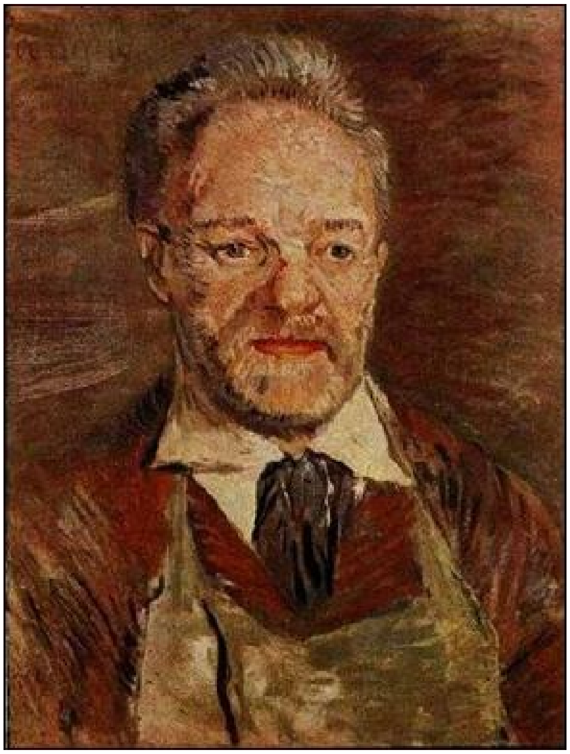
Portrait of a Man with a Moustache
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1886/87



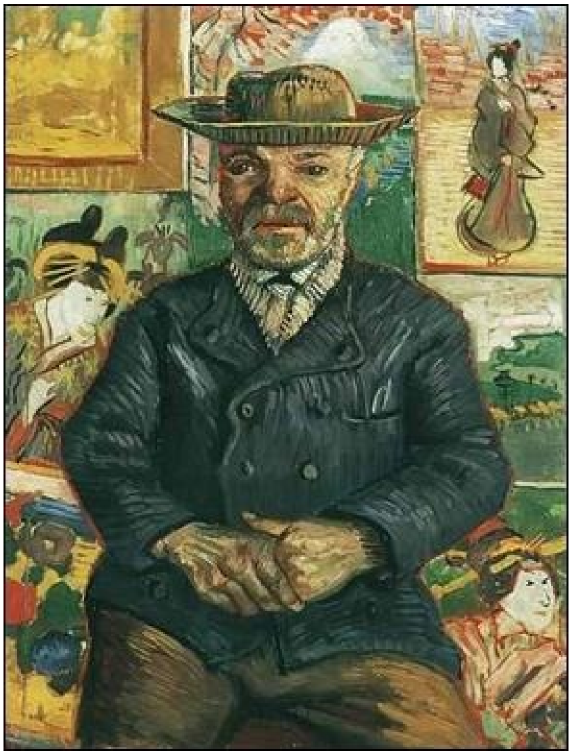
Portrait of a Man with a Skull Cap
Oil on canvas
65.5 x 54.5 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1886-87 (or 1887/88?)



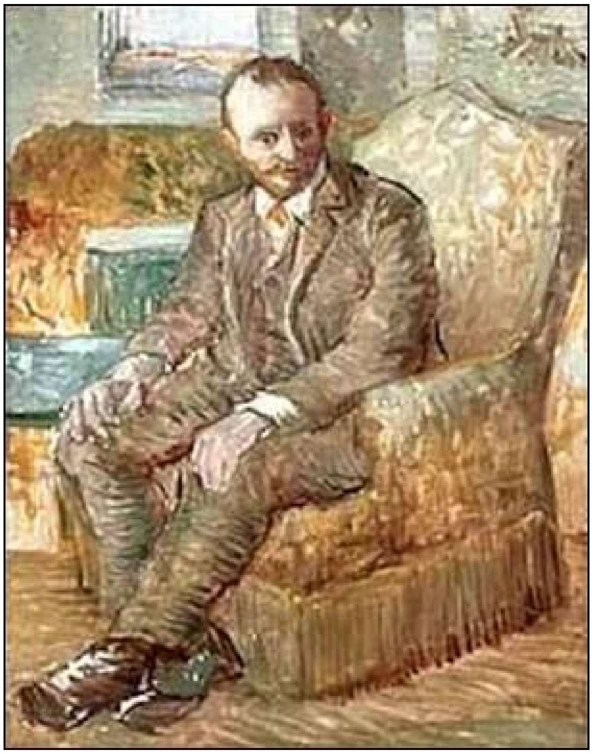
Portrait of a Woman (Madame Tanguy?)
Oil on canvas
40.0 x 32.0 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1886-87



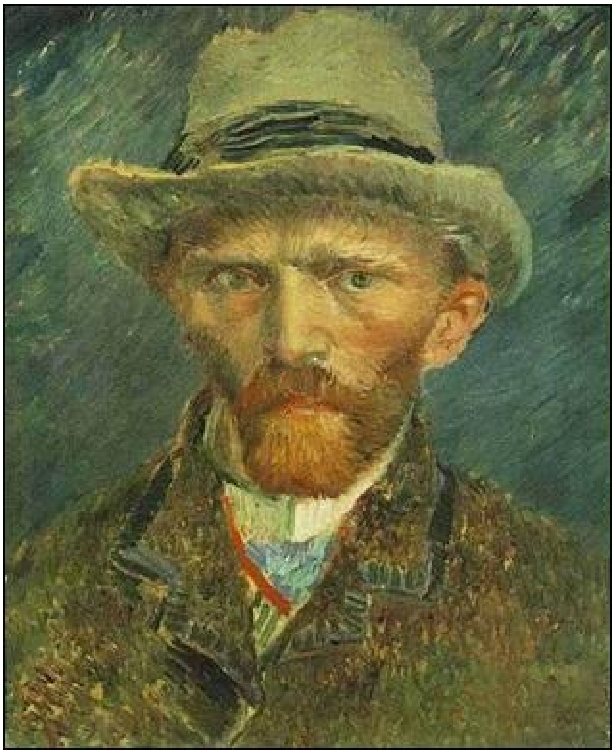
Portrait of Père Tanguy
Oil on canvas
47.0 x 38.5 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1886-87



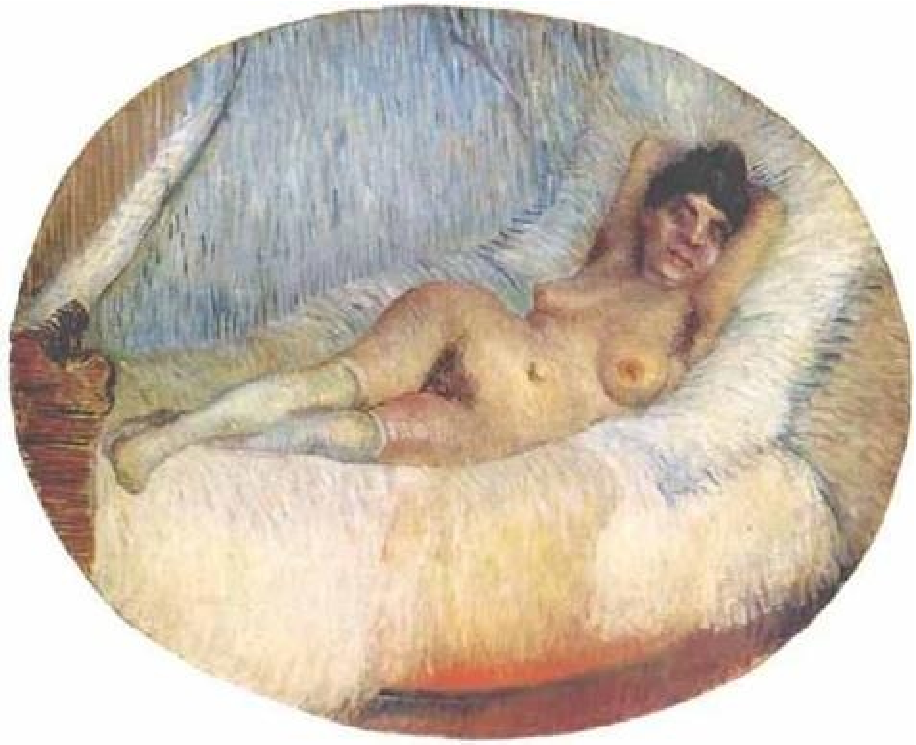
Portrait of Père Tanguy
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 51.0 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887-88



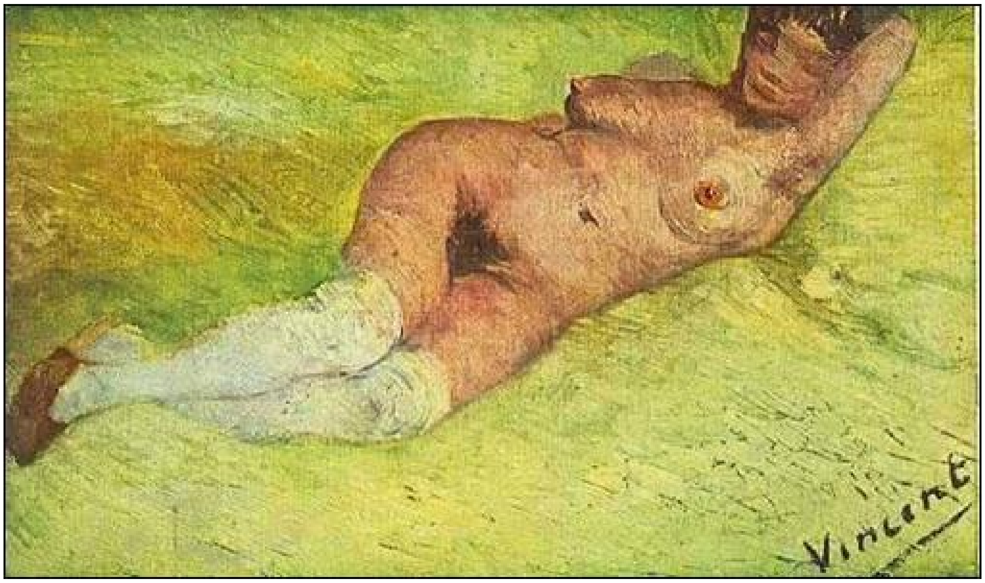
Portrait of the Art Dealer Alexander Reid, Sitting in an Easy Chair
Oil on cardboard
41.0 x 33.0 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1886/87



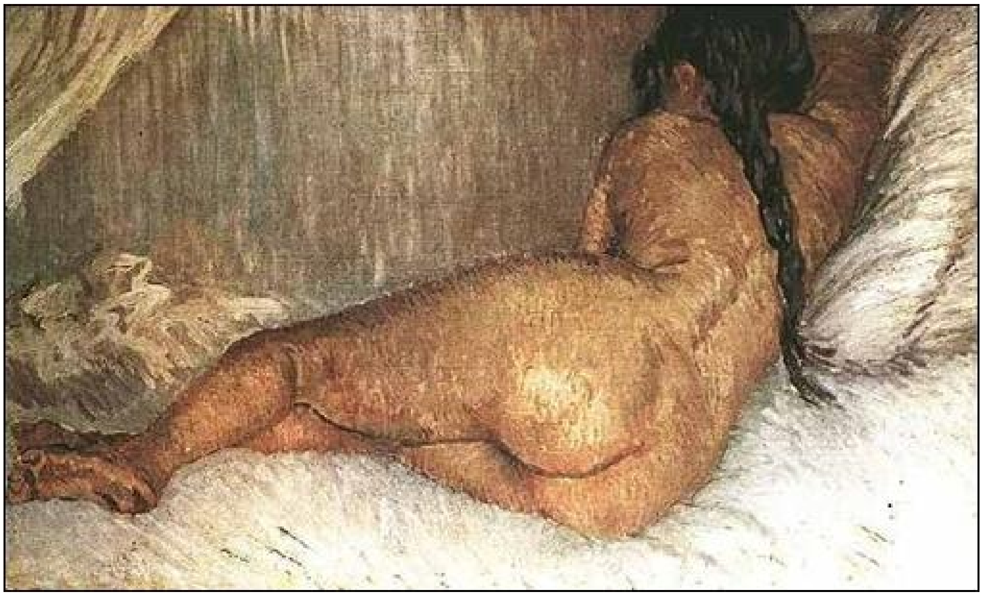
Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat
Oil on cardboard
41.0 x 32.0 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1886-87



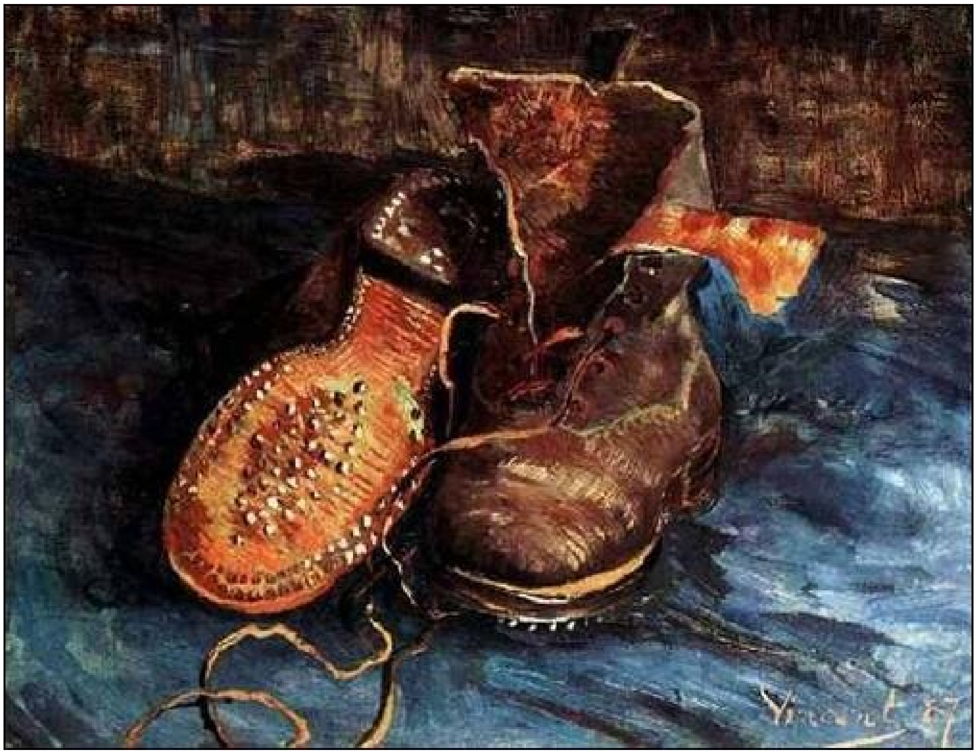
Nude Woman on a Bed
Oil on canvas (oval)
59.5 x 73.0 cm.
Paris: early 1887



Nude Woman Reclining
Oil on canvas
24.0 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: early 1887

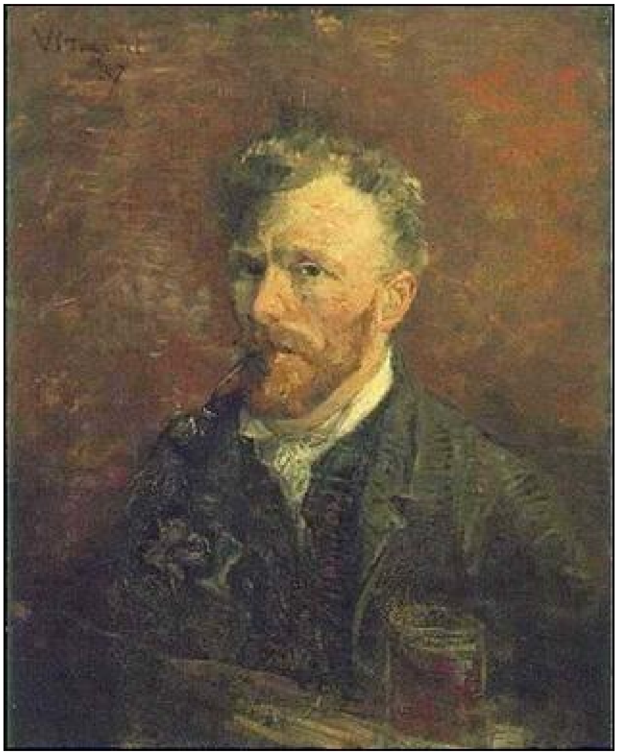


Nude Woman Reclining, Seen from the Back
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: early 1887

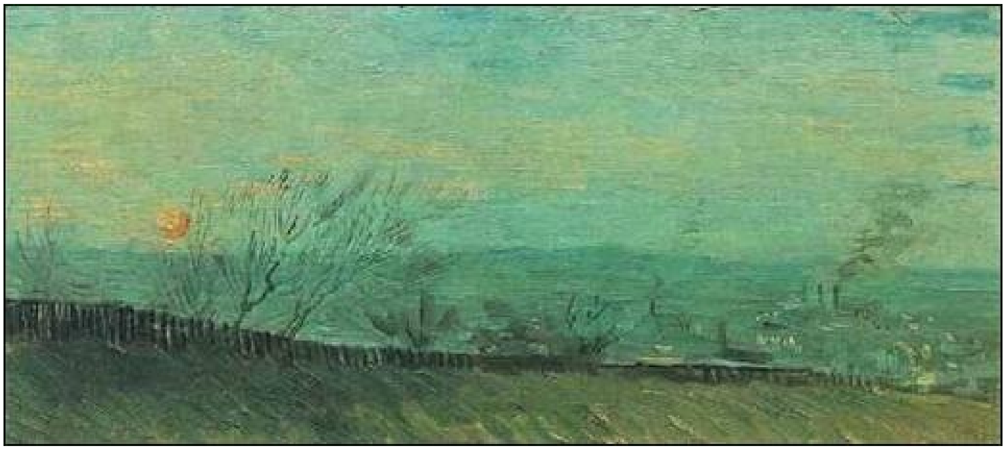


Pair of Shoes, A

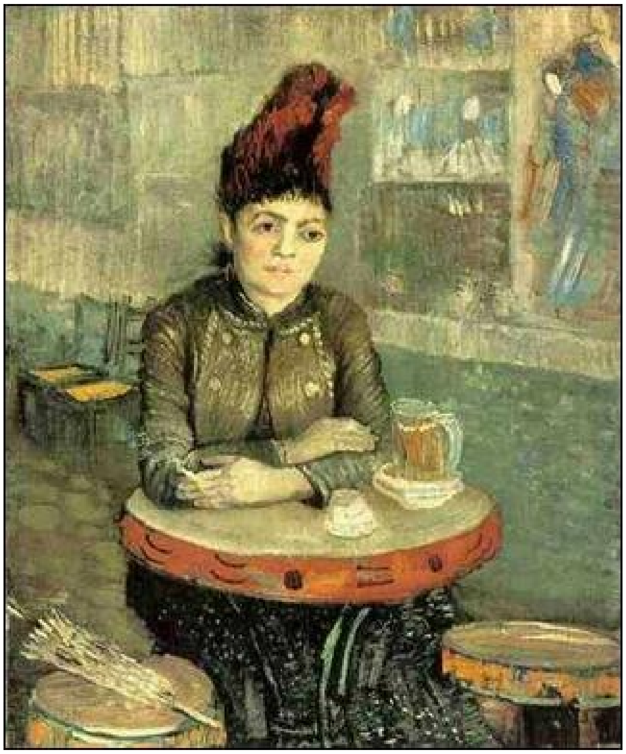
Oil on canvas
34.0 x 41.5 cm.
Paris: early 1887



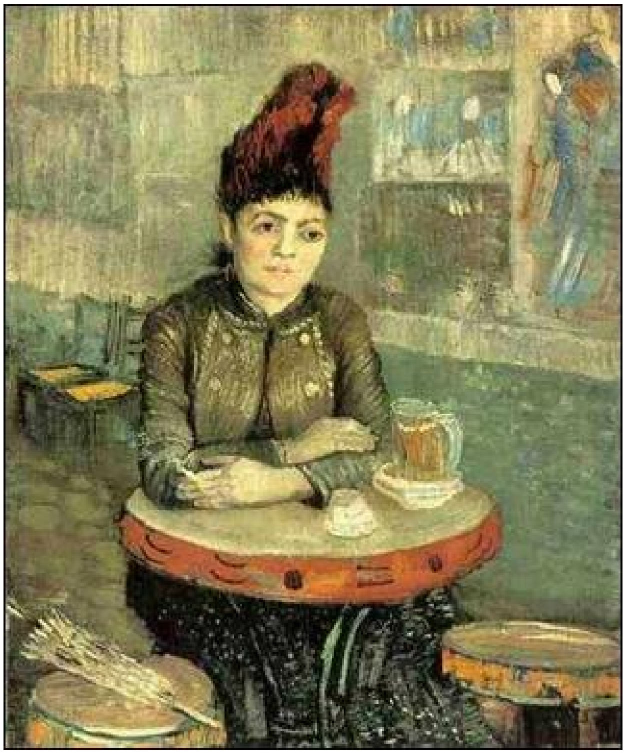
Self-Portrait with Pipe and Glass
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 50.0 cm.
Paris: early 1887



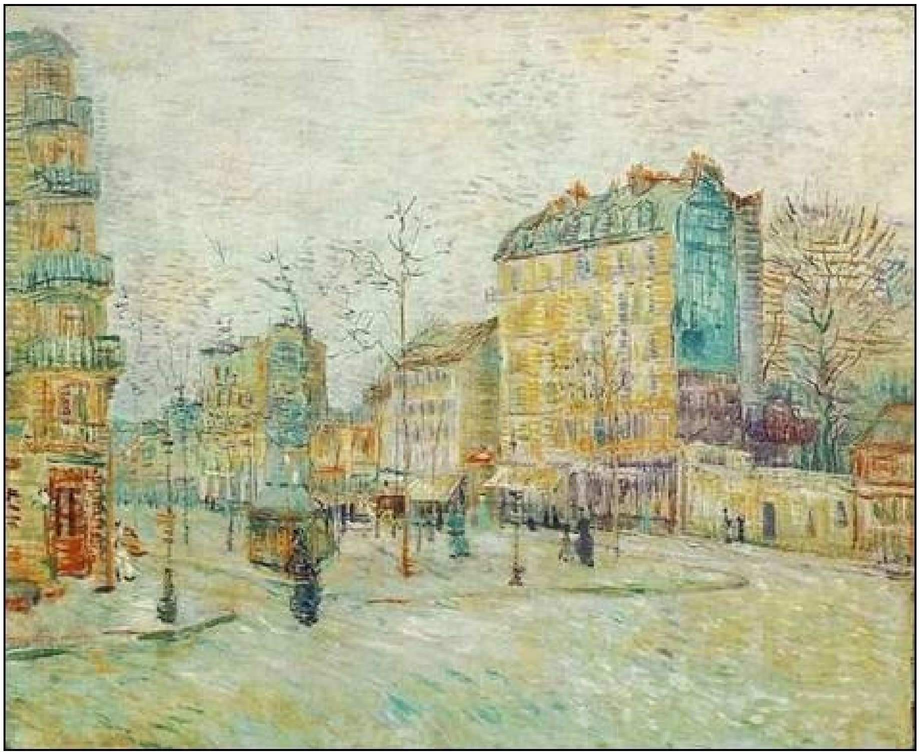
Factories Seen from a Hillside in Moonlight
Oil on canvas
21.0 x 46.5 cm.
Paris: first half, 1887



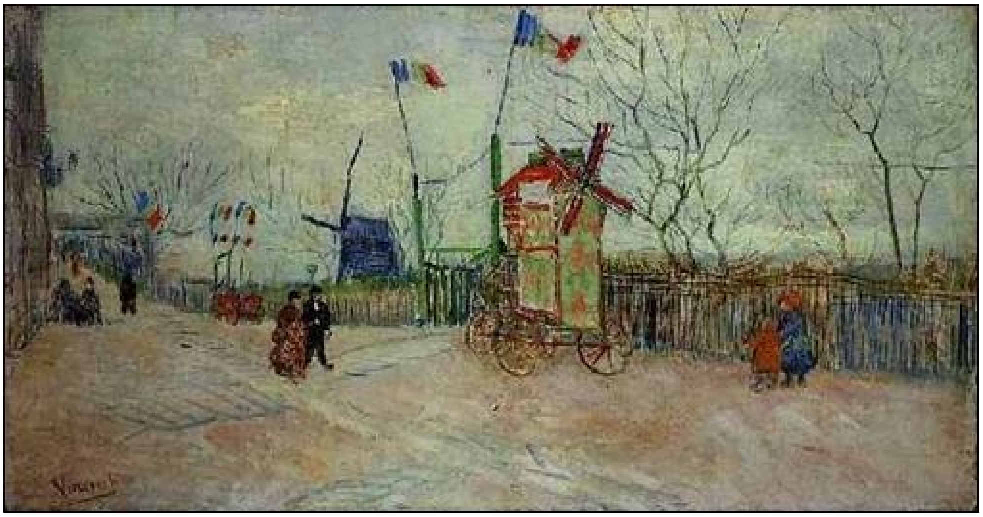
Agostina Segatori Sitting in the Café du Tambourin
Oil on canvas
55.5 x 46.5 cm.
Paris: February-March, 1887



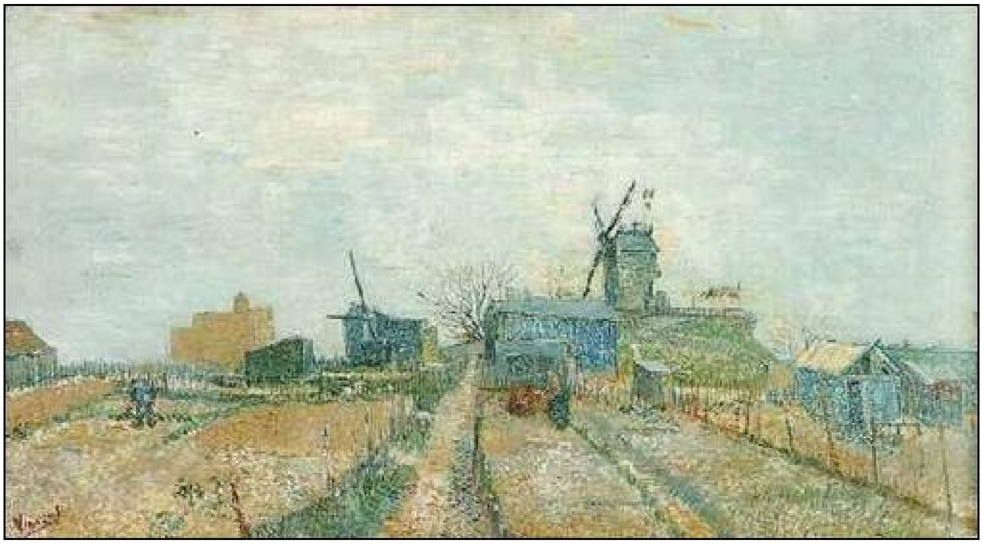
Agostina Segatori Sitting in the Café du Tambourin
Oil on canvas
55.5 x 46.5 cm.
Paris: February-March, 1887



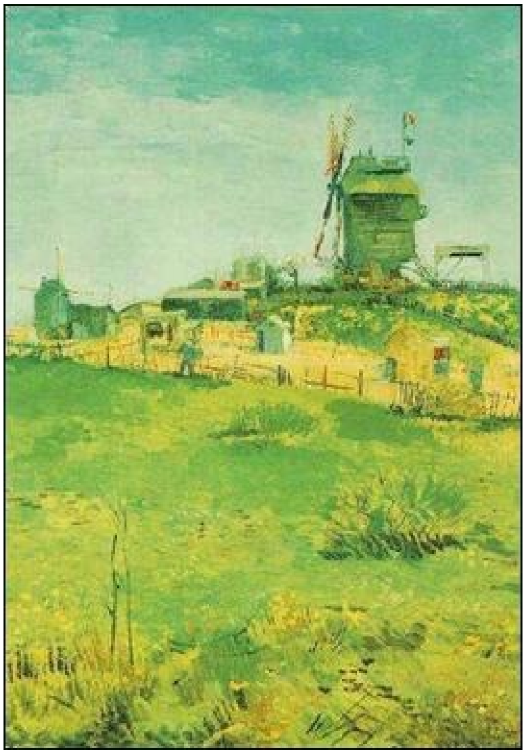
Boulevard de Clichy
Oil on canvas
42.5 x 55.0 cm.
Paris: February-March, 1887



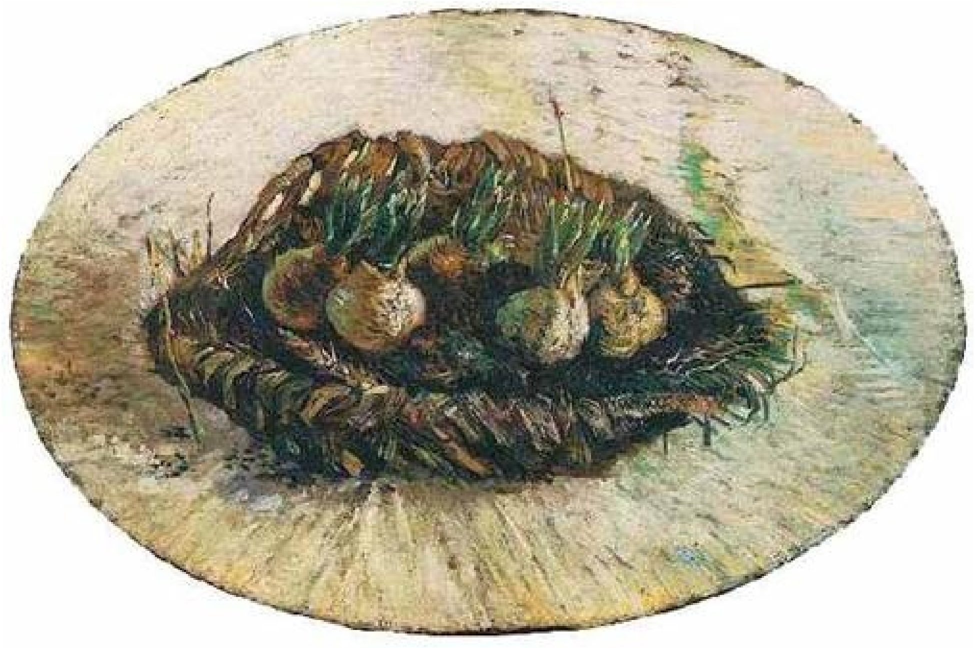
Street Scene in Montmartre: Le Moulin a Poivre
Oil on canvas
34.5 x 64.5 cm.
Paris: February-March, 1887



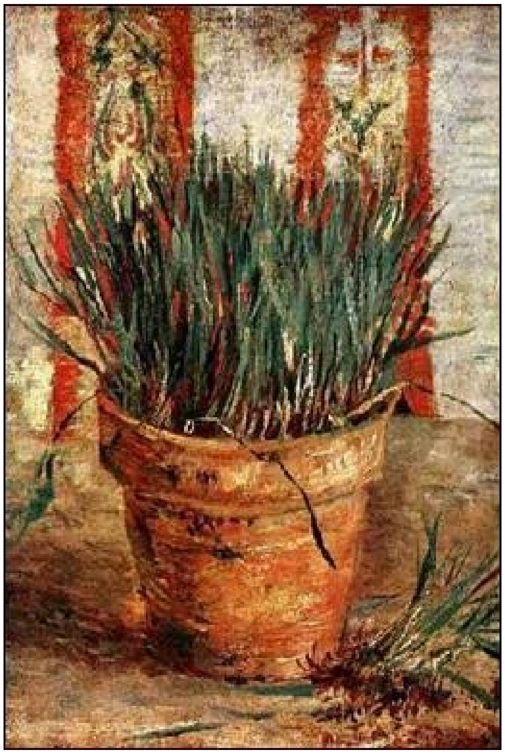
Vegetable Garden in Montmartre
Oil on canvas
44.8 x 81.0 cm.
Paris: February-March, 1887



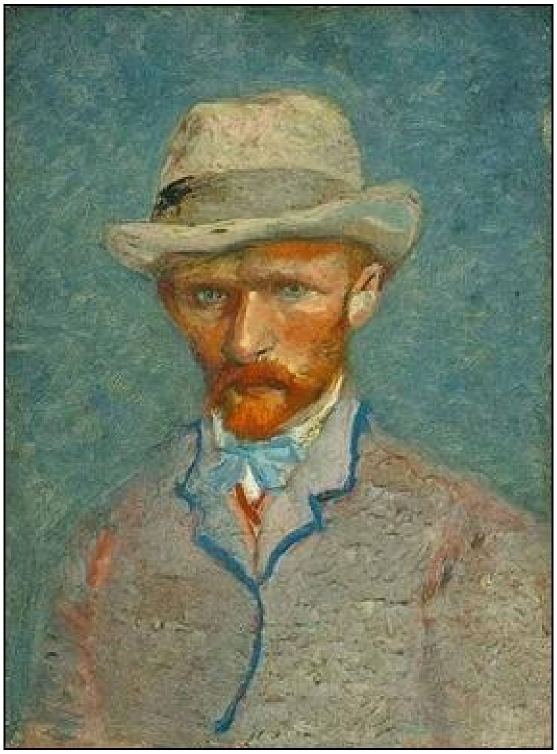
Le Moulin de la Galette
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: March, 1887



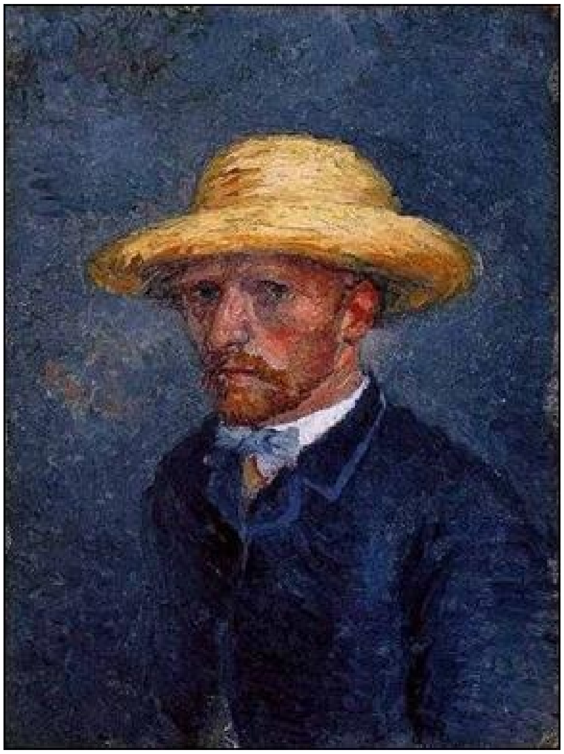
Basket of Sprouting Bulbs
Oil on panel (oval)
31.5 x 48.0 cm.
Paris: March-April, 1887



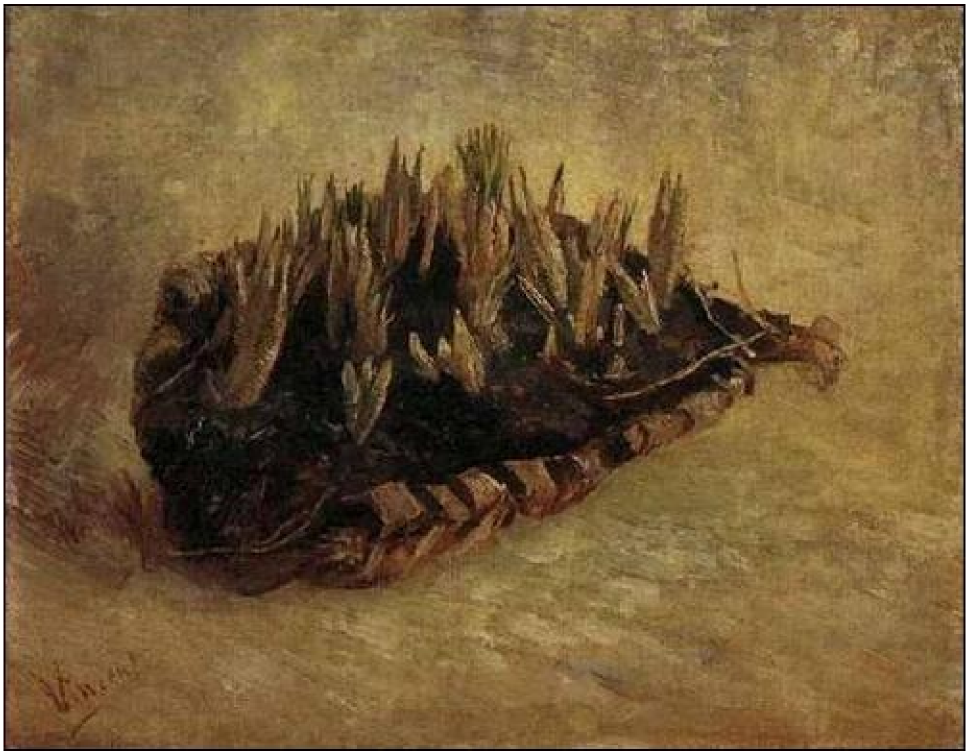
Flowerpot with Chives
Oil on canvas
31.5 x 22.0 cm.
Paris: March-April, 1887



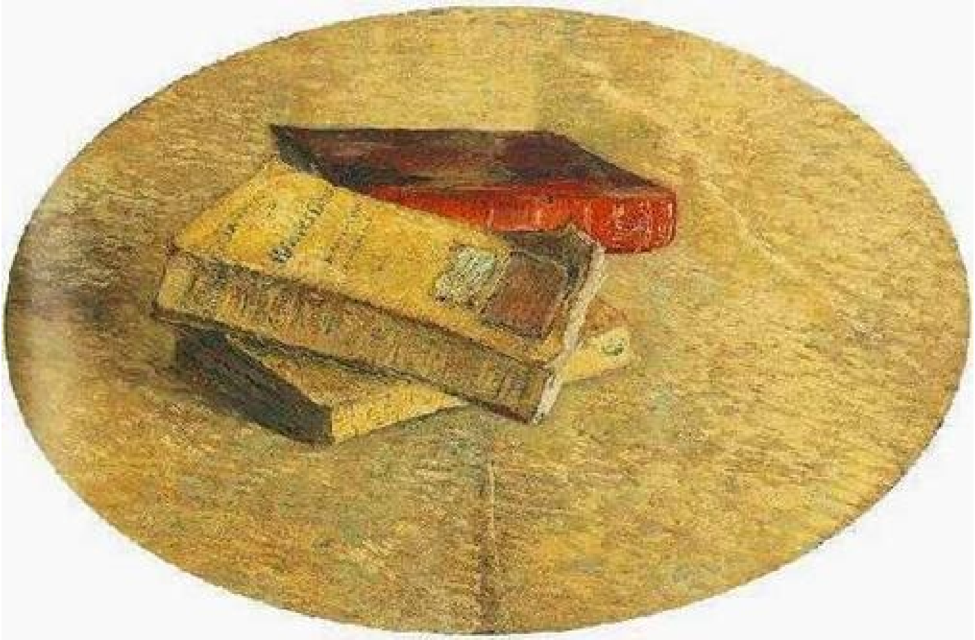
Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat
Oil on cardboard
19.0 x 14.0 cm.
Paris: March-April, 1887



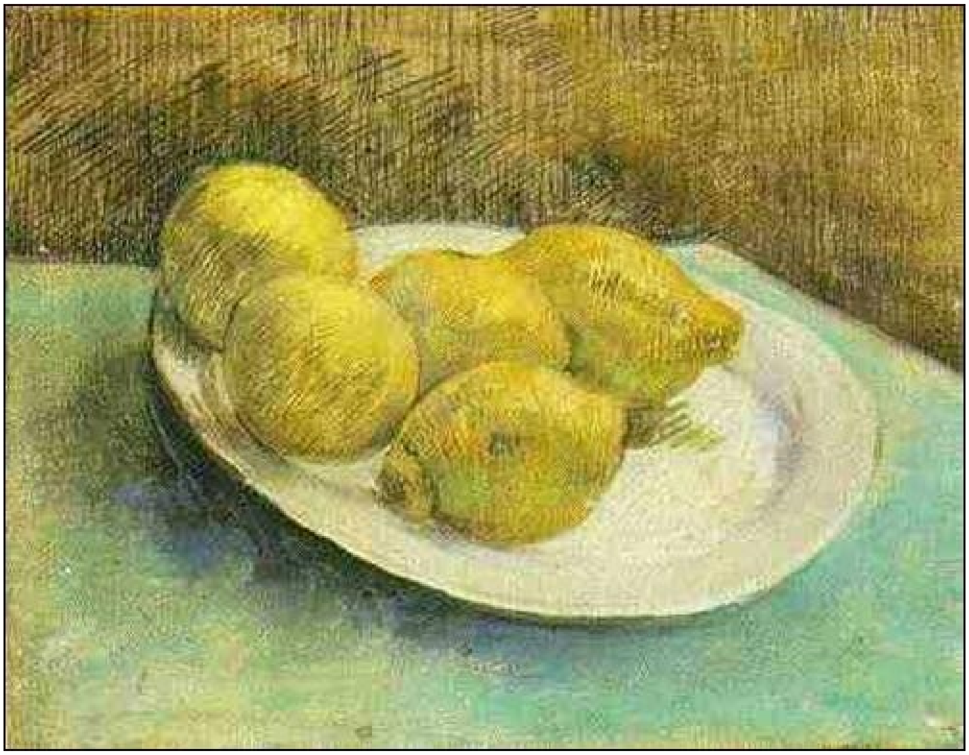
Portrait of Theo van Gogh
Oil on cardboard
19.0 x 14.0 cm.
Paris: March-April, 1887



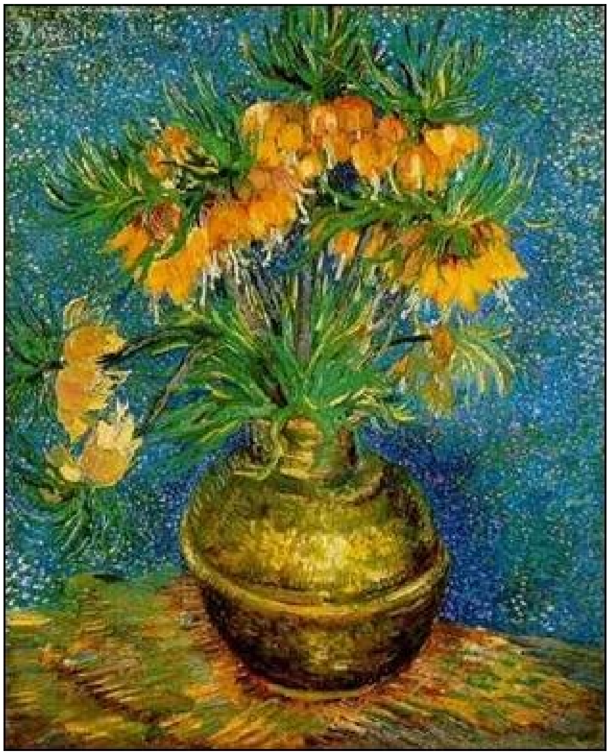
Still Life with a Basket of Crocuses
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: March-April, 1887



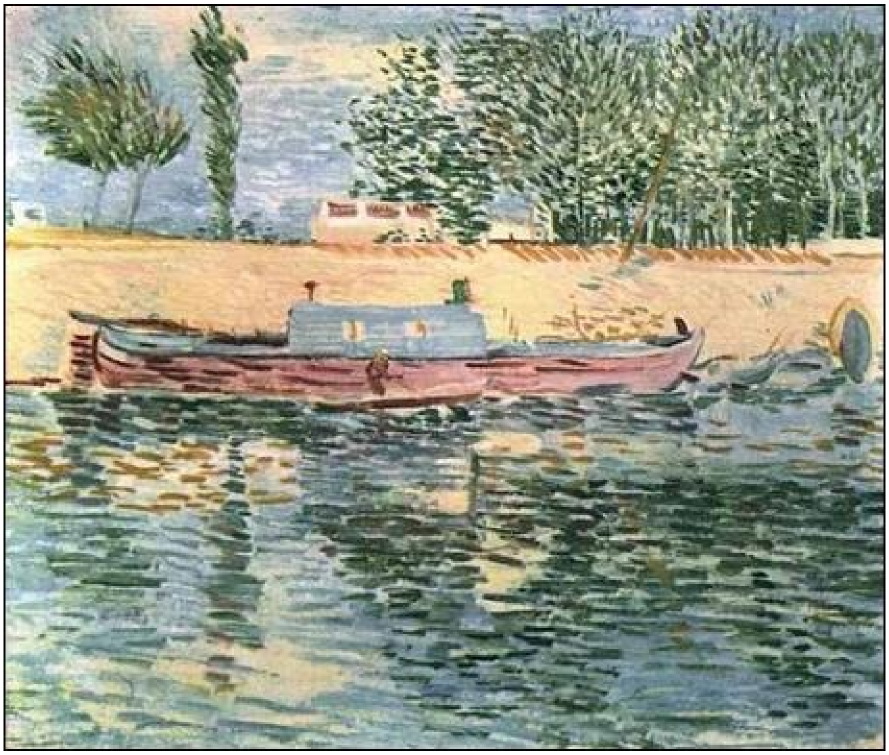
Still Life with Three Books
Oil on panel (oval)
31.0 x 48.5 cm.
Paris: March-April, 1887



Still Life with Lemons on a Plate
Oil on canvas
21.0 x 26.5 cm.
Paris: March-April, 1887

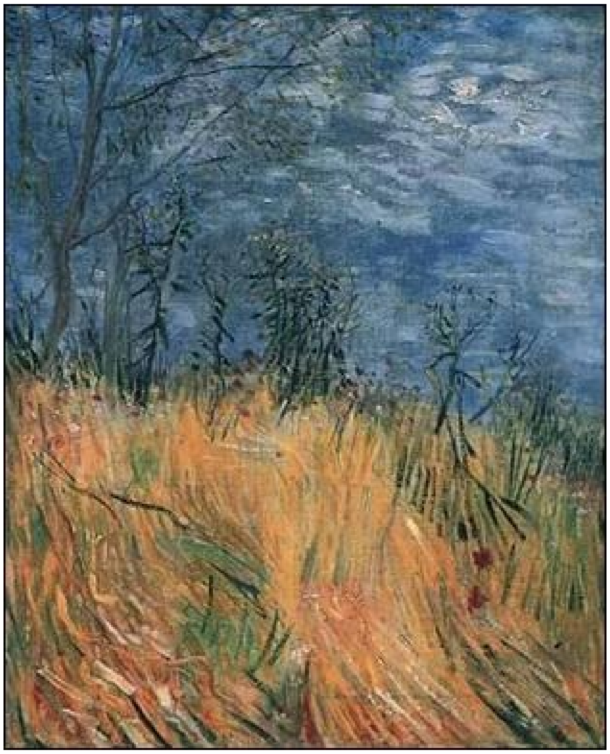


Fritillaries in a Copper Vase
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 60.5 cm.
Paris: April-May, 1887

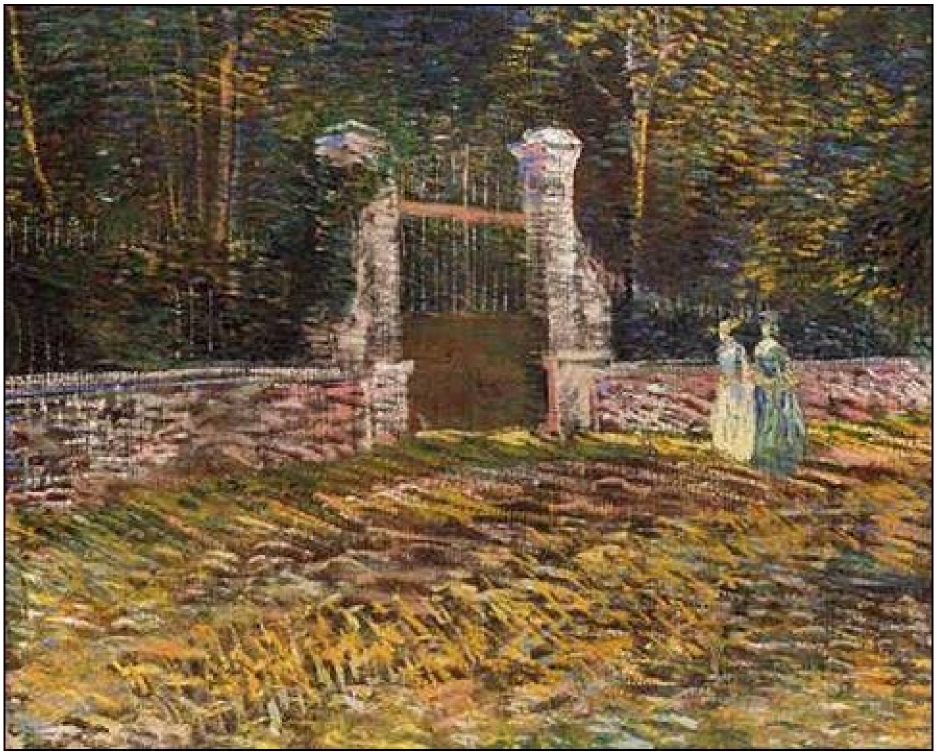


Banks of the Seine with Boats, The

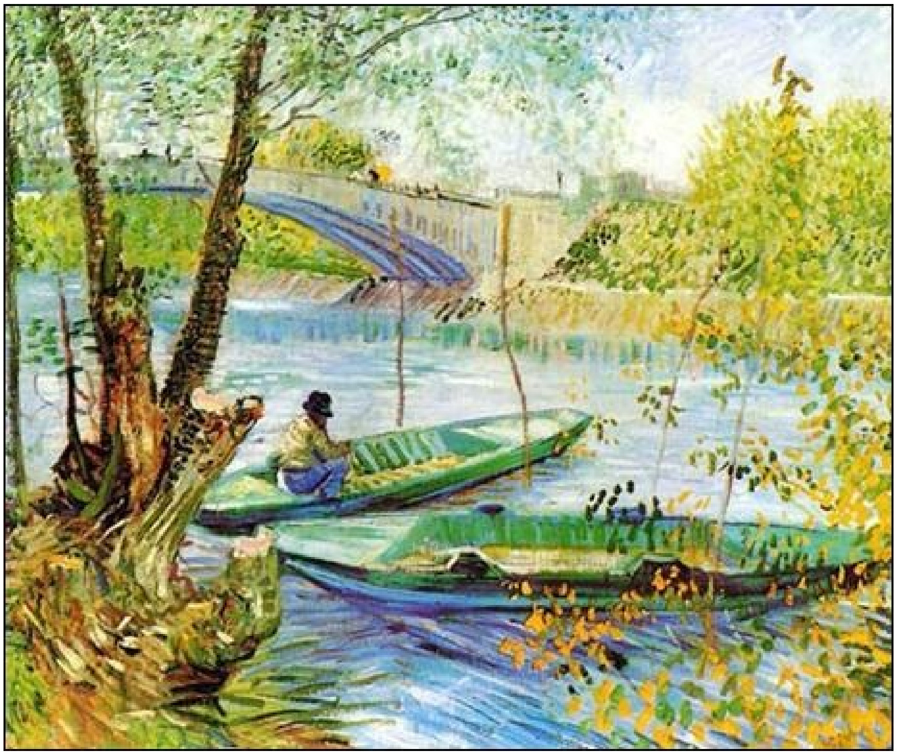
Oil on canvas
48.0 x 55.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



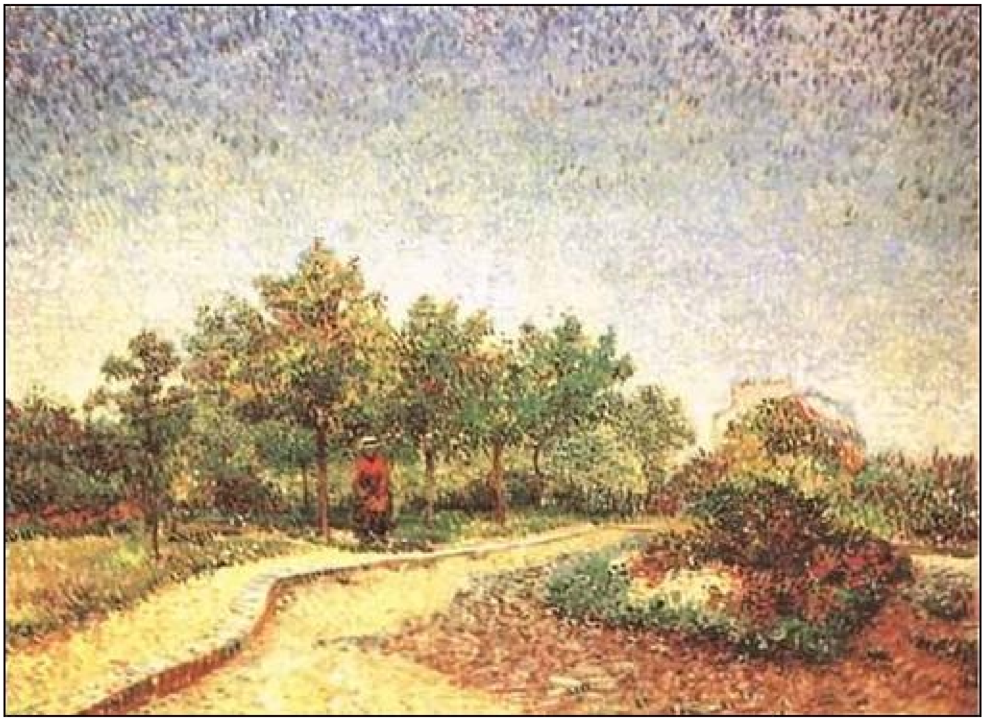
Edge of a Wheatfield with Poppies
Oil on canvas on cardboard
40.0 x 32.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



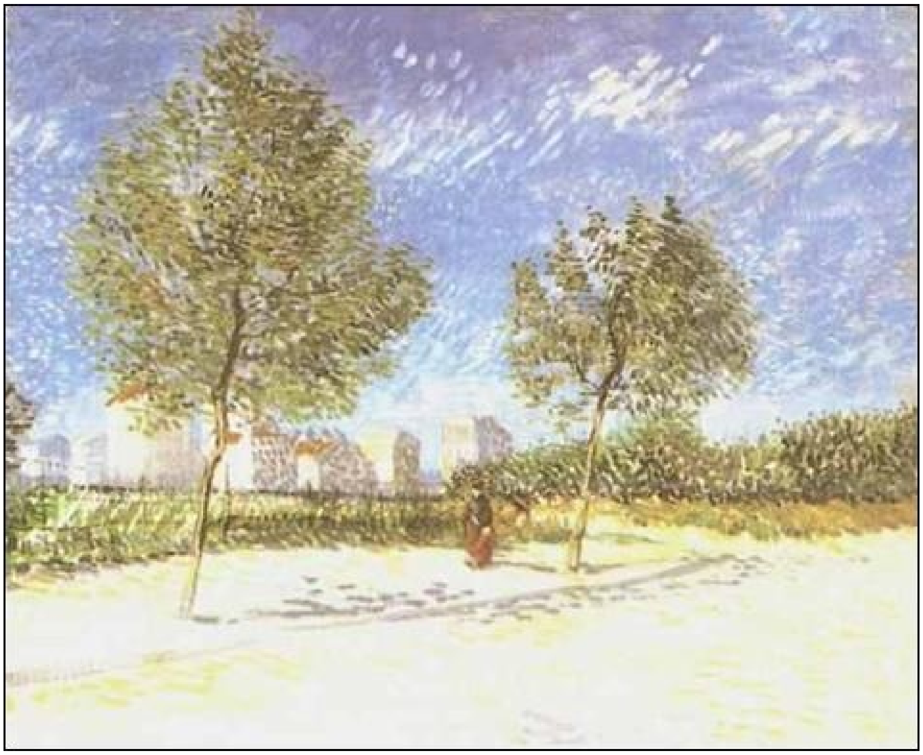
Entrance of Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnières
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 67.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



Fishing in Spring
Oil on canvas
50.5 x 60.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

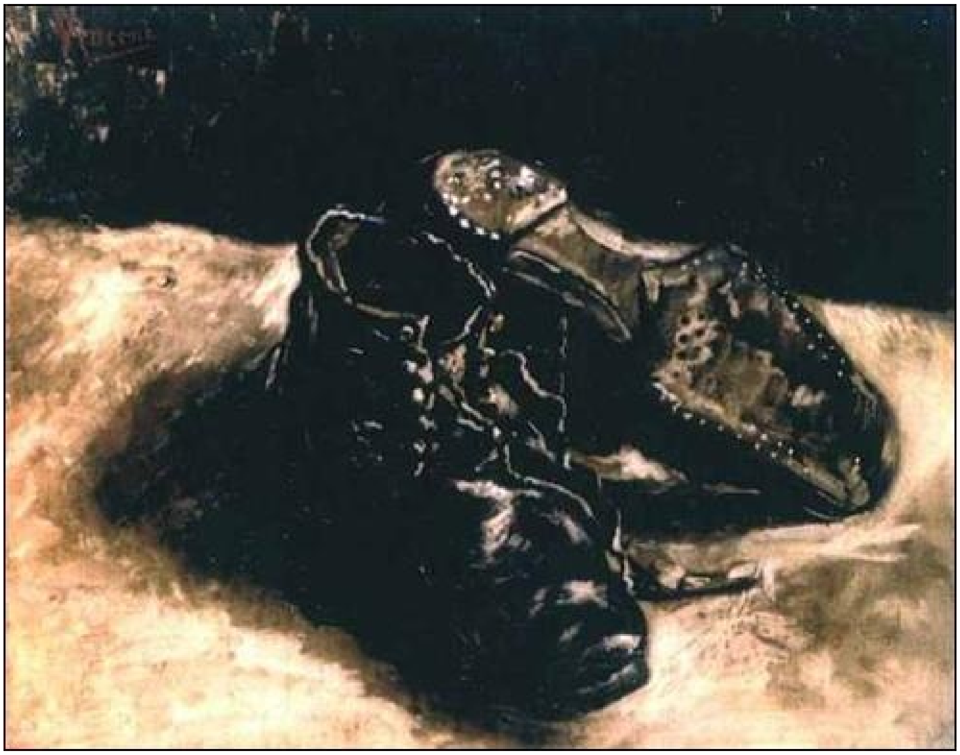


Lane in Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Oil on canvas
59.0 x 81.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



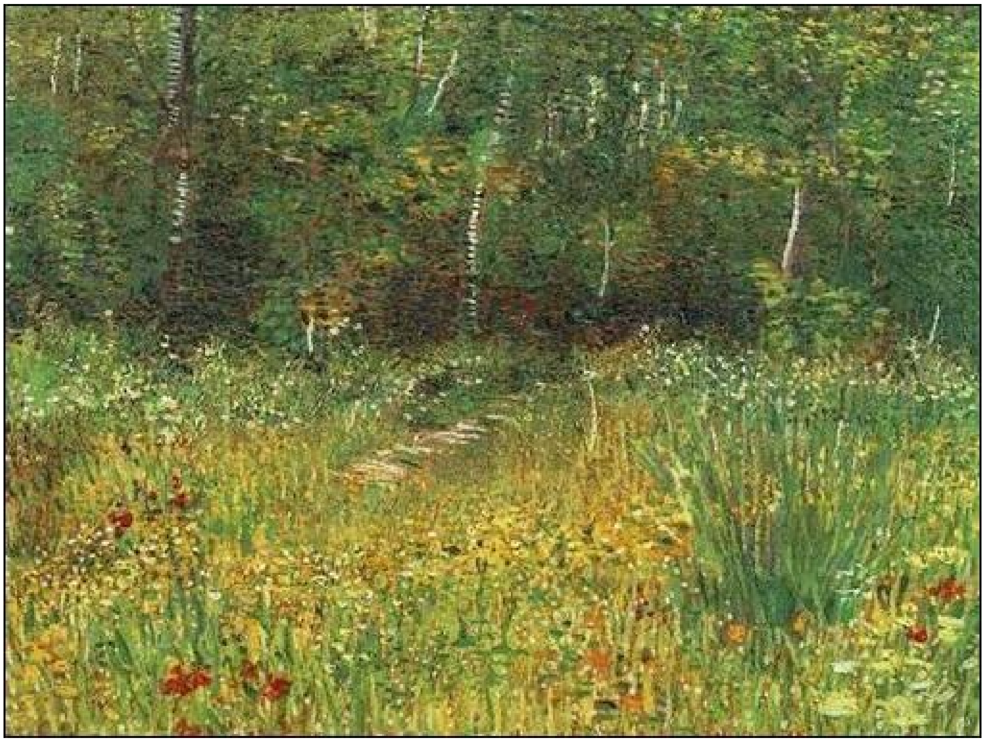
On the Outskirts of Paris

Oil on canvas
38.0 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



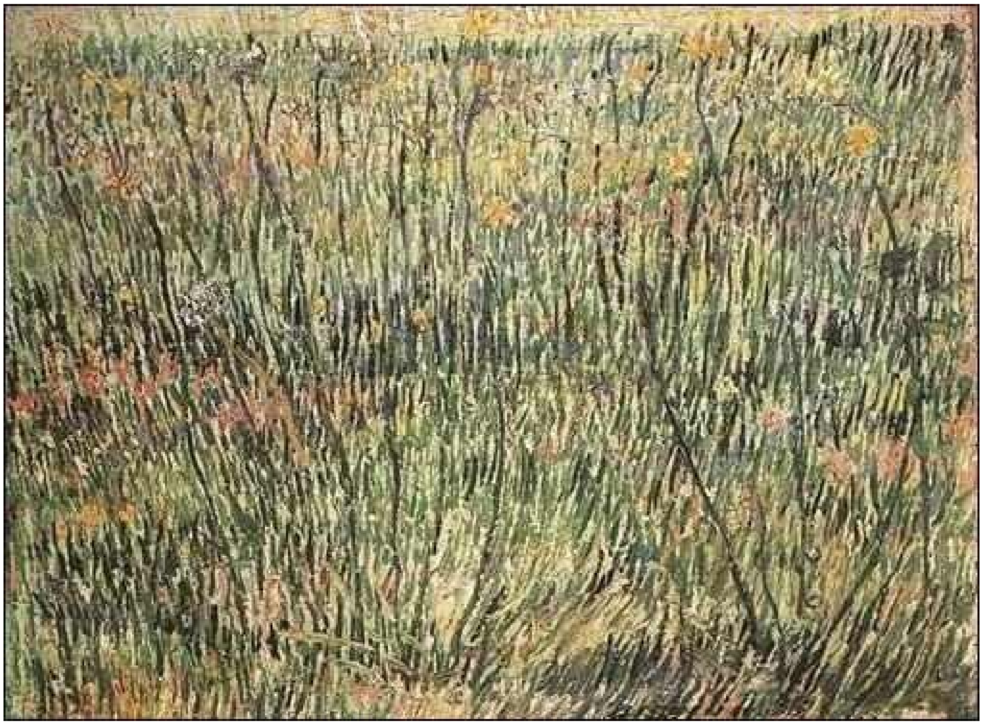
Pair of Shoes, A

Oil on canvas
37.5 x 45.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

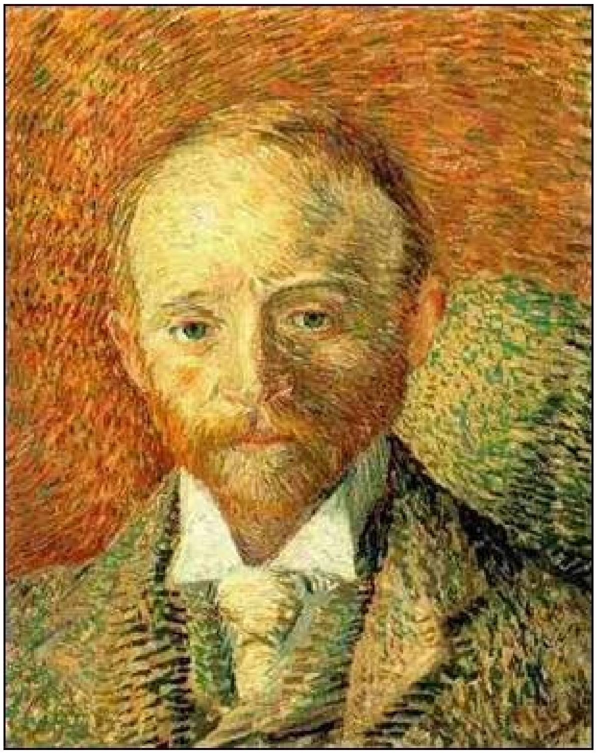


Park at Asnieres in Spring

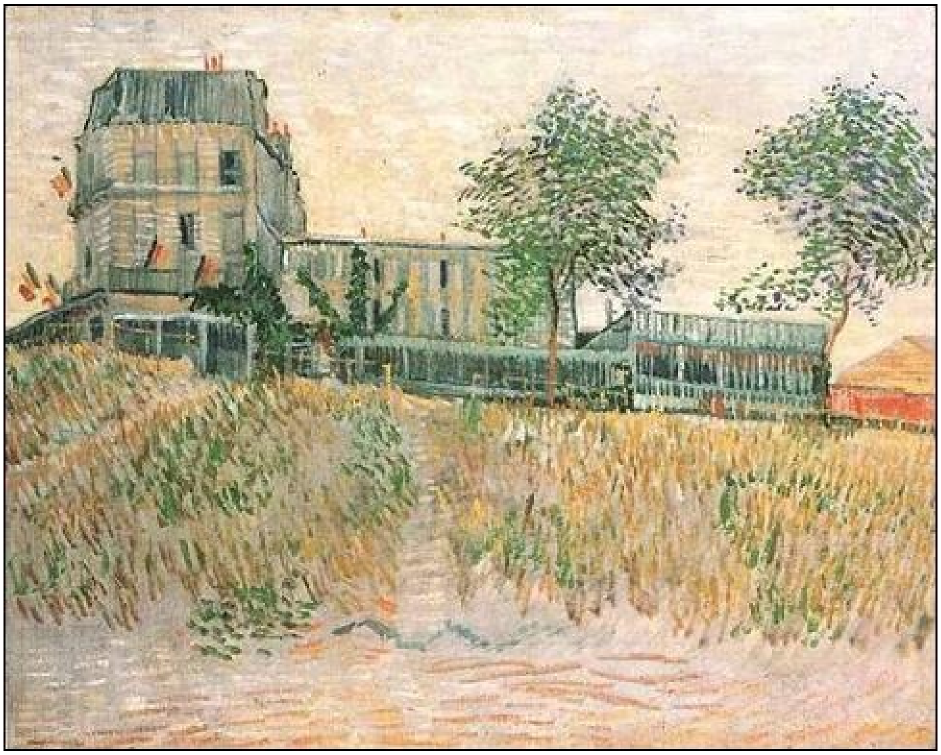
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 65.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



Pasture in Bloom
Oil on canvas
31.5 x 40.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

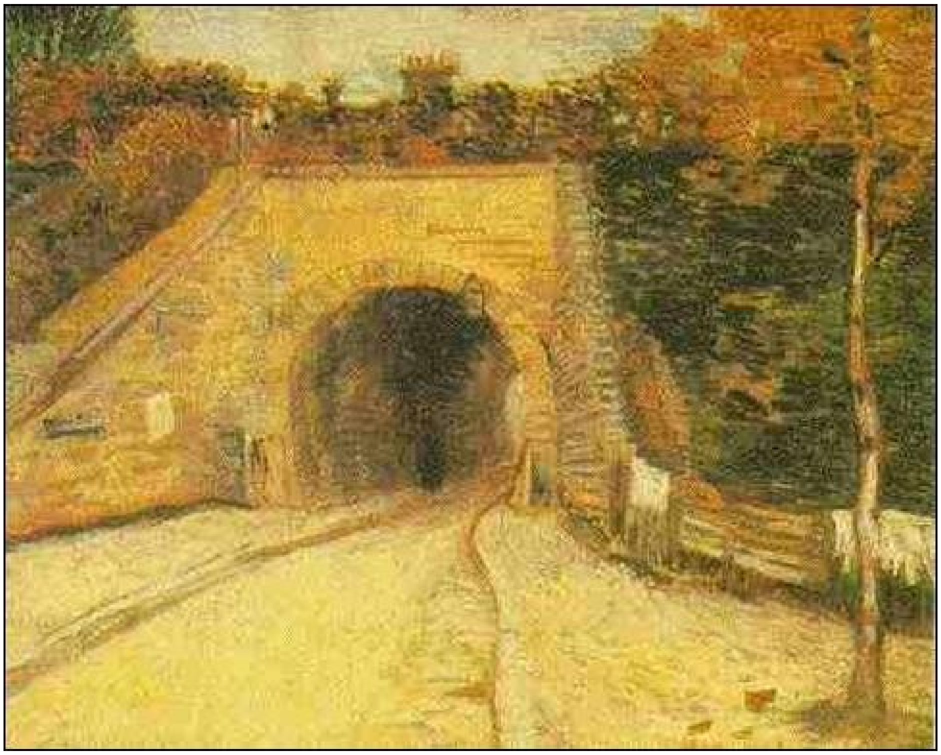


Portrait of the Art Dealer Alexander Reid
Oil on cardboard
41.5 x 33.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

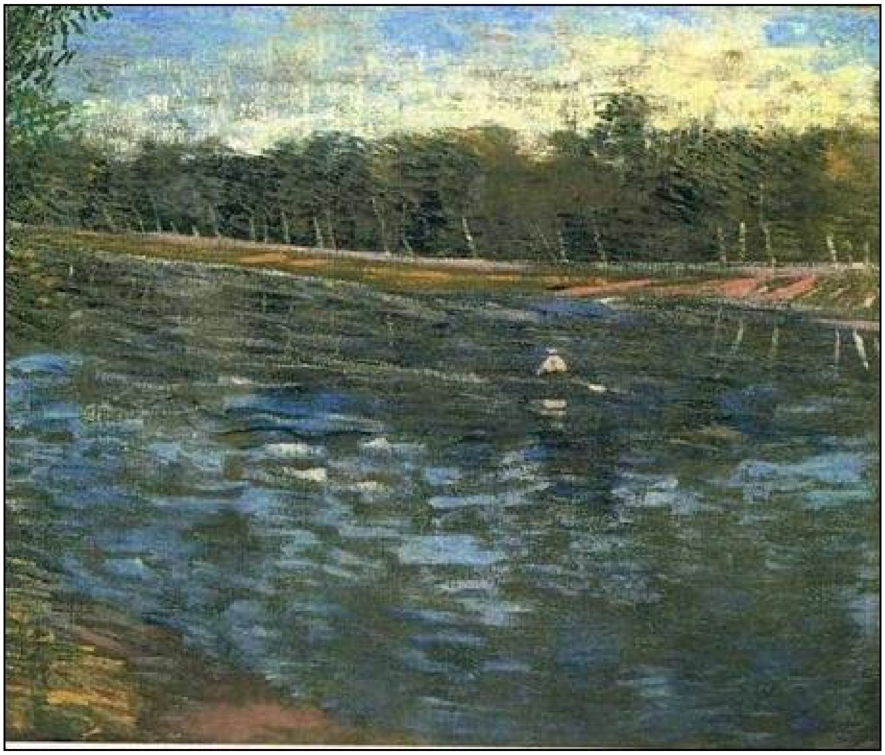


Restaurant de la Sirene at Asnières, The

Oil on canvas
51.5 x 64.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

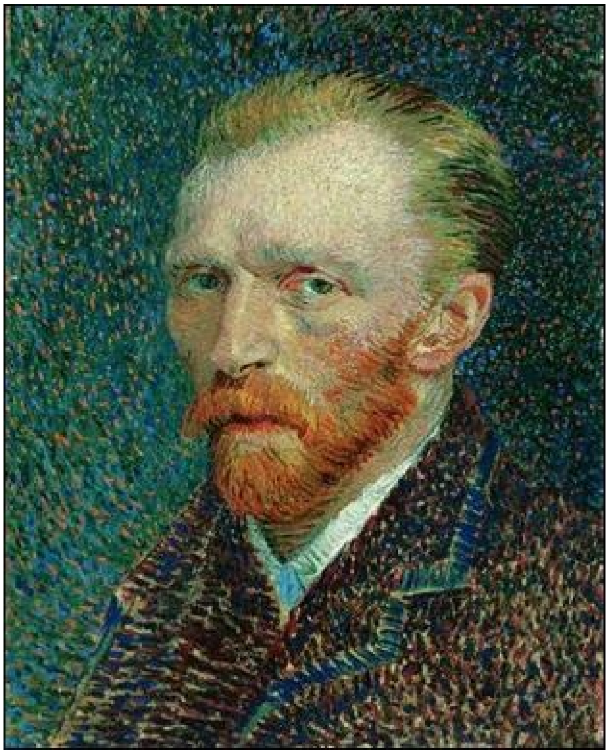


Roadway with Underpass (The Viaduct)
Oil on canvas
32.7 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

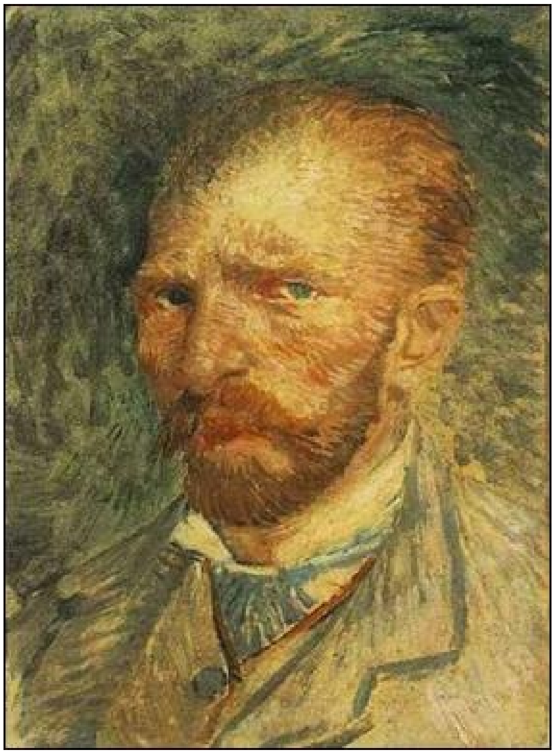


Seine with a Rowing Boat, The

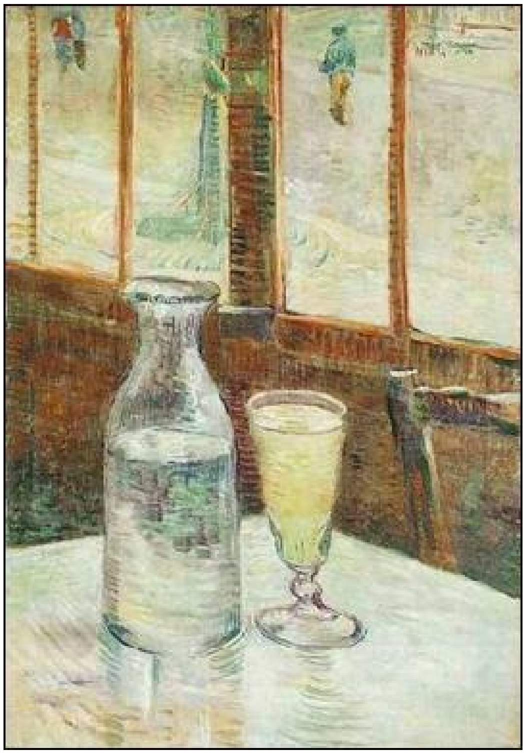
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 65.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



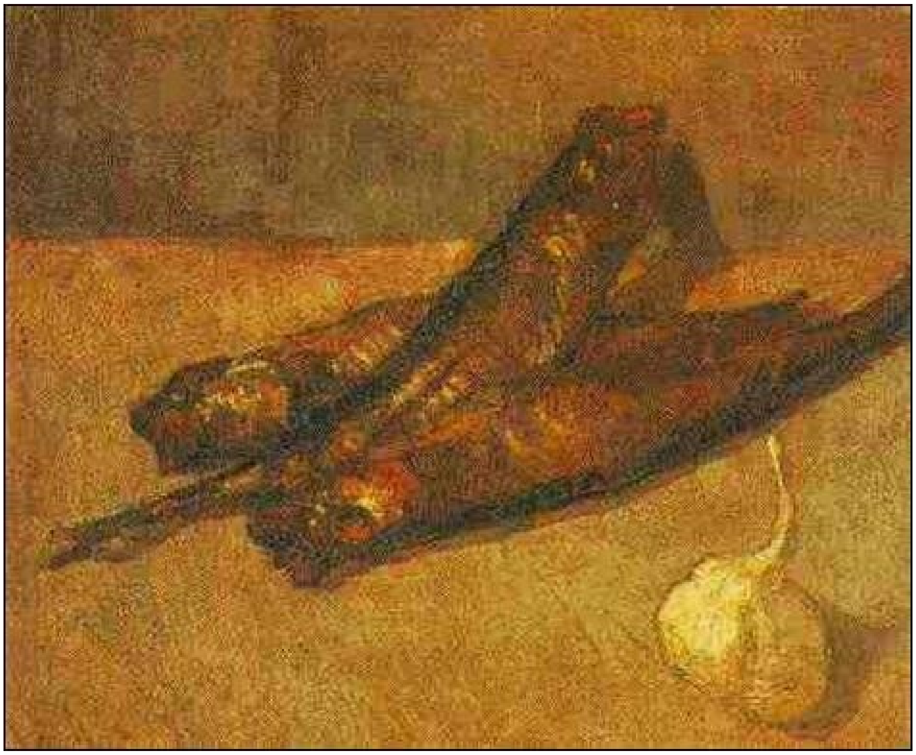
Self-portrait
Oil on cardboard
42.0 x 33.7 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



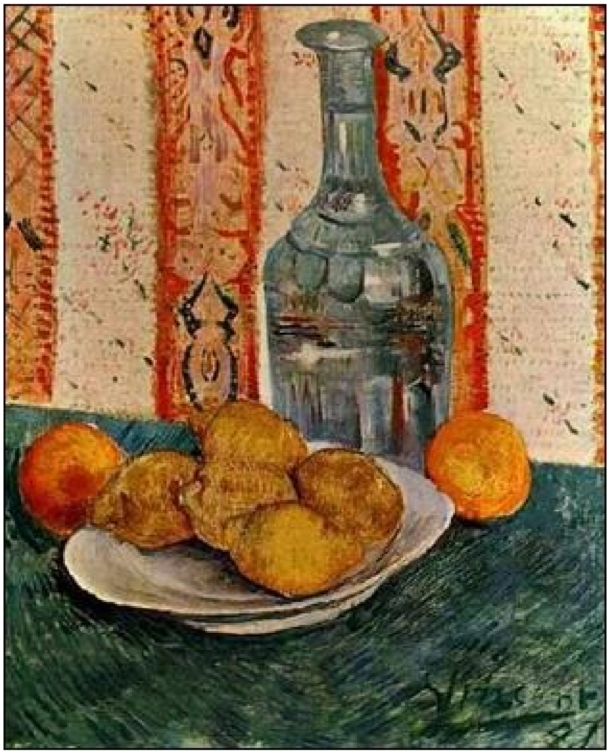
Self-Portrait
Oil on paper
32.0 x 23.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



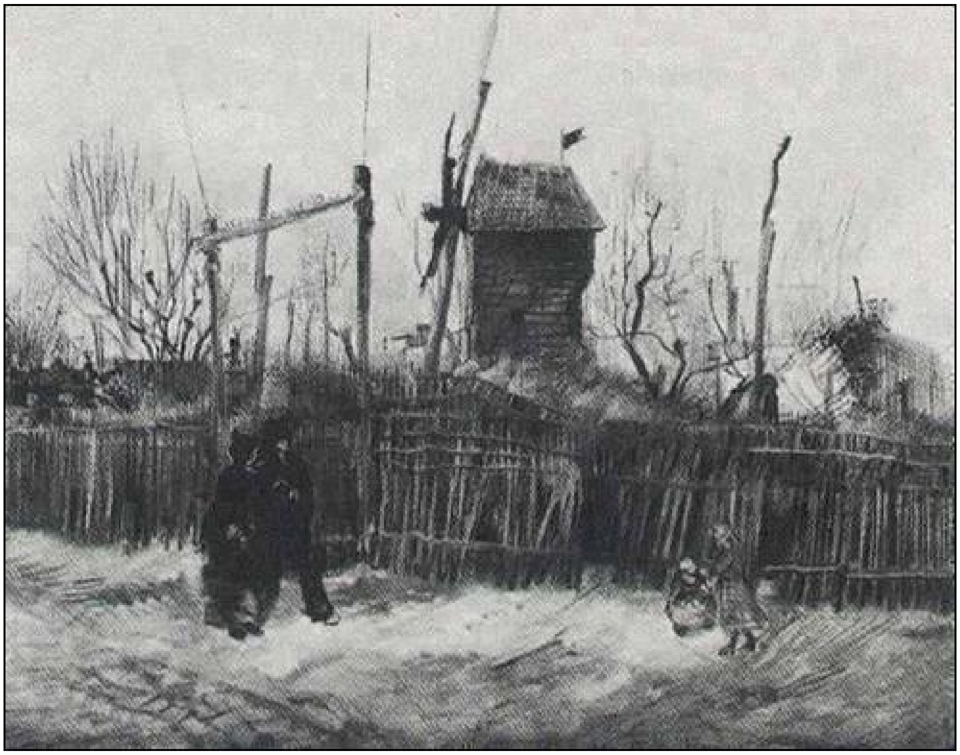
Still Life with Absinthe
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 33.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



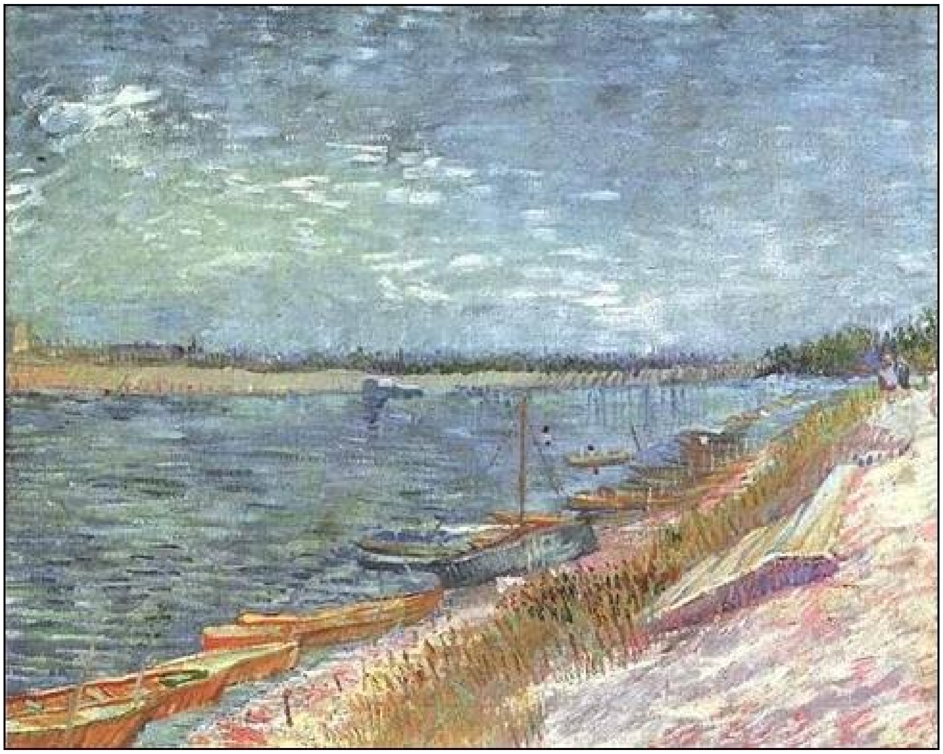
Still Life with Bloaters and Garlic
Oil on canvas
37.0 x 44.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



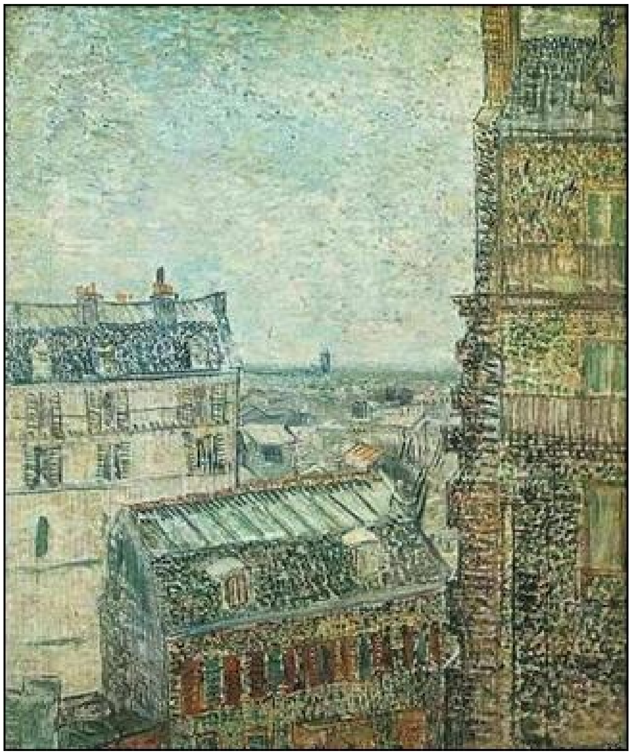
Still Life with Decanter and Lemons on a Plate
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 38.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



Street Scene in Montmartre
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

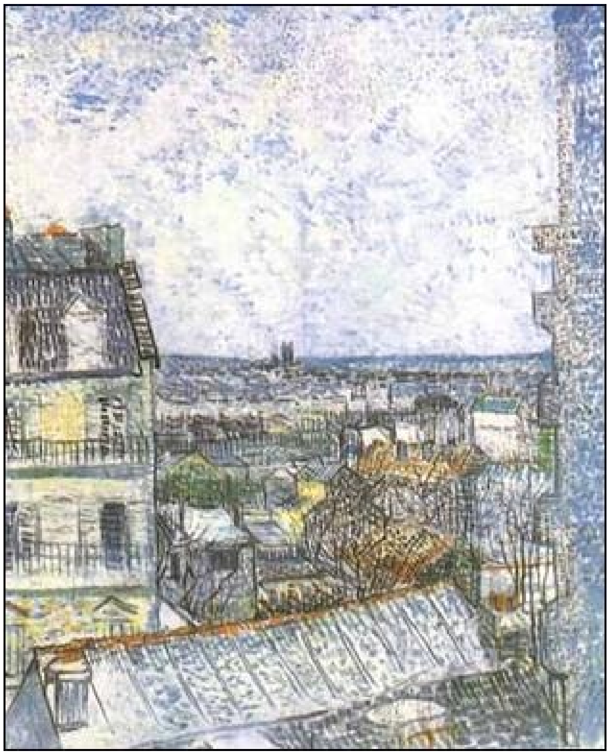


View of a River with Rowing Boats
Oil on canvas
52.0 x 65.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887

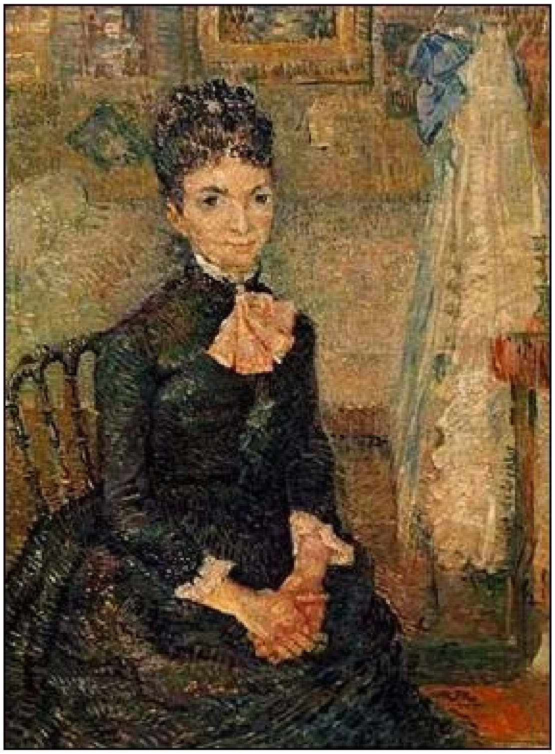


View of Paris from Vincent's Room in the Rue Lepic

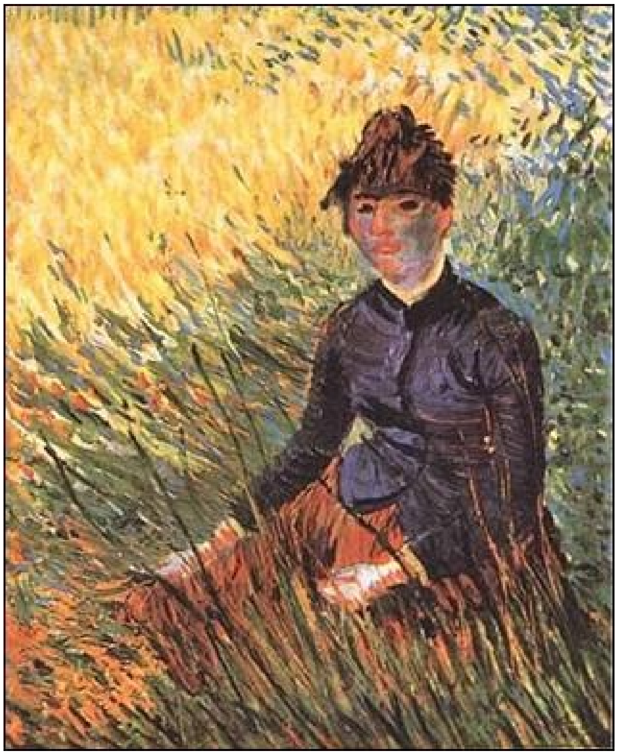
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



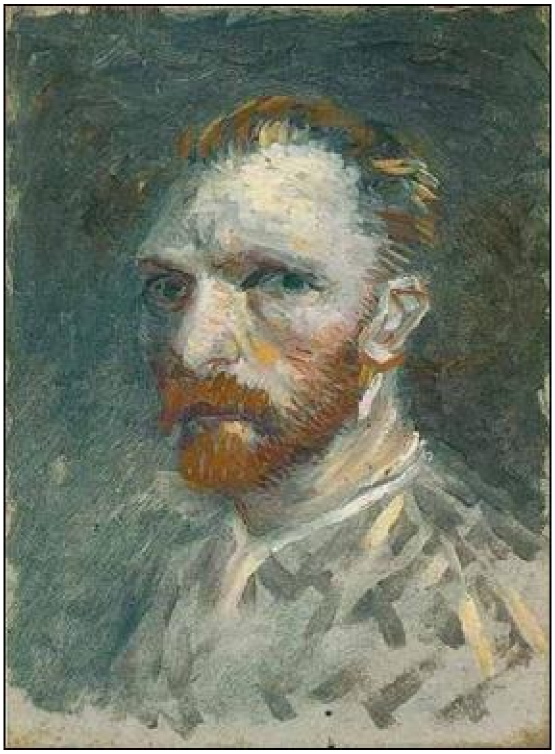
View of Paris from Vincent's Room in the Rue Lepic
Oil on cardboard
46.0 x 38.2 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



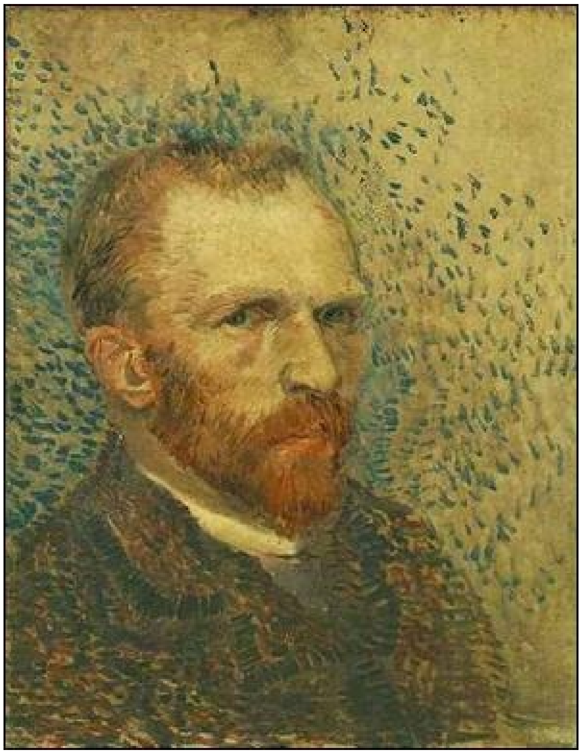
Woman Sitting by a Cradle
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 45.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



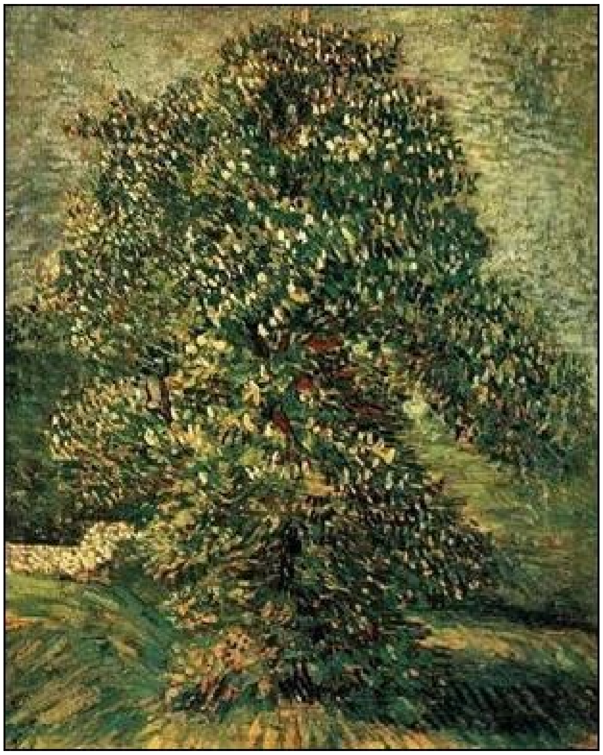
Woman Sitting in the Grass
Oil on cardboard
41.5 x 34.5 cm.
Paris: Spring, 1887



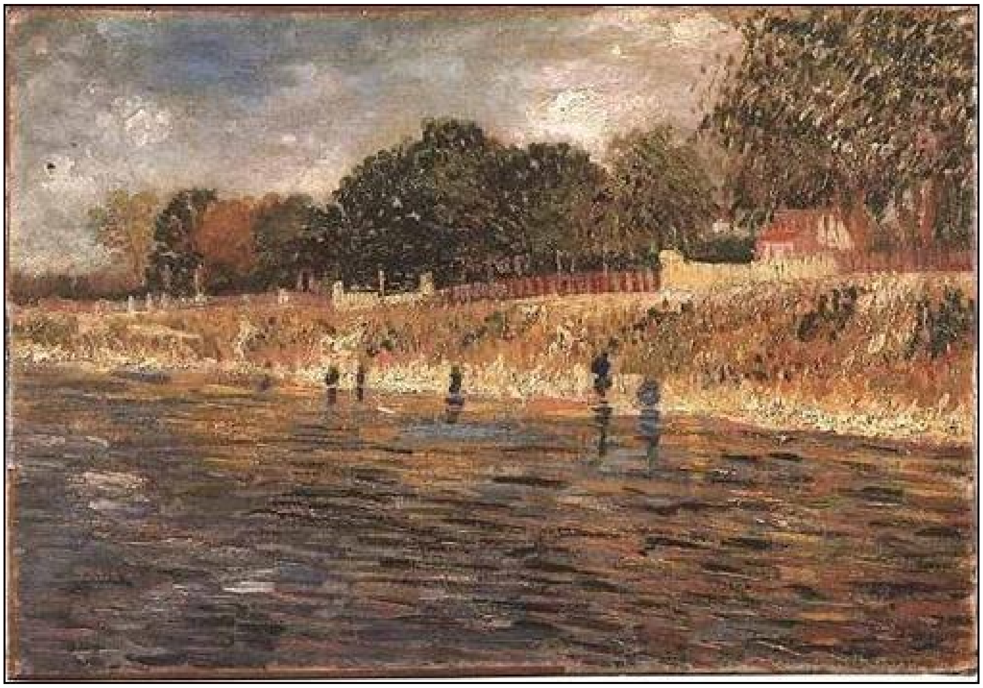
Self-Portrait
Oil on cardboard
19.0 x 14.0 cm.
Paris: Spring-Summer, 1887



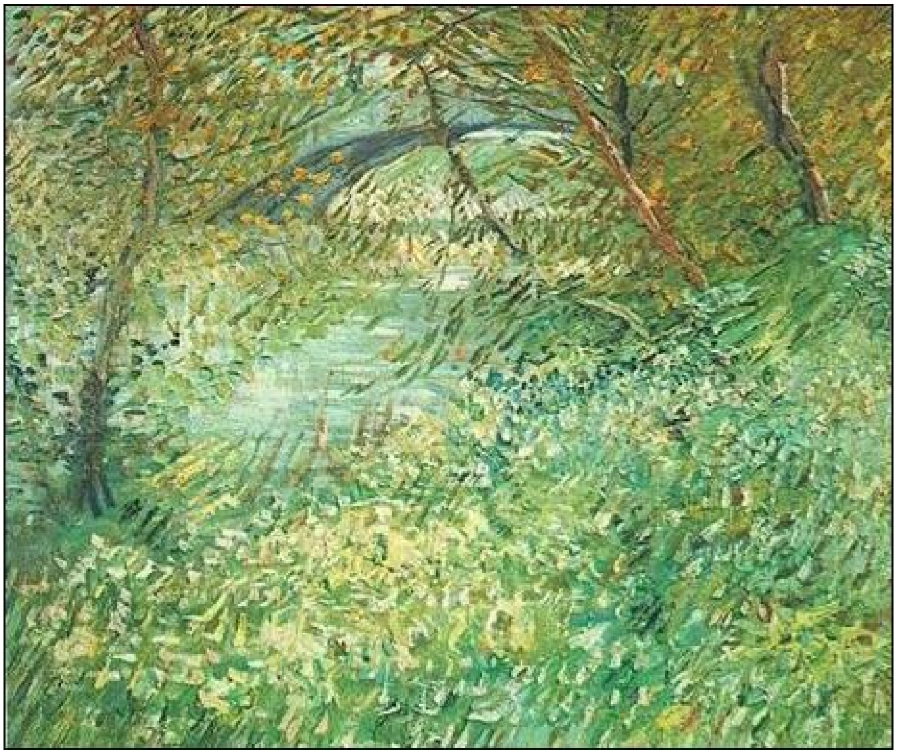
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 33.0 cm.
Paris: Spring-Summer, 1887



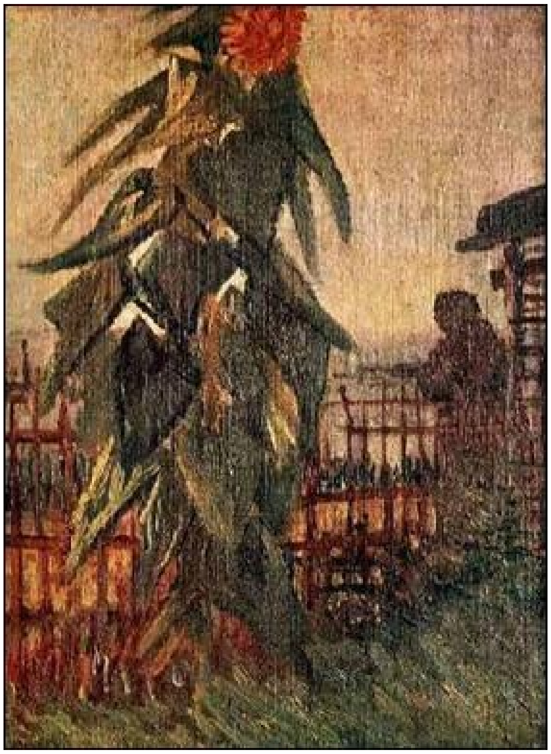
Chestnut Tree in Blossom
Oil on canvas
56.0 x 46.5 cm.
Paris: May, 1887



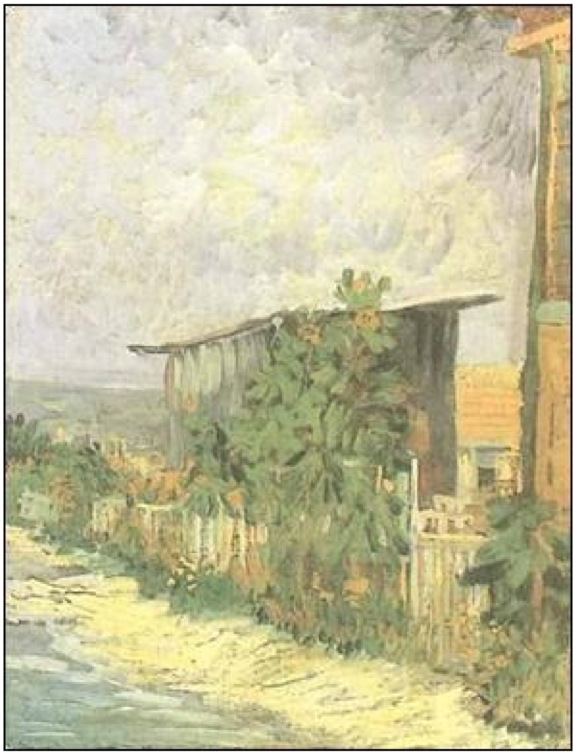
Banks of the Seine, The
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: May-June, 1887



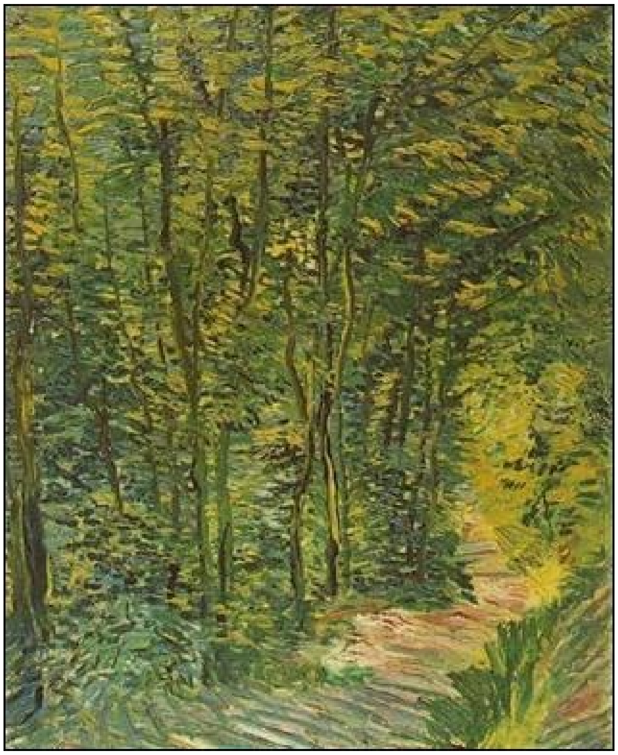
Banks of the Seine with Pont de Clichy in the Spring
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 60.0 cm.
Paris: June, 1887



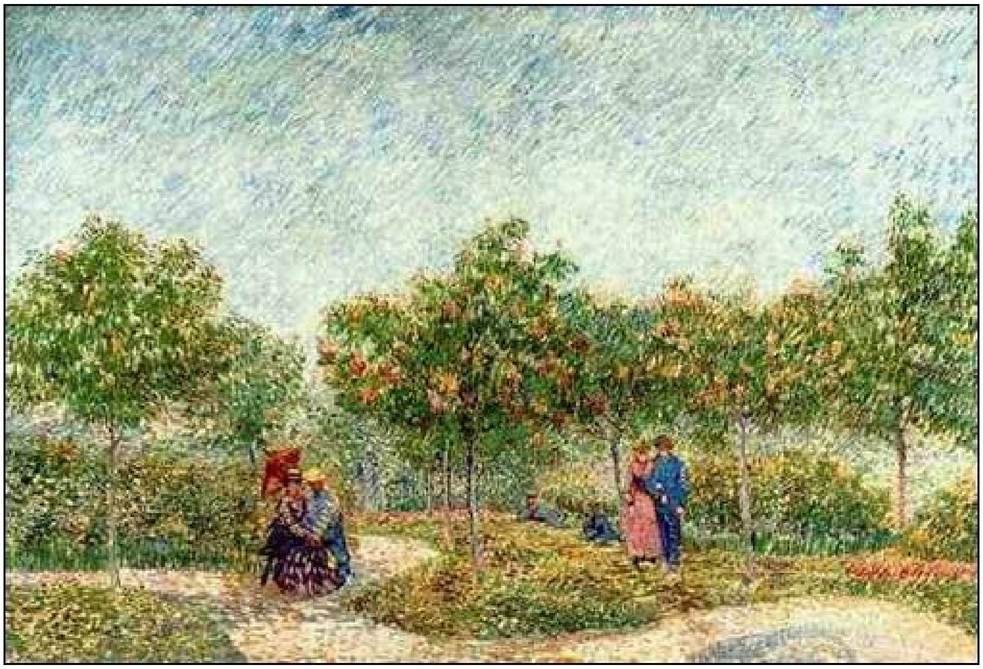
Garden with Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
42.5 x 35.5 cm.
Paris: June, 1887



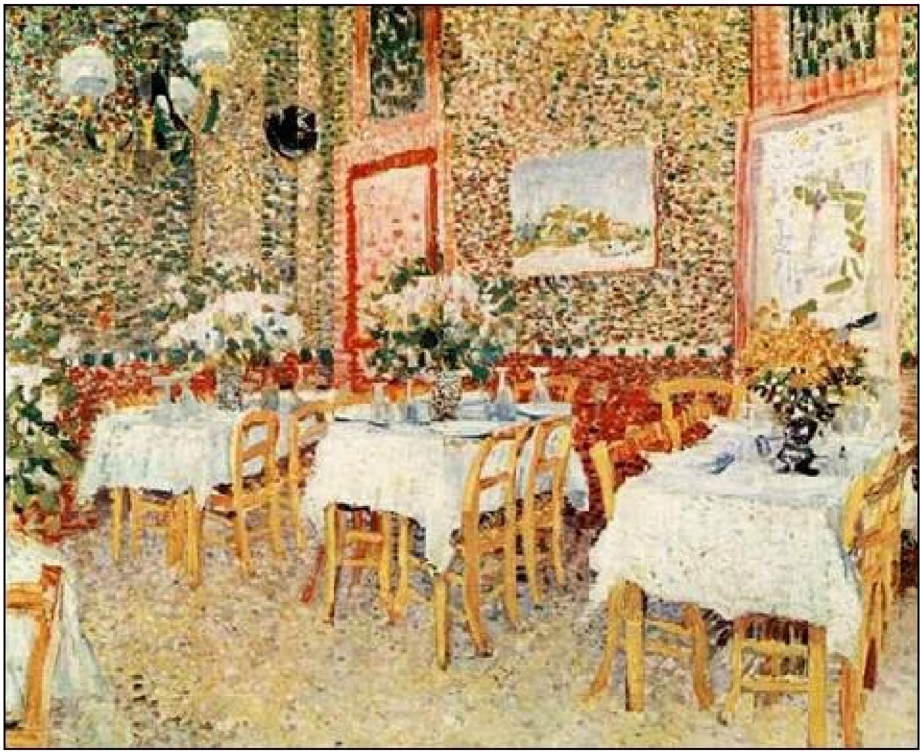
Montmartre Path with Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: June, 1887



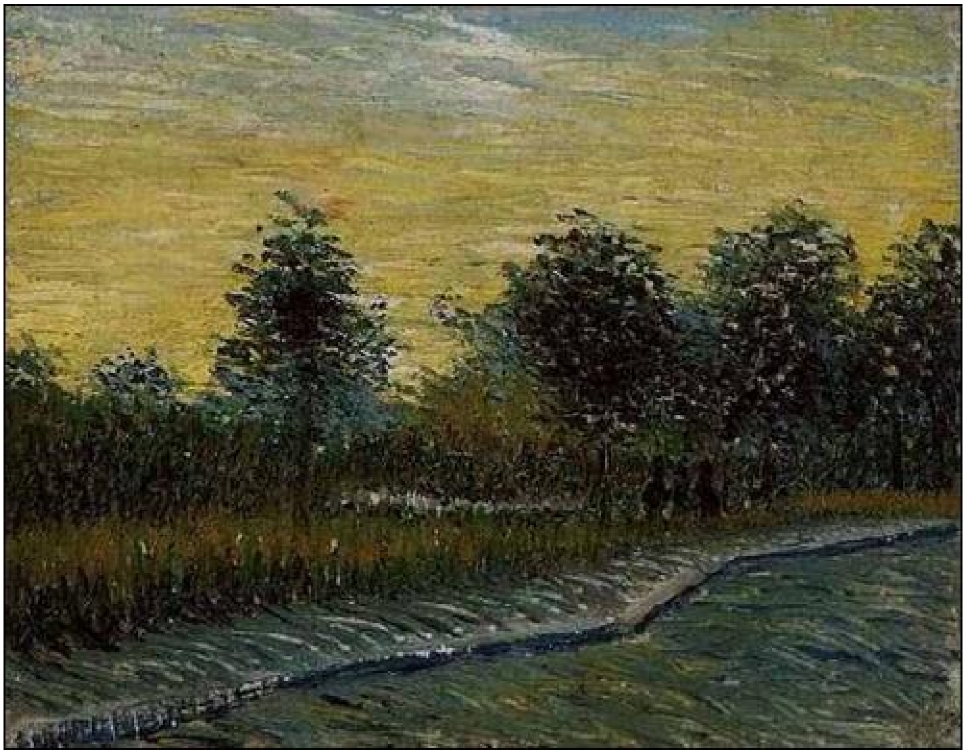
Path in the Woods
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.5 cm.
Paris: June, 1887



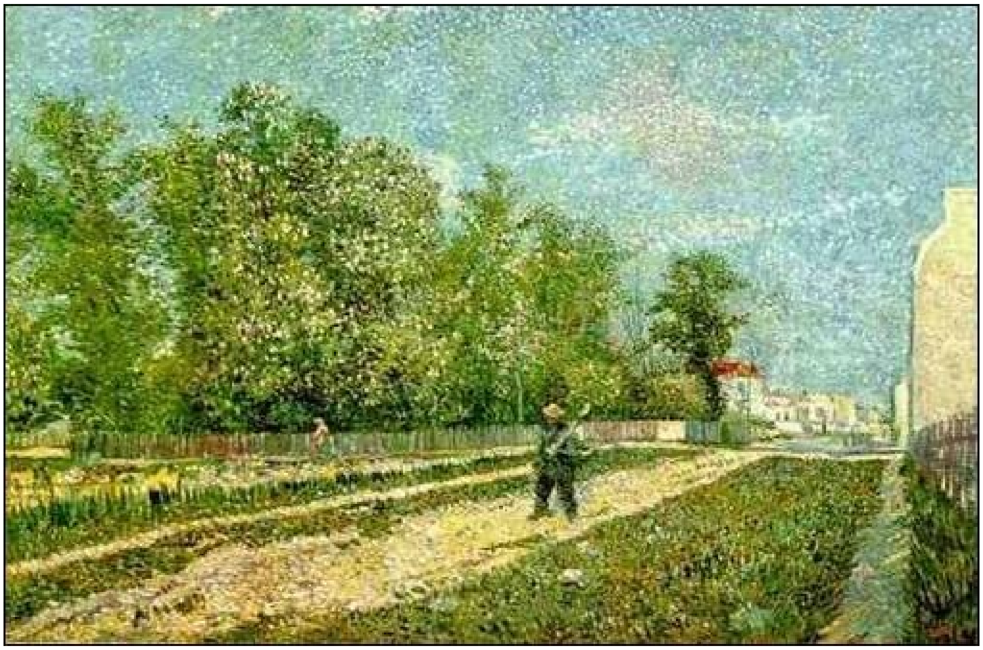
Couples in the Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Oil on canvas
75.0 x 112.5 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1887



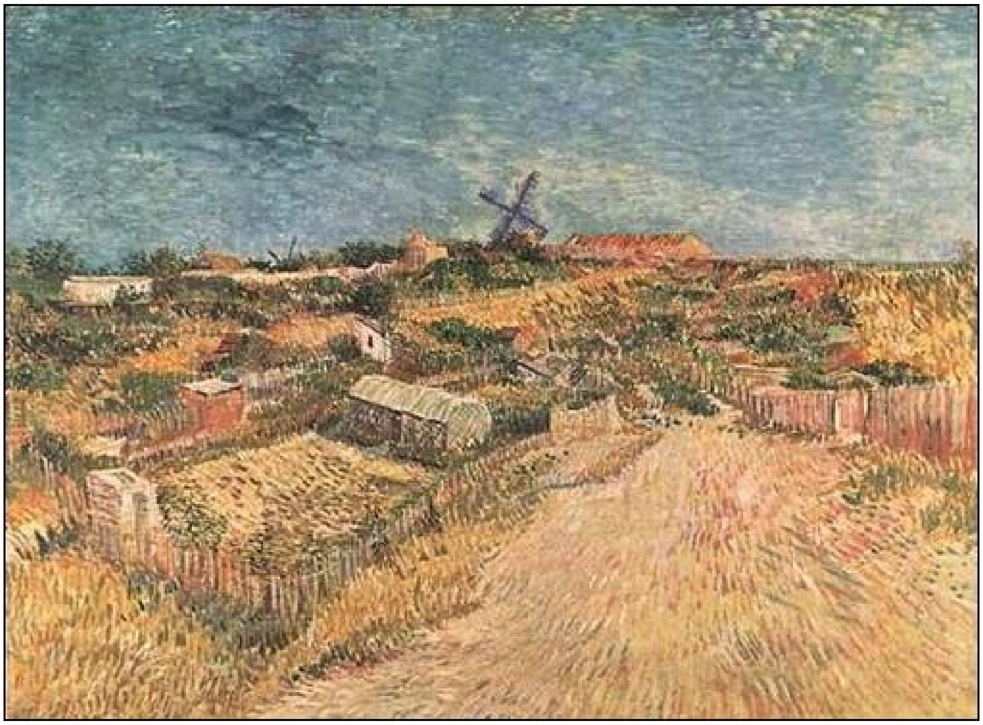
Interior of a Restaurant
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 56.5 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1887



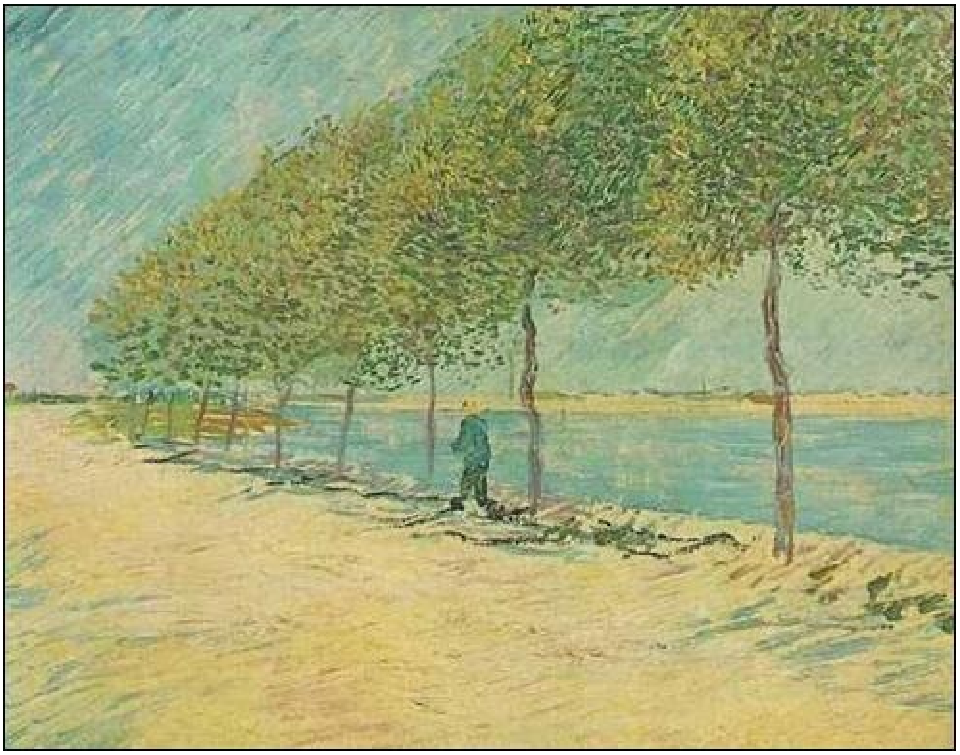
Lane in Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Oil on canvas on cardboard
33.0 x 42.0 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1887



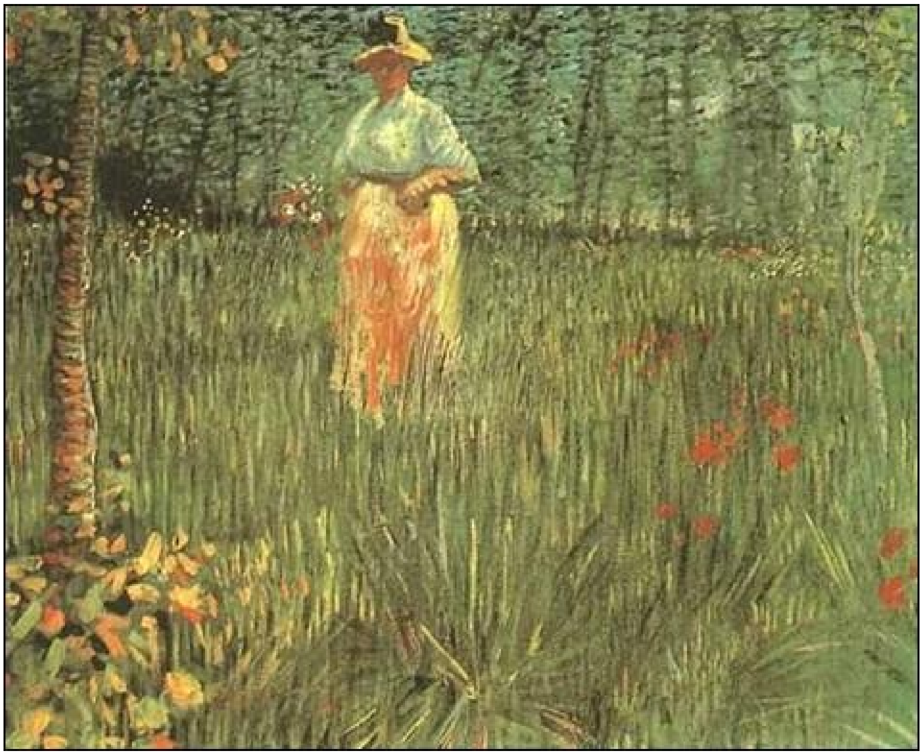
Outskirts of Paris: Road with Peasant Shouldering a Spade
Oil on canvas
48.0 x 73.0 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1887



Vegetable Gardens in Montmartre: La Butte Montmartre
Oil on canvas
96.0 x 120.0 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1887

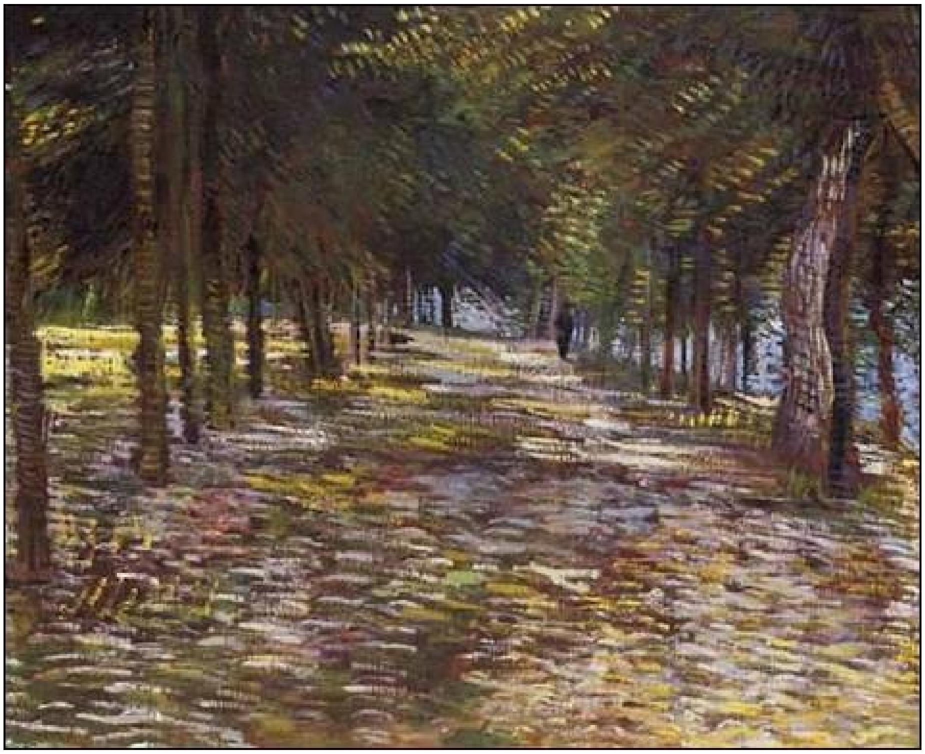


Walk Along the Banks of the Seine Near Asnières
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 65.5 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1887

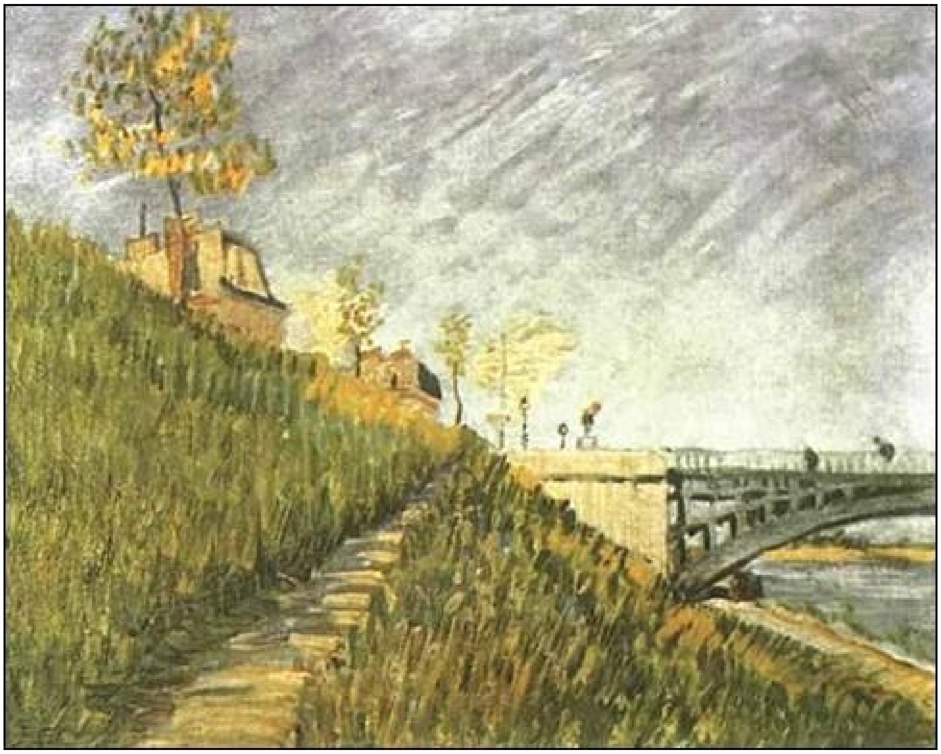


Woman Walking in a Garden, A

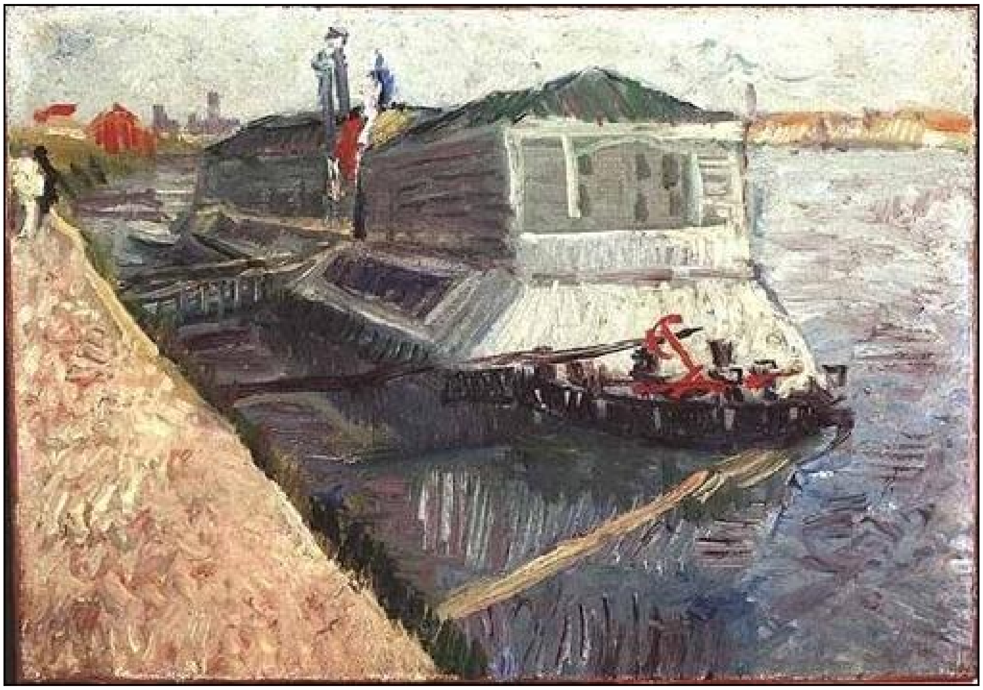
Oil on canvas
48.0 x 60.0 cm.
Paris: June-July, 1887



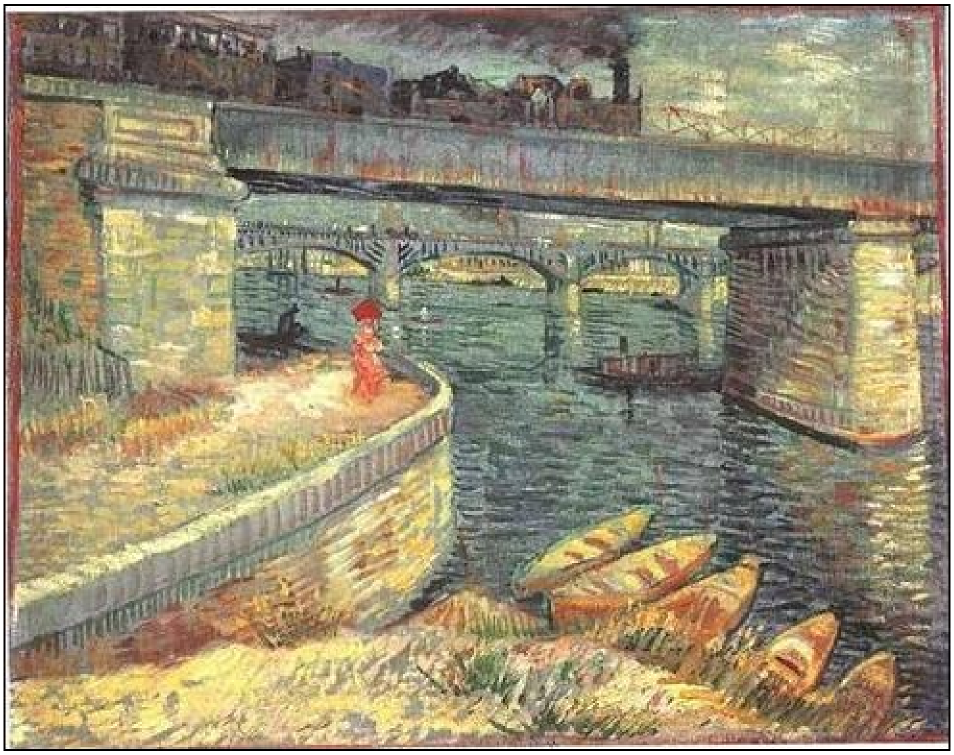
Avenue in Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 67.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



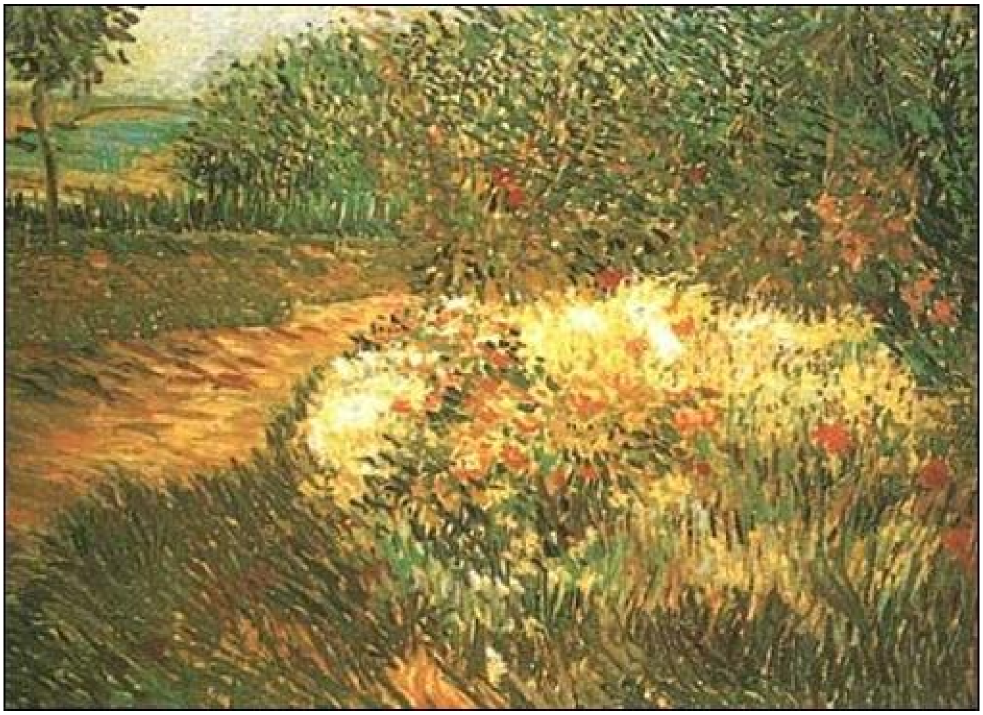
Banks of the Seine with Pont de Clichy
Oil on cardboard
30.5 x 39.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



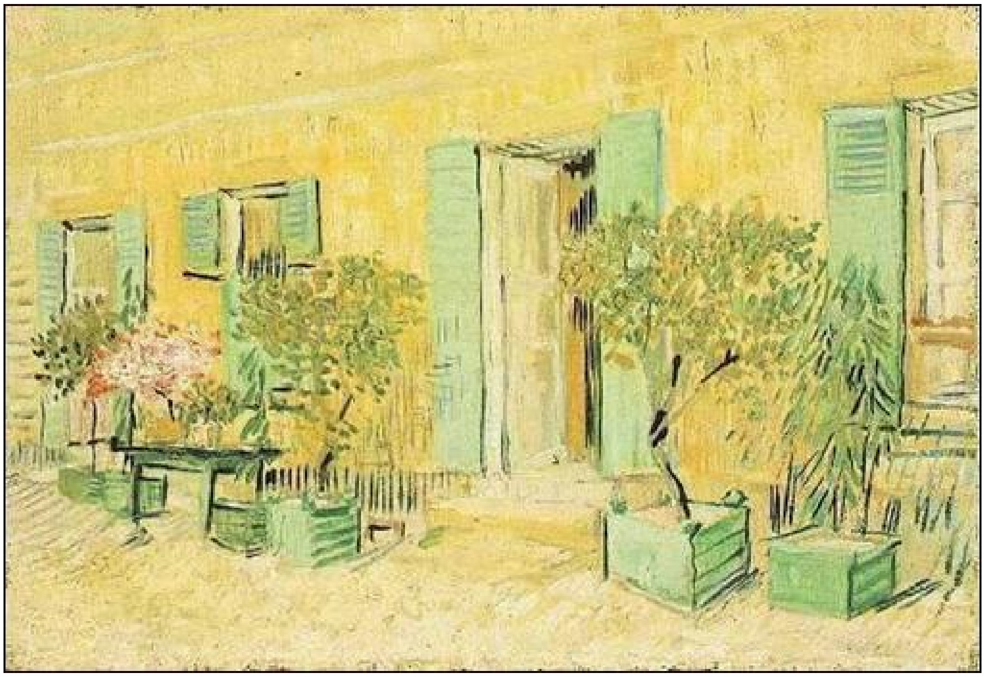
Bathing Float on the Seine at Asnieres
Oil on canvas
19.0 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



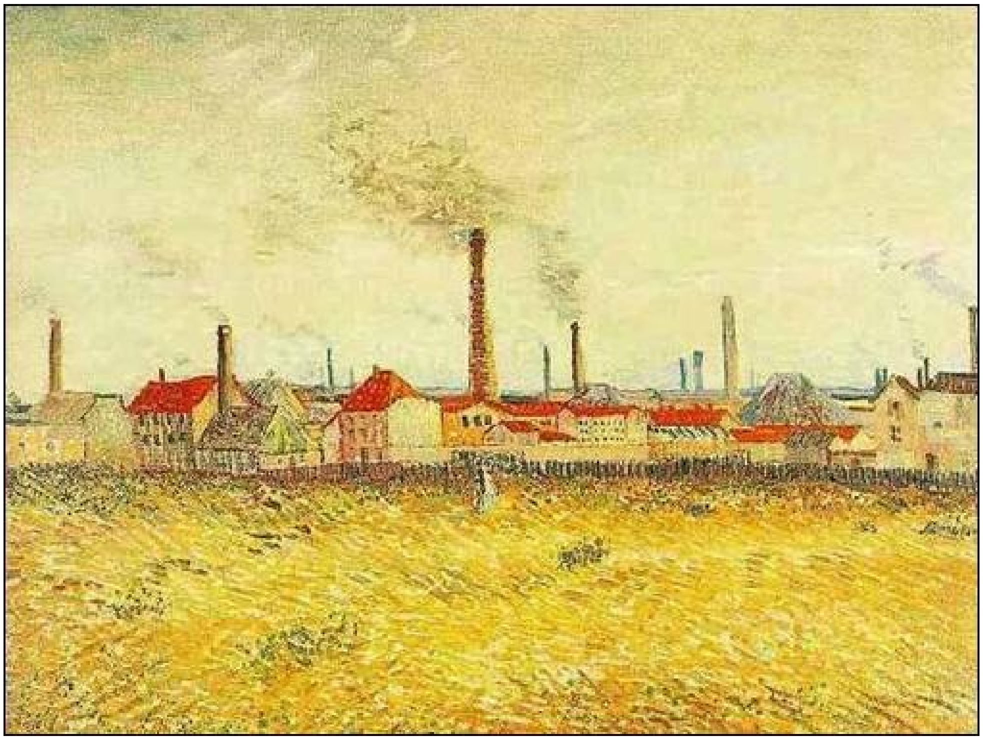
Bridges across the Seine at Asnieres
Oil on canvas
52.0 x 65.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



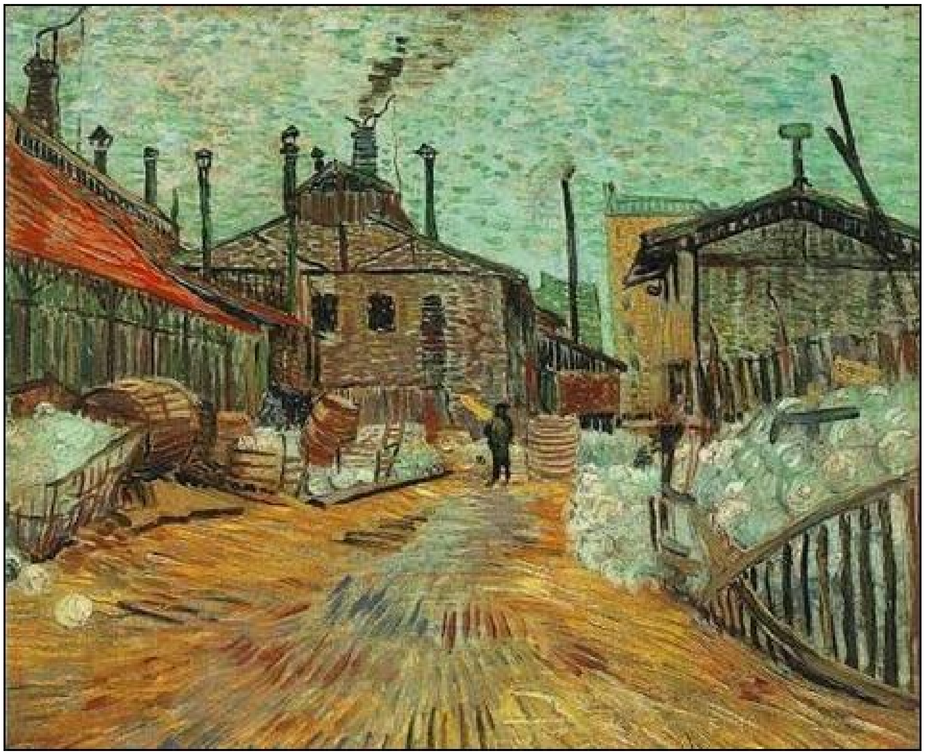
Corner of Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 65.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



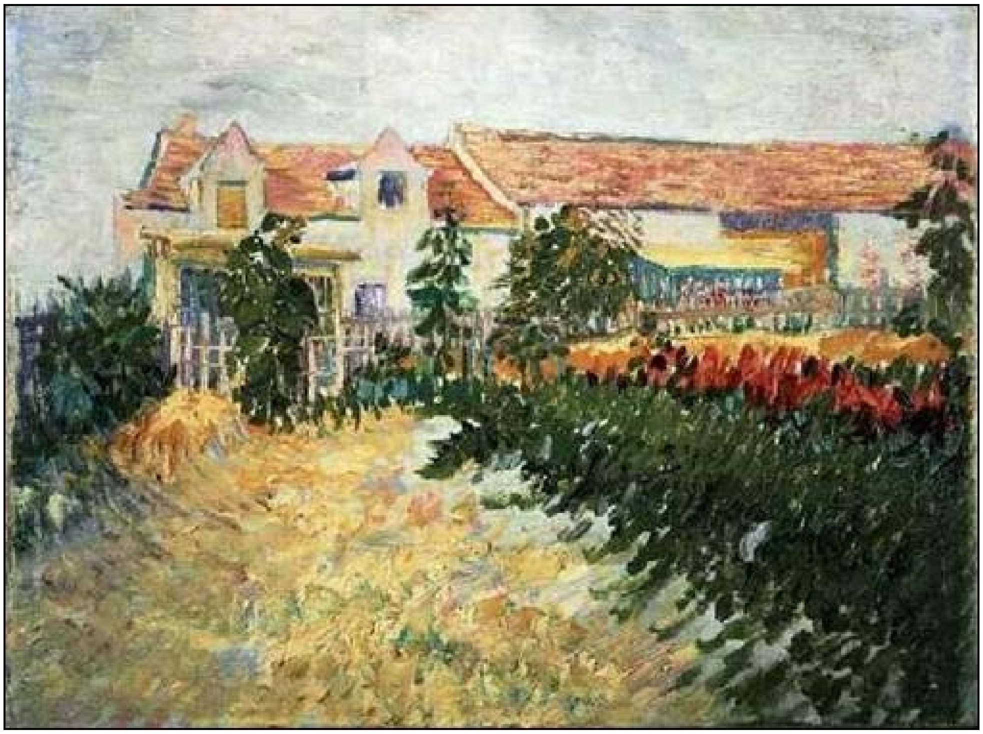
Exterior of a Restaurant at Asnieres
Oil on canvas
18.5 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



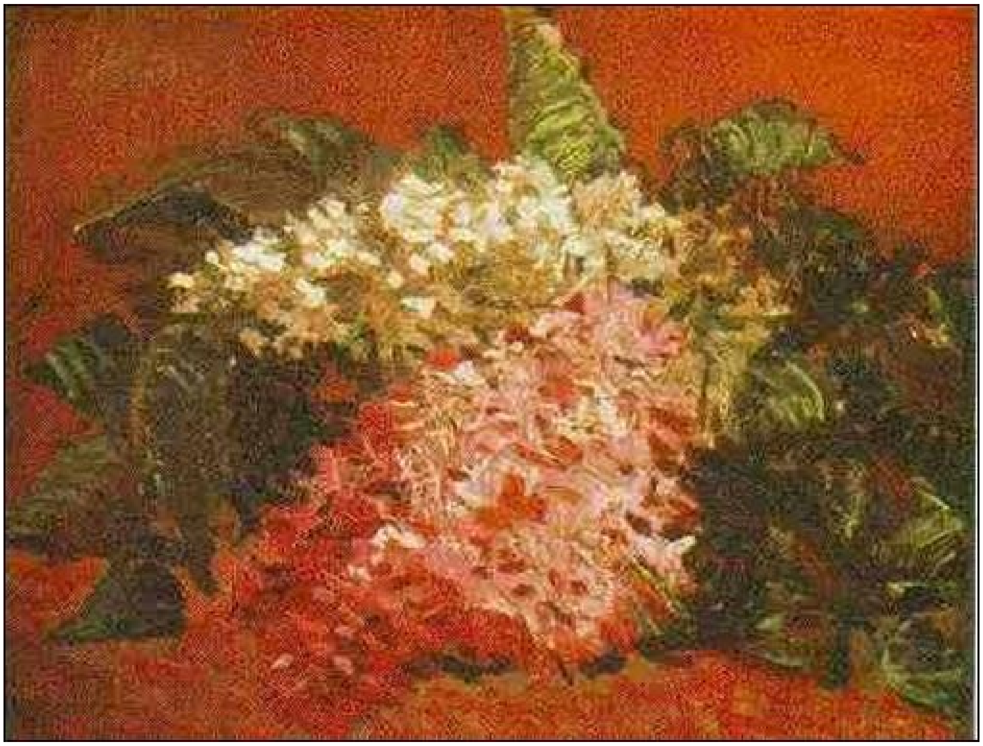
Factories at Asnieres Seen from the Quai de Clichy
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 72.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



Factory at Asnieres, The
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 54.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

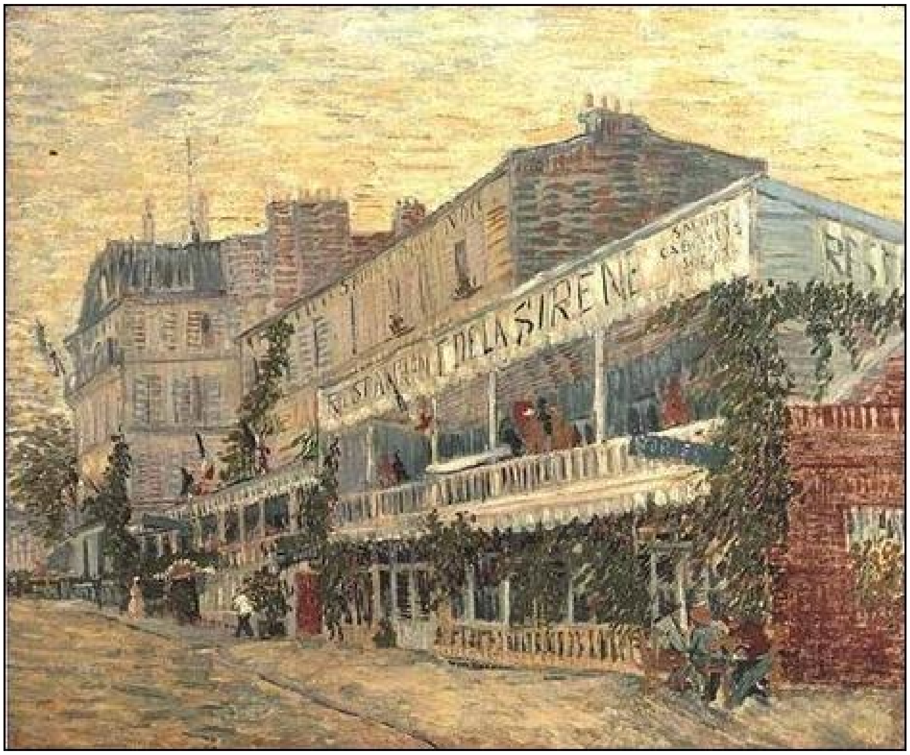


House with Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
31.5 x 41.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

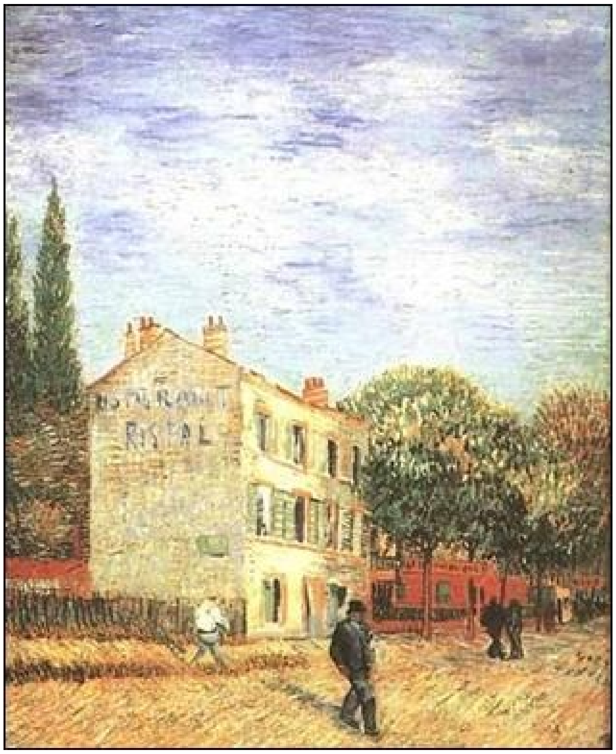


Lilacs

Oil on canvas
27.3 x 35.3 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

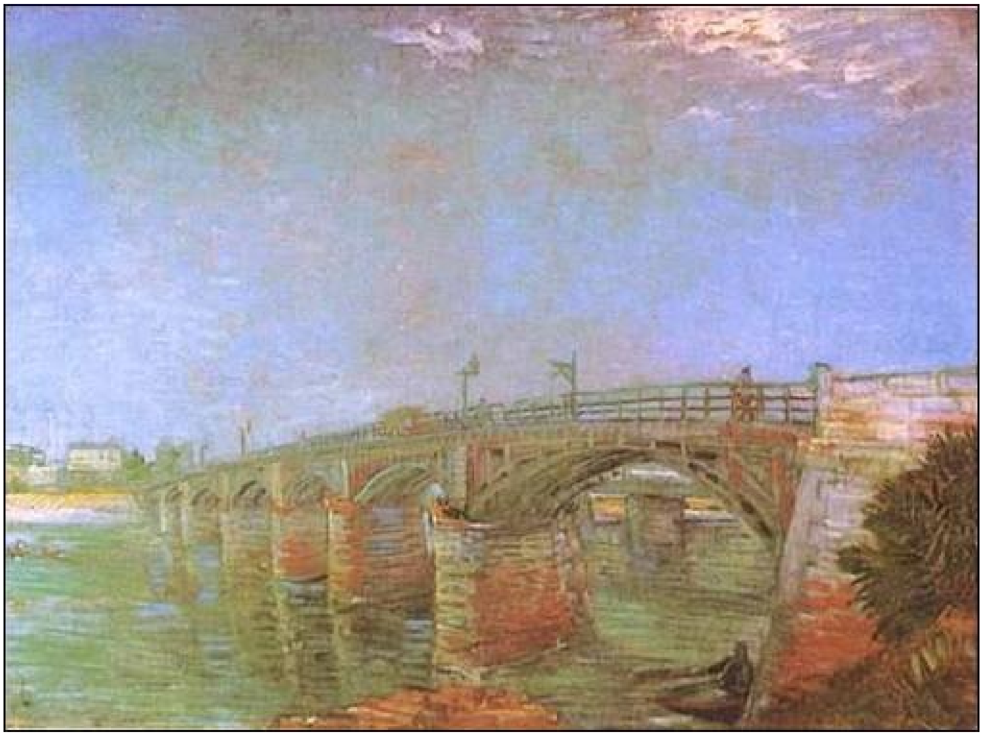

RESTAURANT DE LA SIRENE
REST

Restaurant de la Sirène at Asnières
Oil on canvas
54.5 x 65.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

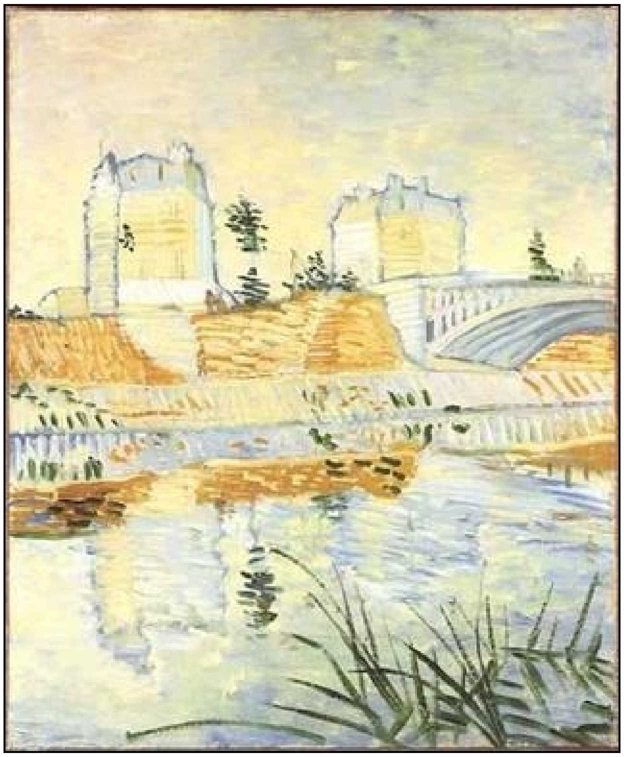


Rispal Restaurant at Asnières, The

Oil on canvas
72.0 x 60.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

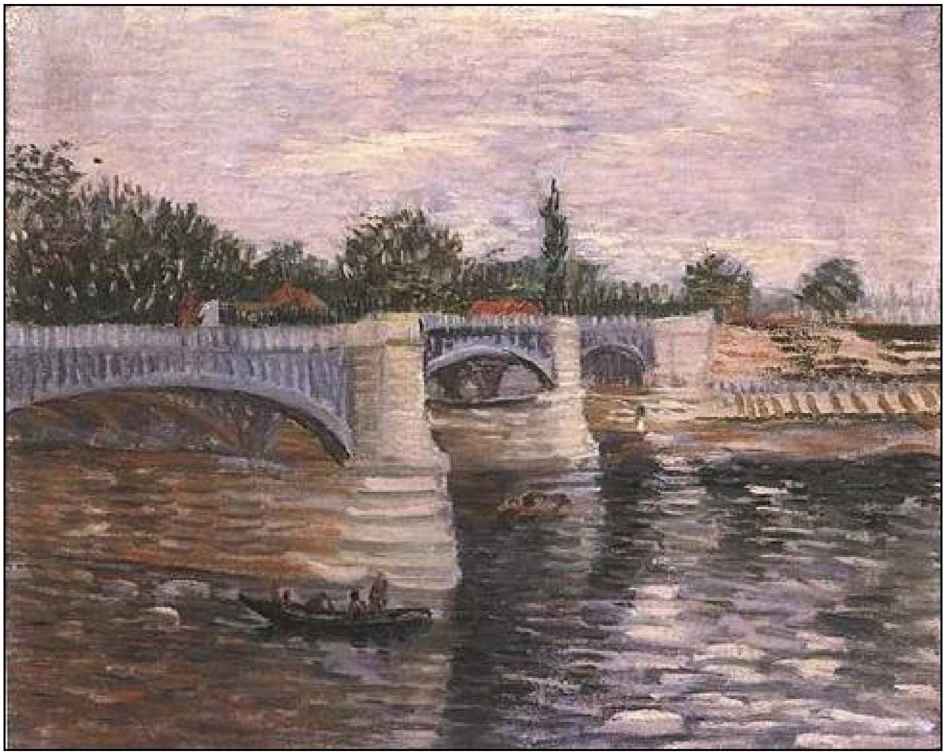


Seine Bridge at Asnieres, The
Oil on canvas
53.0 x 73.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



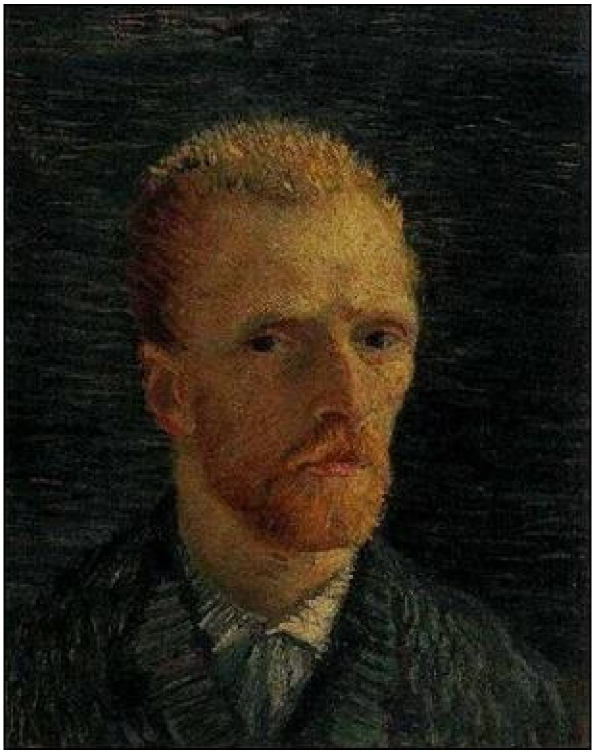
Seine with the Pont de Clichy, The

Oil on canvas
55.0 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

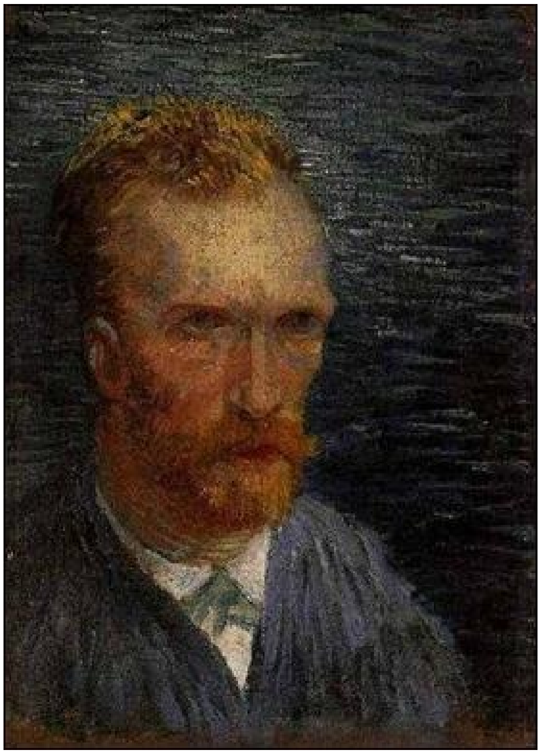


Seine with the Pont de la Grande Jette, The

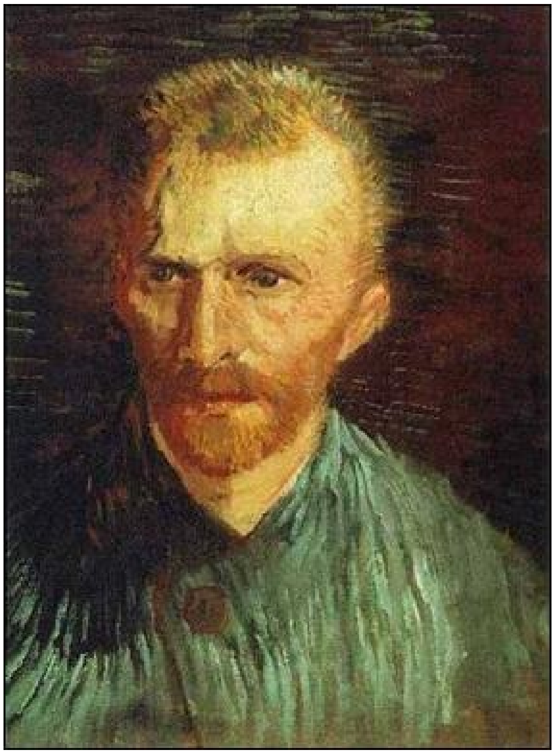
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 40.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



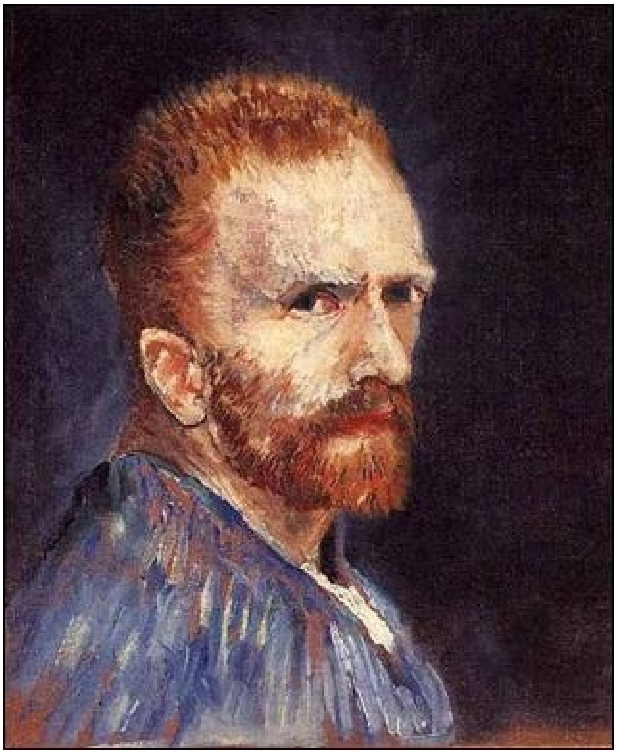
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
42.0 x 34.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



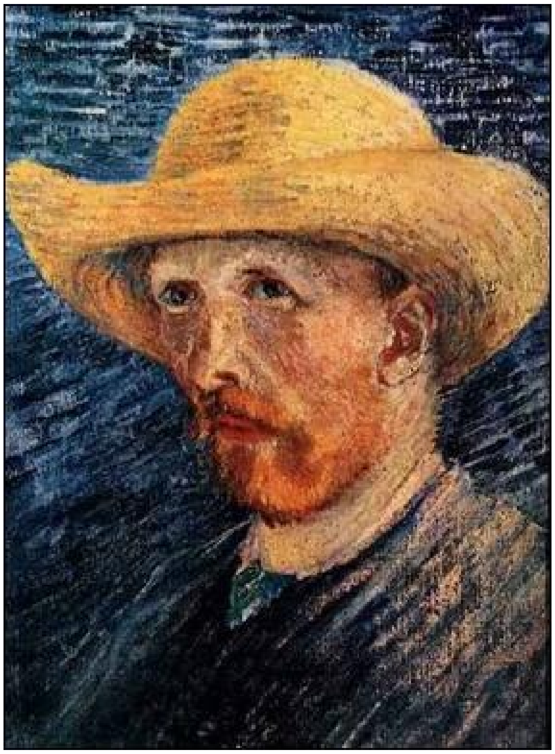
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas on cardboard
42.5 x 31.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



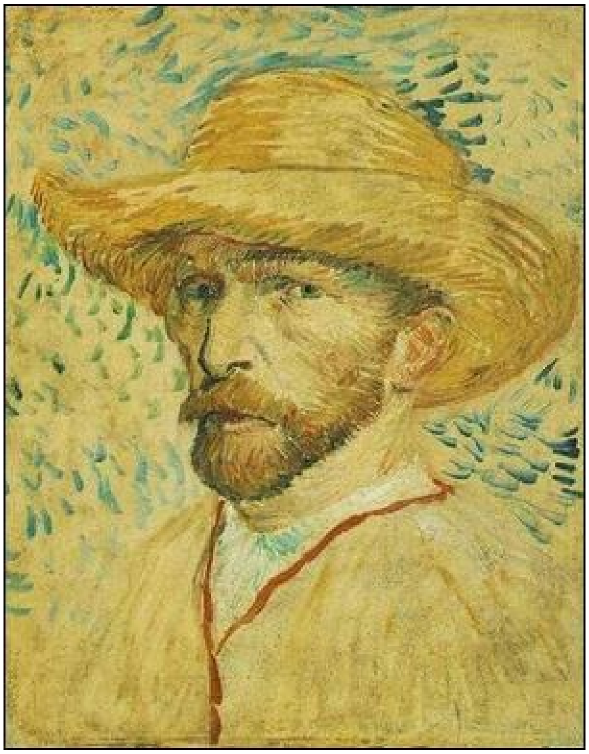
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 33.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



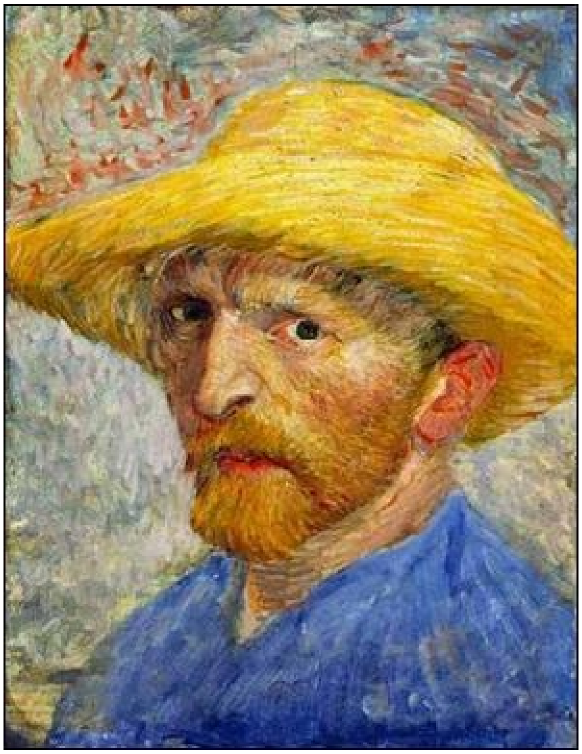
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 33.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



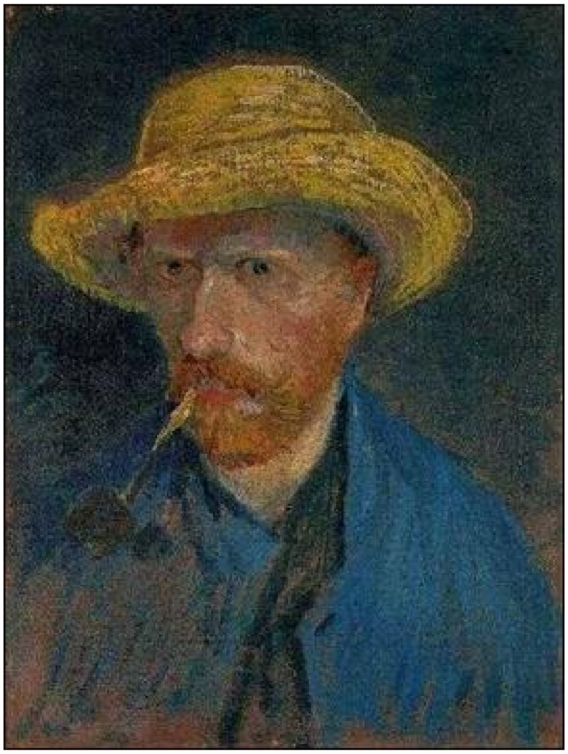
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 31.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



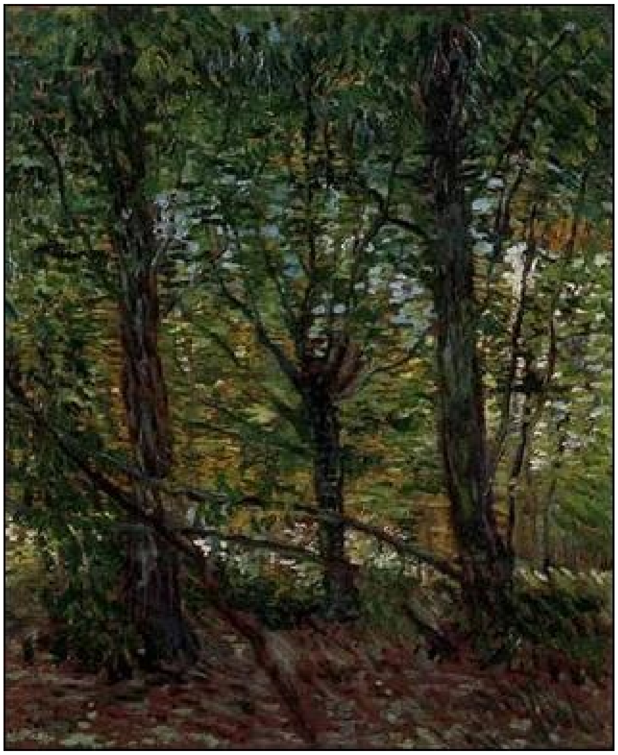
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Oil on cardboard
40.5 x 32.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



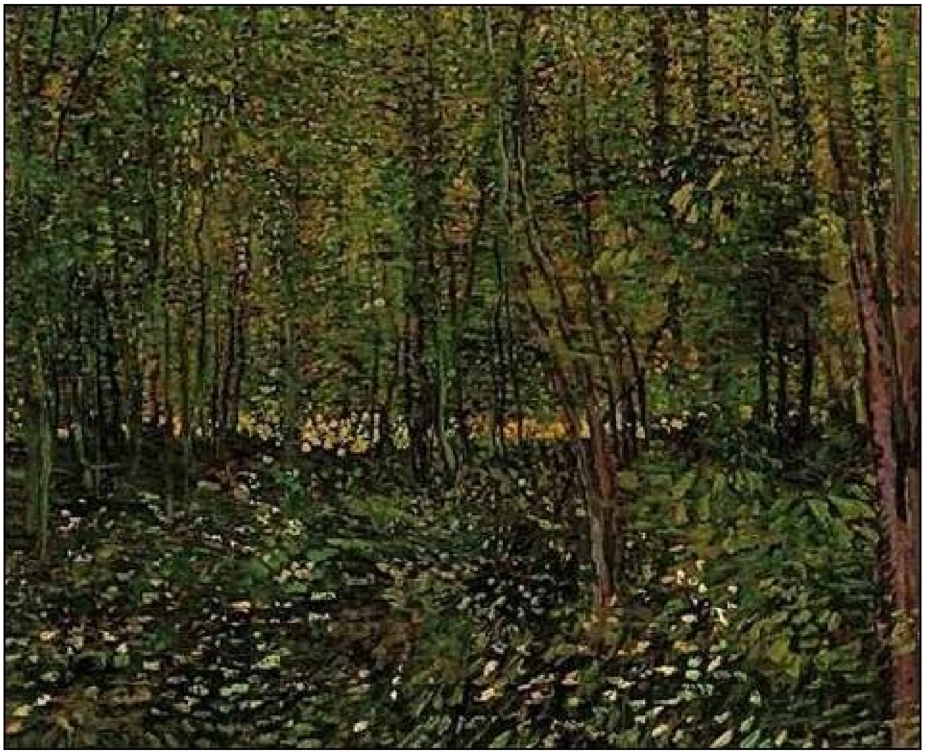
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Oil on canvas on panel
34.9 x 26.7 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



Self-Portrait with Straw Hat and Pipe
Oil on canvas
41.5 x 31.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

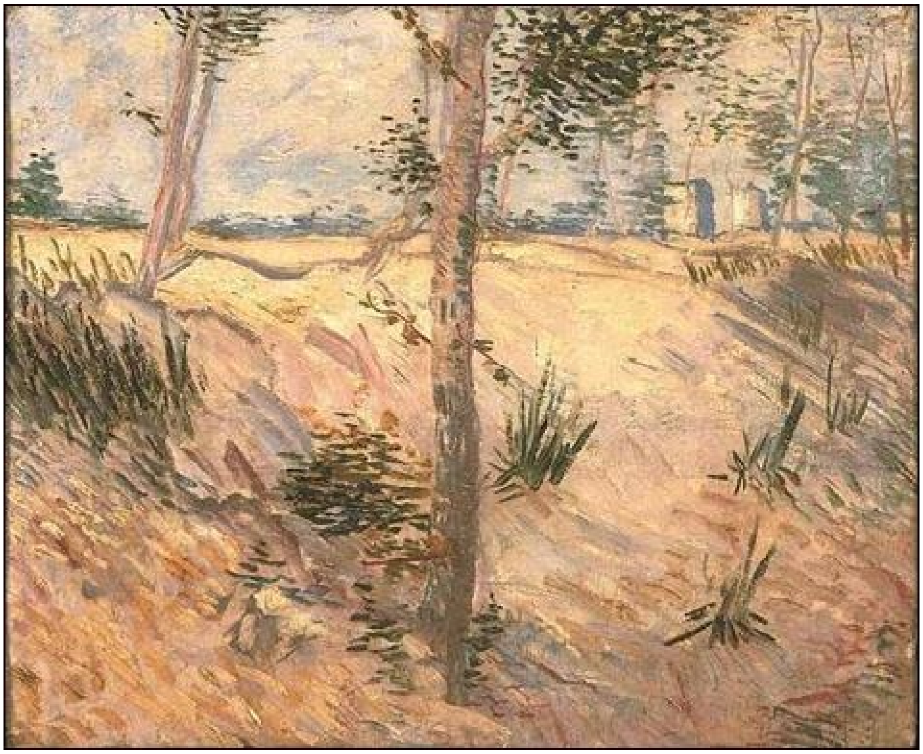


Trees and Undergrowth
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 36.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887

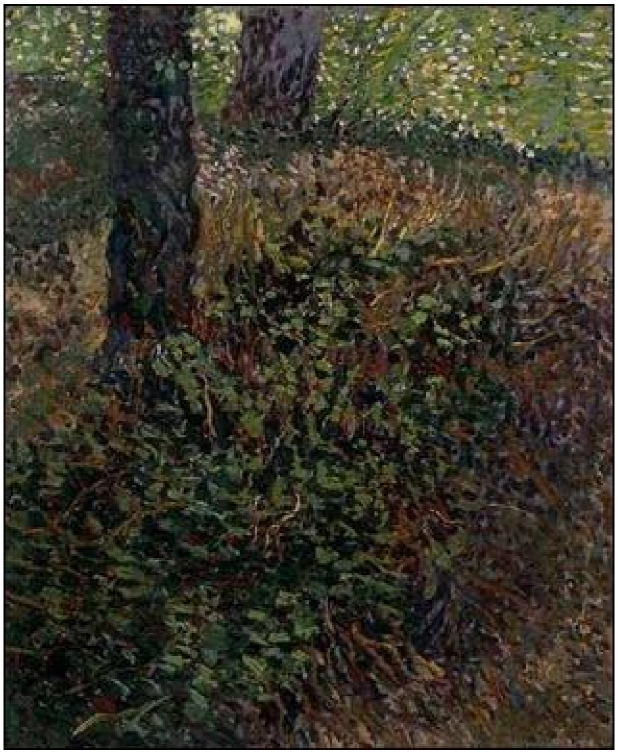


Trees and Undergrowth

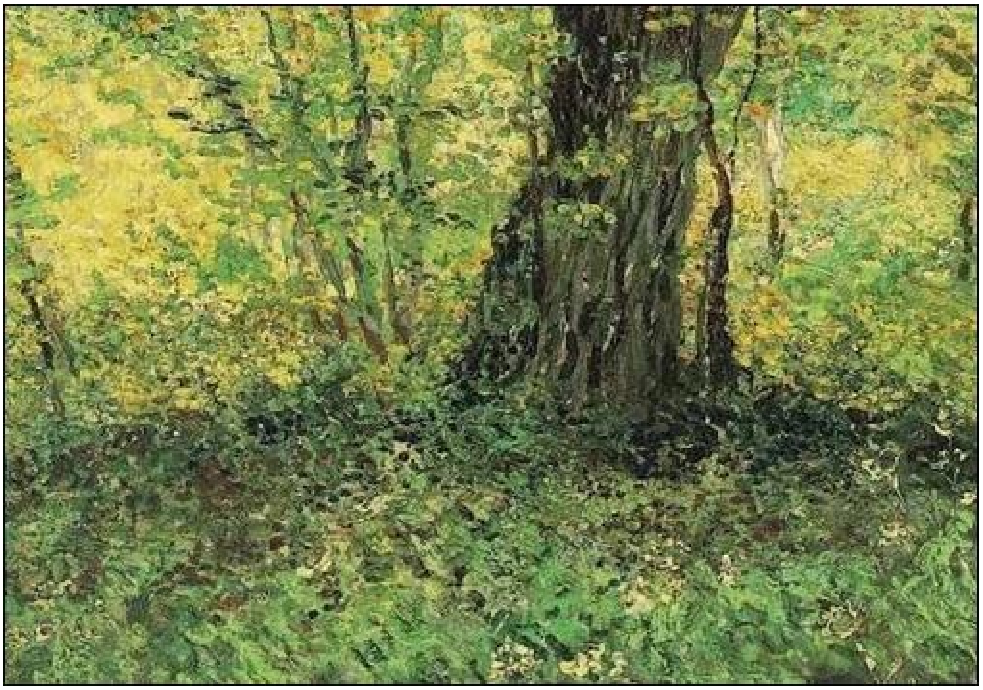
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 55.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



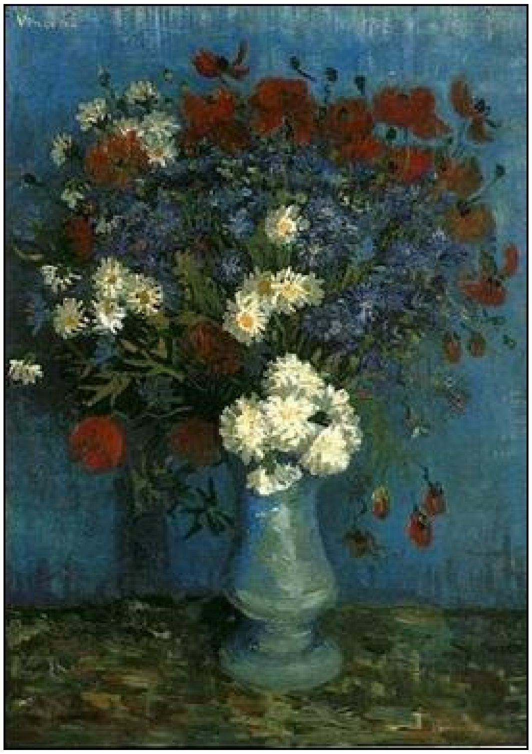
Trees in a Field on a Sunny Day
Oil on canvas
37.0 x 45.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



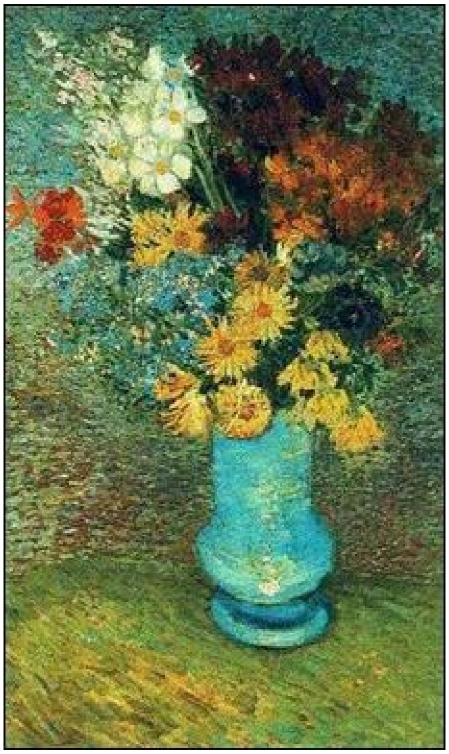
Undergrowth
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



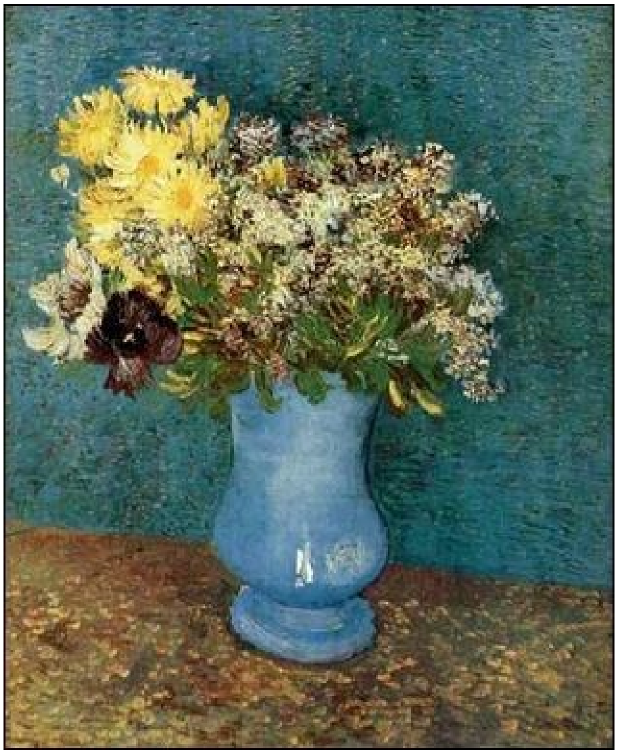
Undergrowth
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



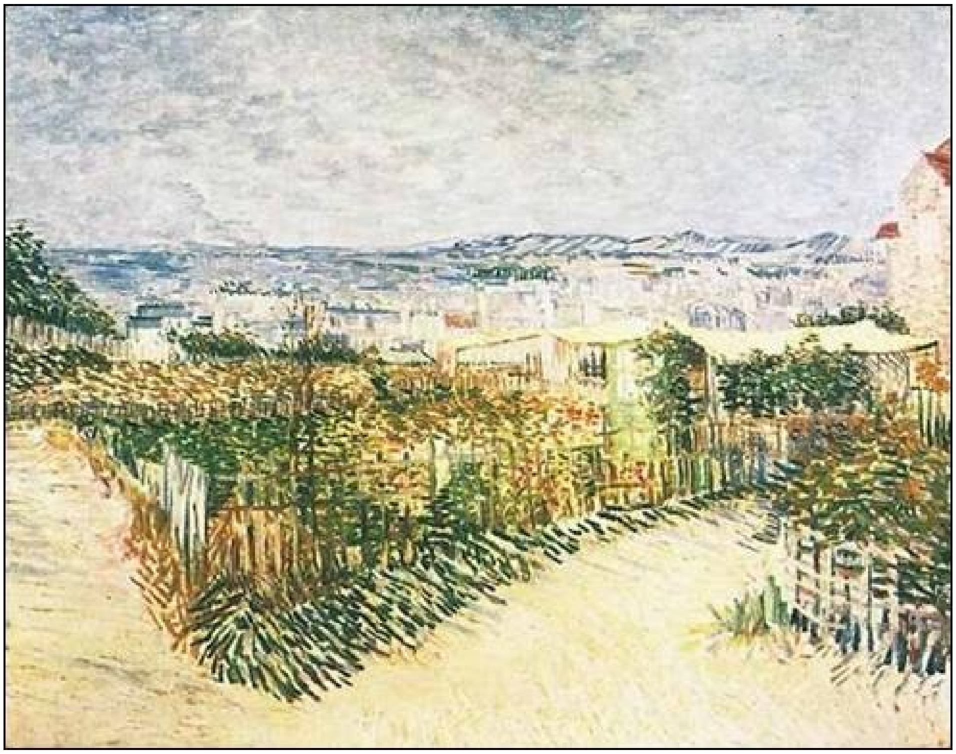
Vase with Cornflowers and Poppies
Oil on canvas
80.0 x 67.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



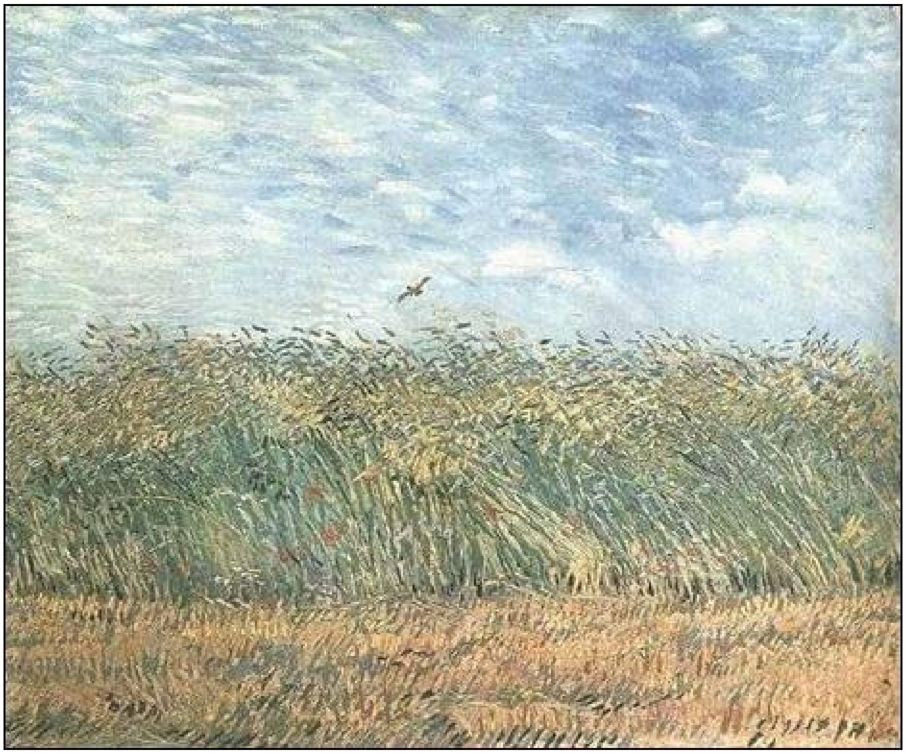
Vase with Daisies and Anemones
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 38.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



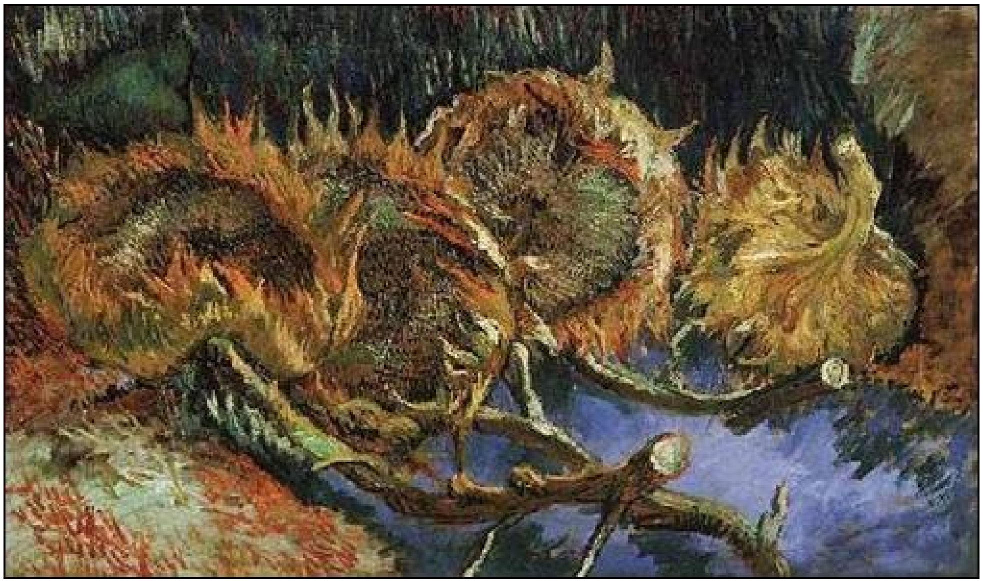
Vase with Lilacs, Daisies and Anemones
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 37.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



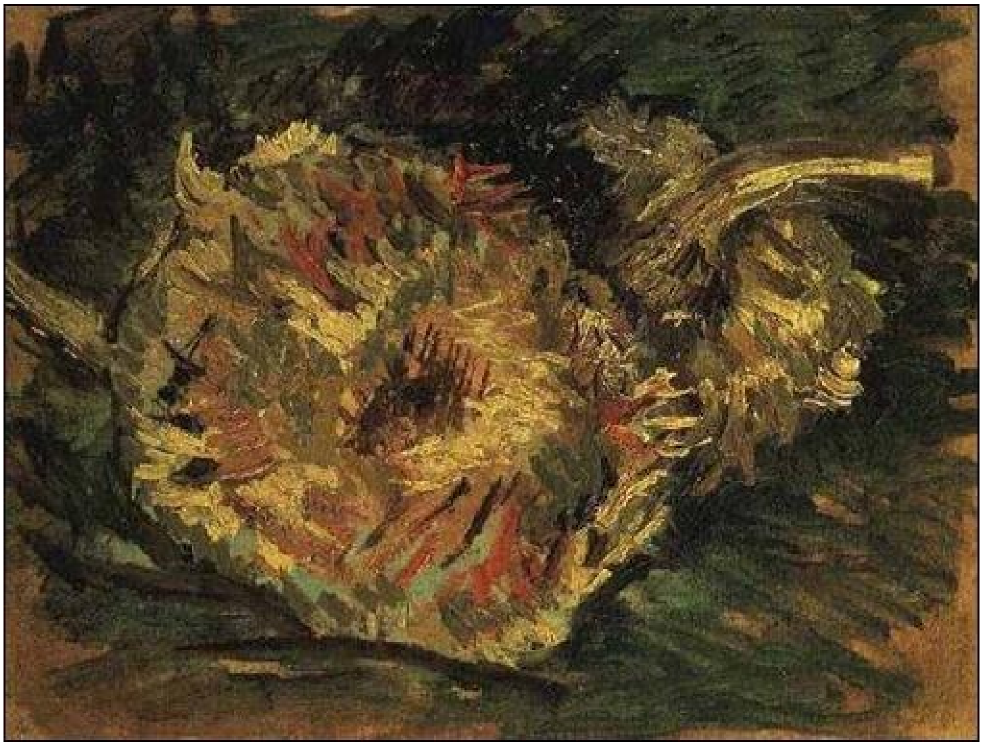
Vegetable Gardens at Montmartre
Oil on canvas
81.0 x 100.0 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887



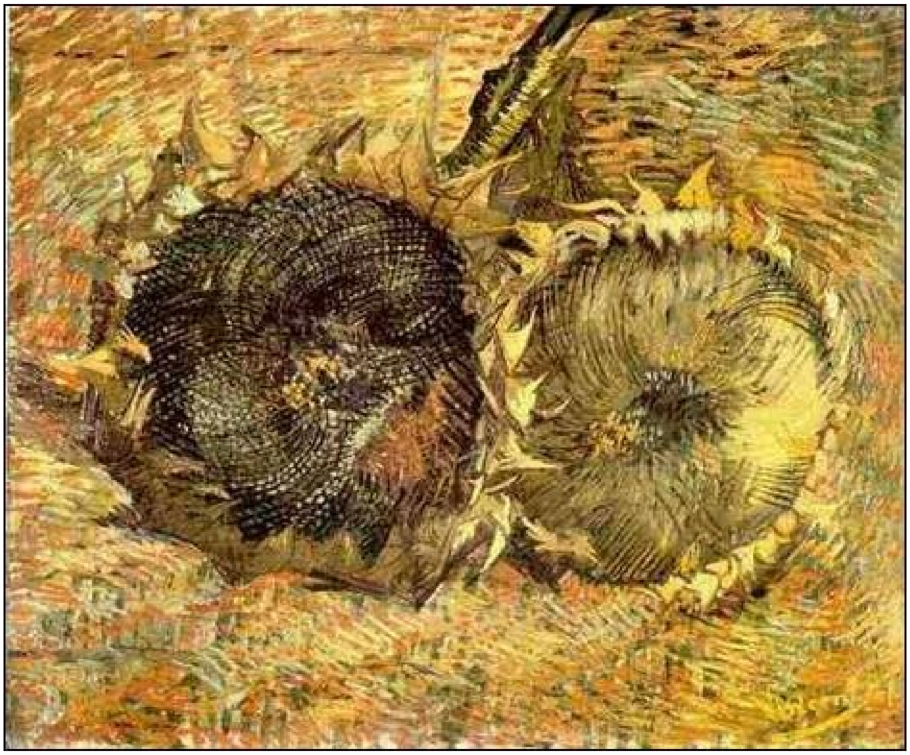
Wheat Field with a Partridge
Oil on canvas
34.0 x 65.5 cm.
Paris: Summer, 1887
F 310, JH 1274



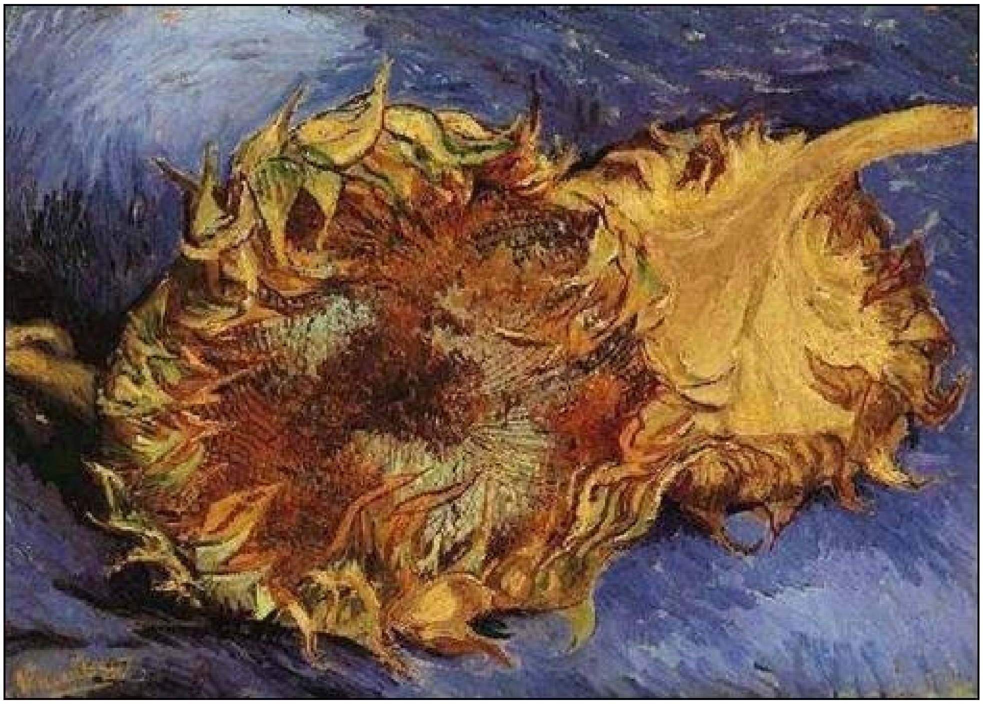
Four Cut Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 100.0 cm.
Paris: August-September, 1887



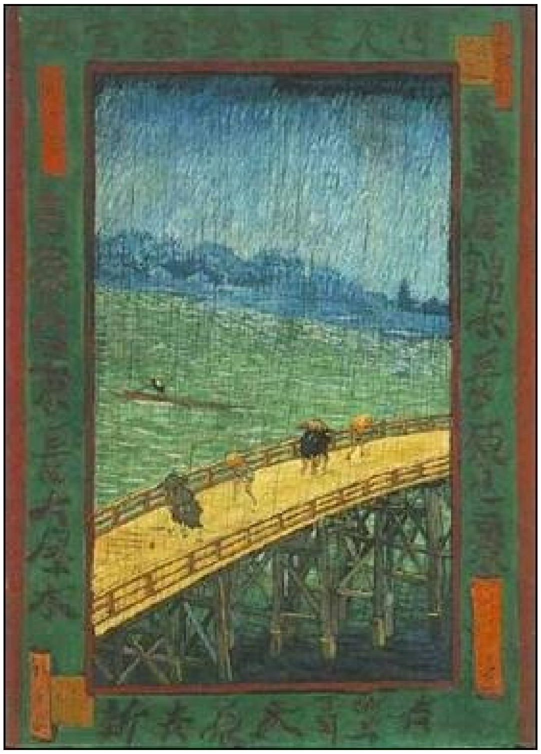
Two Cut Sunflowers
Oil on canvas on triplex board
21.0 x 27.0 cm.
Paris: August-September, 1887



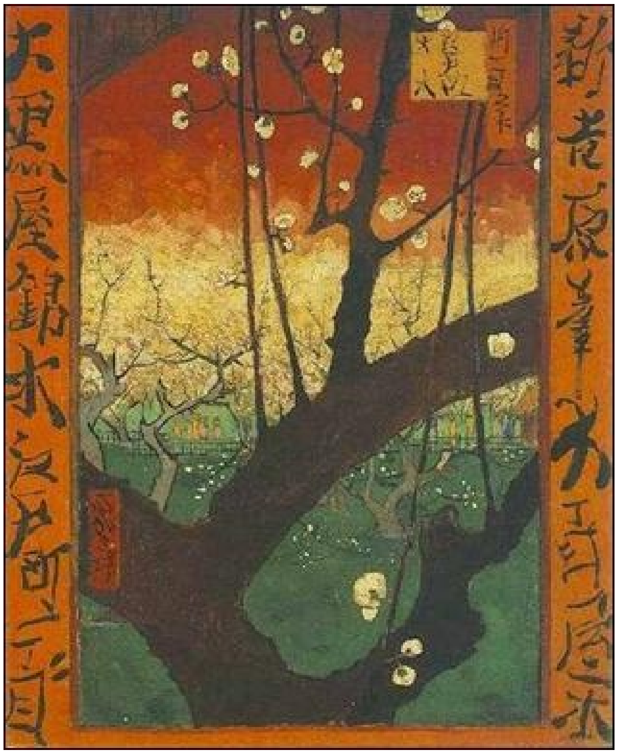
Two Cut Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 60.0 cm.
Paris: August-September, 1887



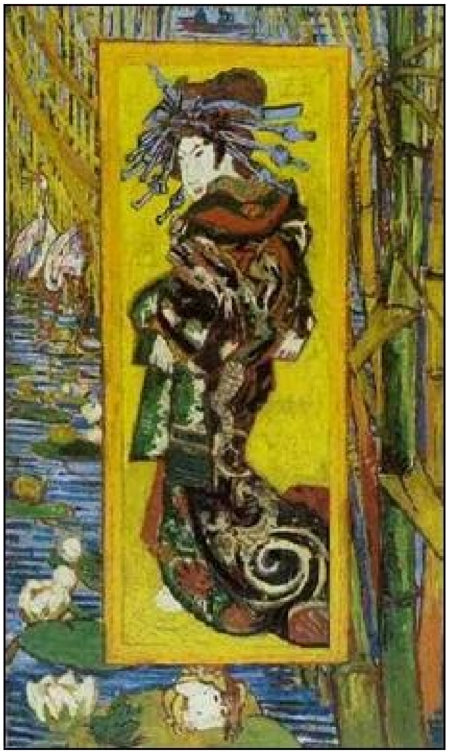
Two Cut Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
43.2 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: August-September, 1887



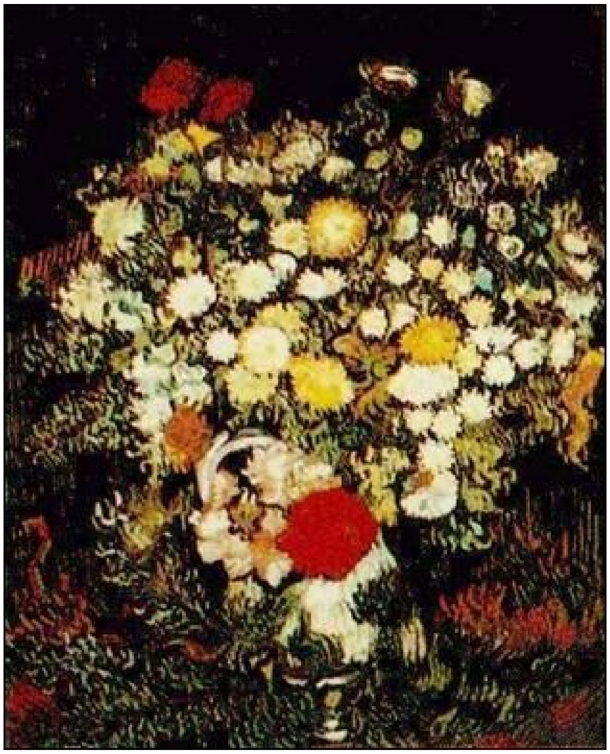
Japonaiserie: Bridge in the Rain (after Hiroshige)
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 54.0 cm.
Paris: September-October, 1887



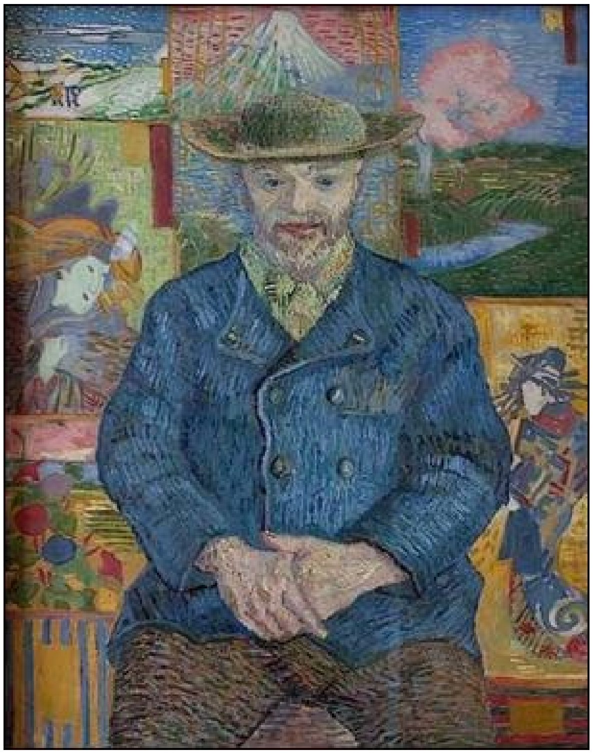
Japonaiserie: Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: September-October, 1887



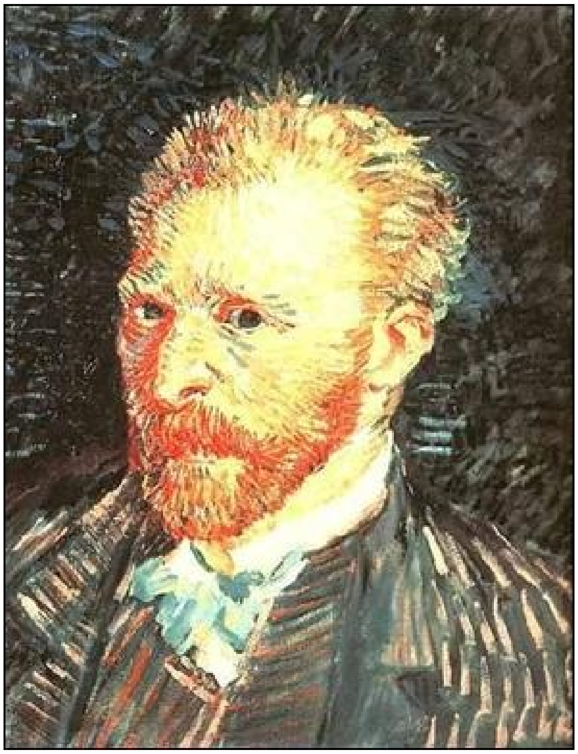
Japonaiserie: Oiran
105.0 x 60.5 cm.
Paris: September-October, 1887



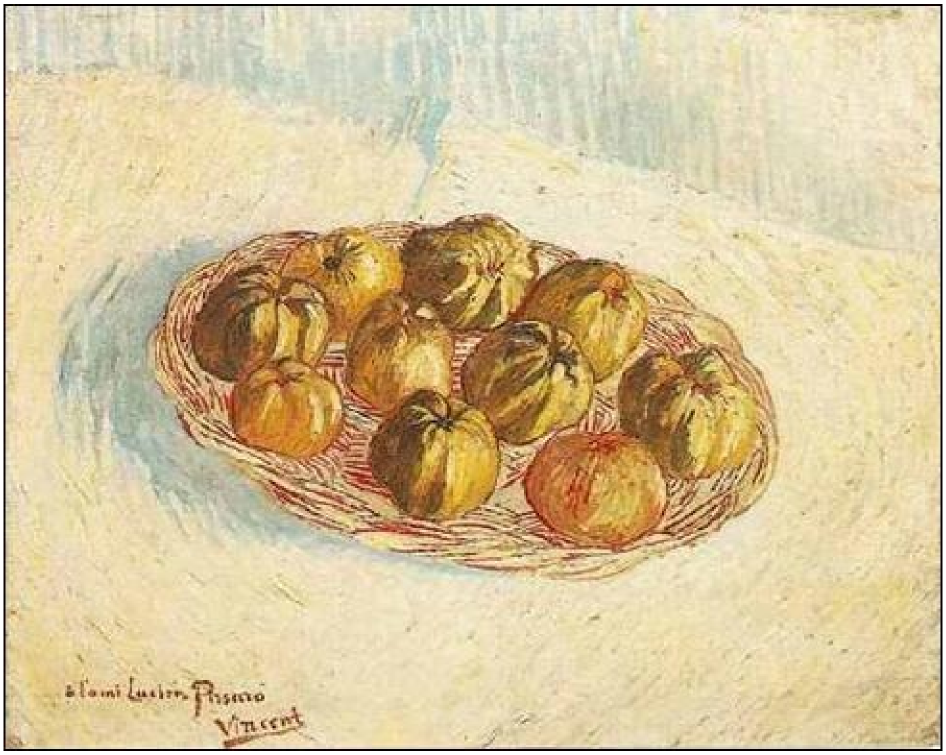
Chrysanthemums and Wild Flowers in a Vase
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



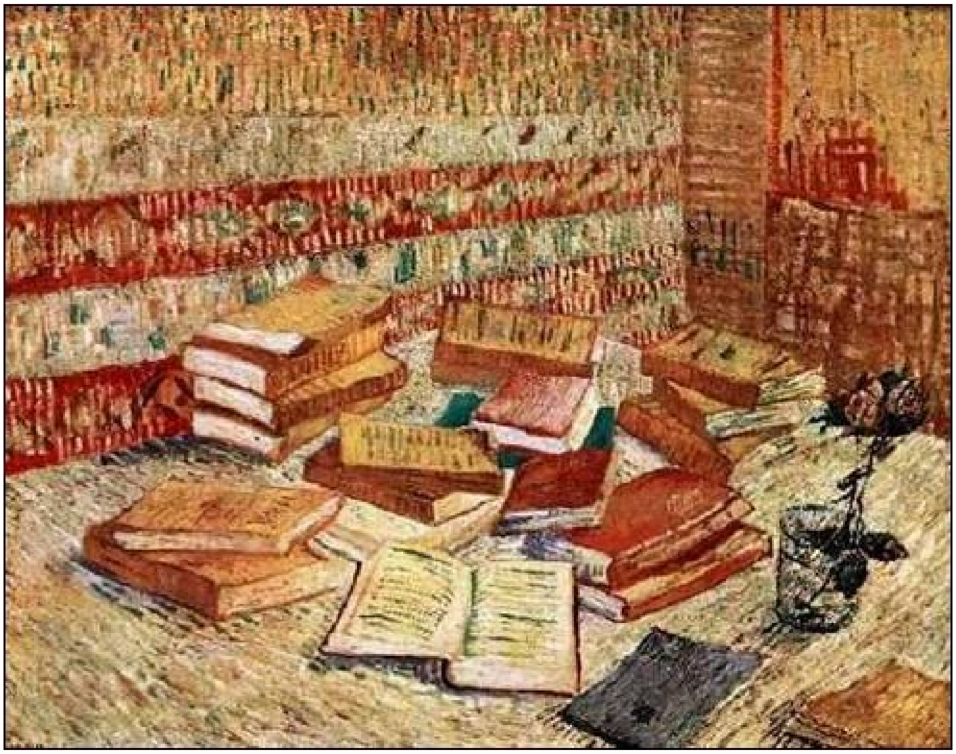
Portrait of Père Tanguy
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 75.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



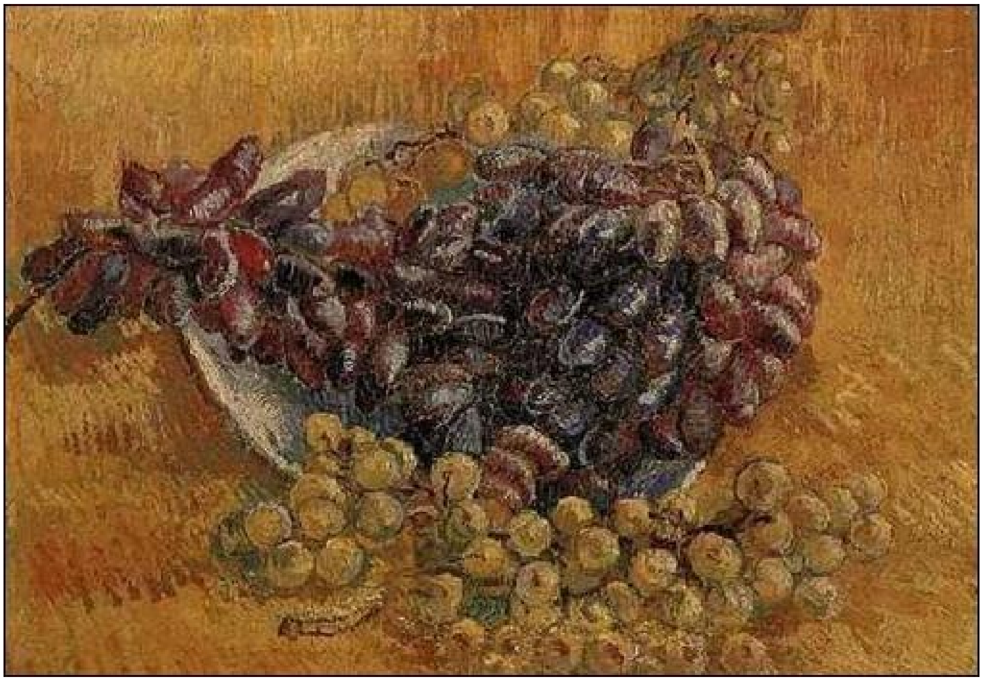
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
47.0 x 35.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887


à l'ami Lucien Pissarro
Vincent

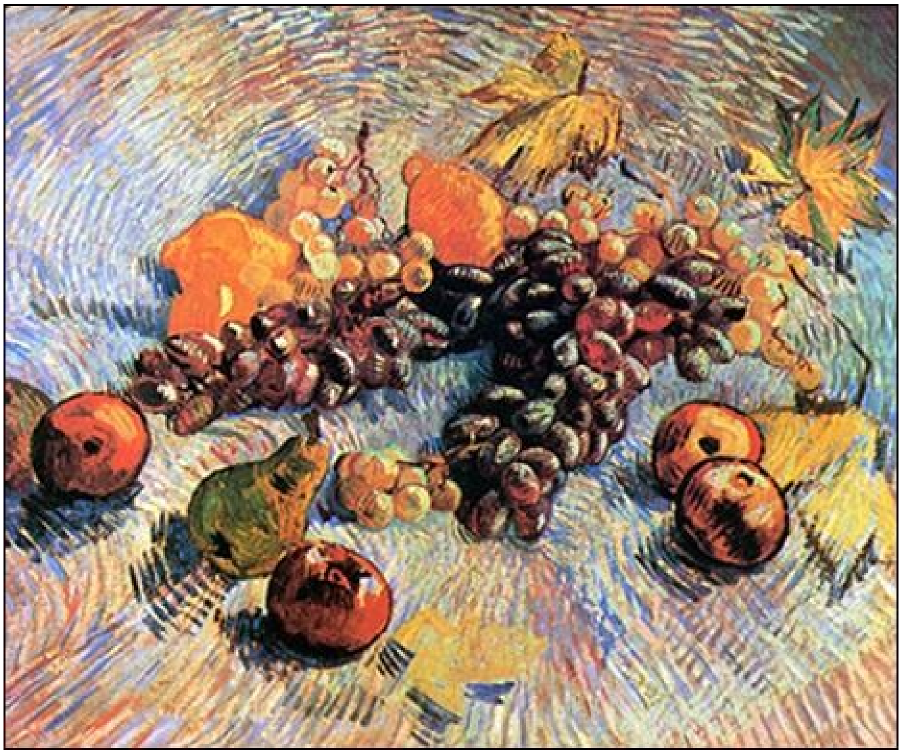
Still Life with Basket of Apples (to Lucien Pissarro)
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 61.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



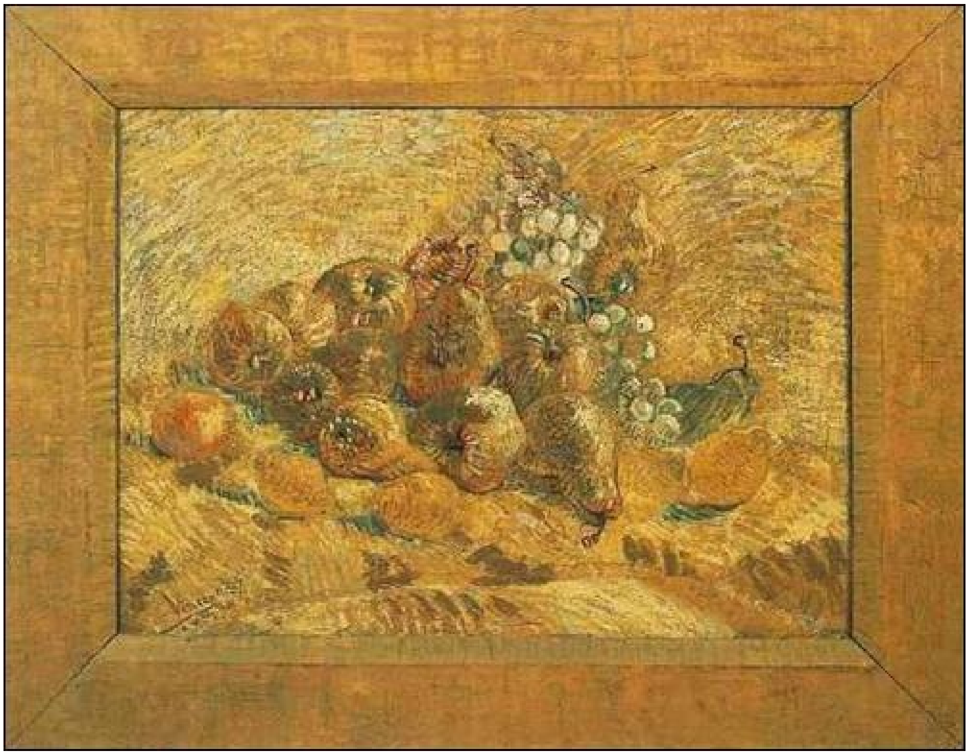
Still Life with French Novels and a Rose
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 93.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



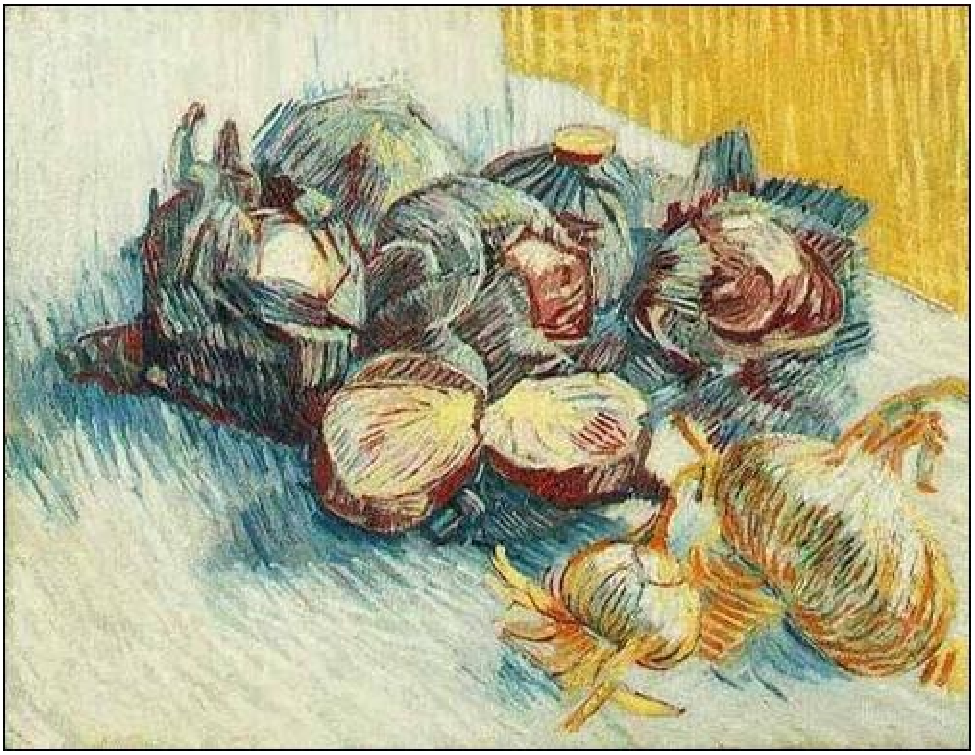
Still Life with Grapes
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 46.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



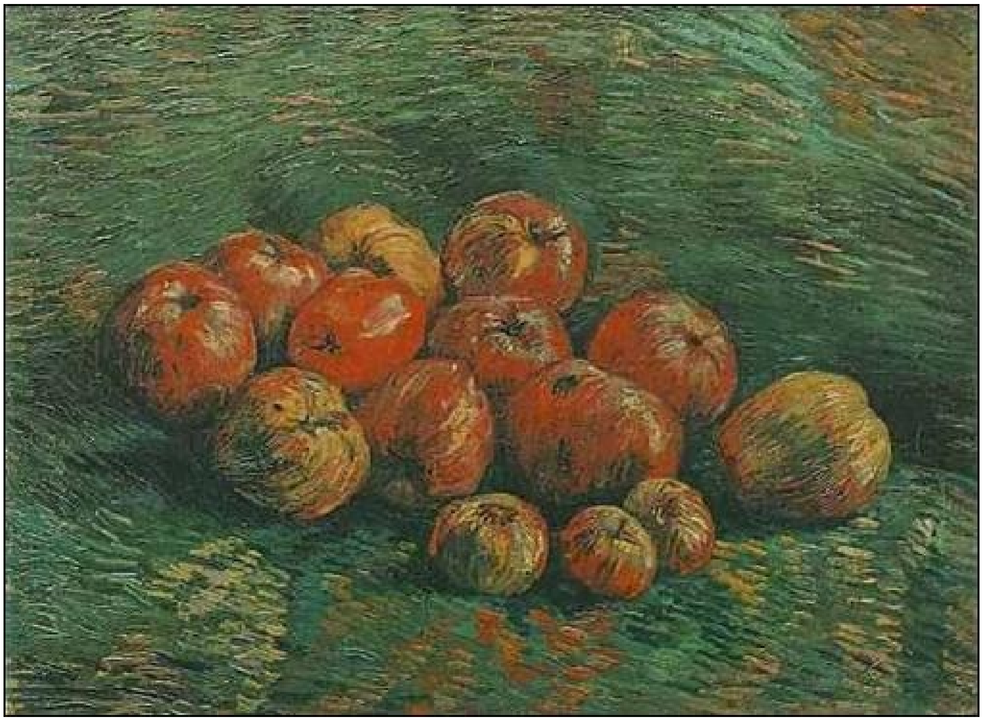
Still Life with Apples, Pears, Lemons and Grapes
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 55.2 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



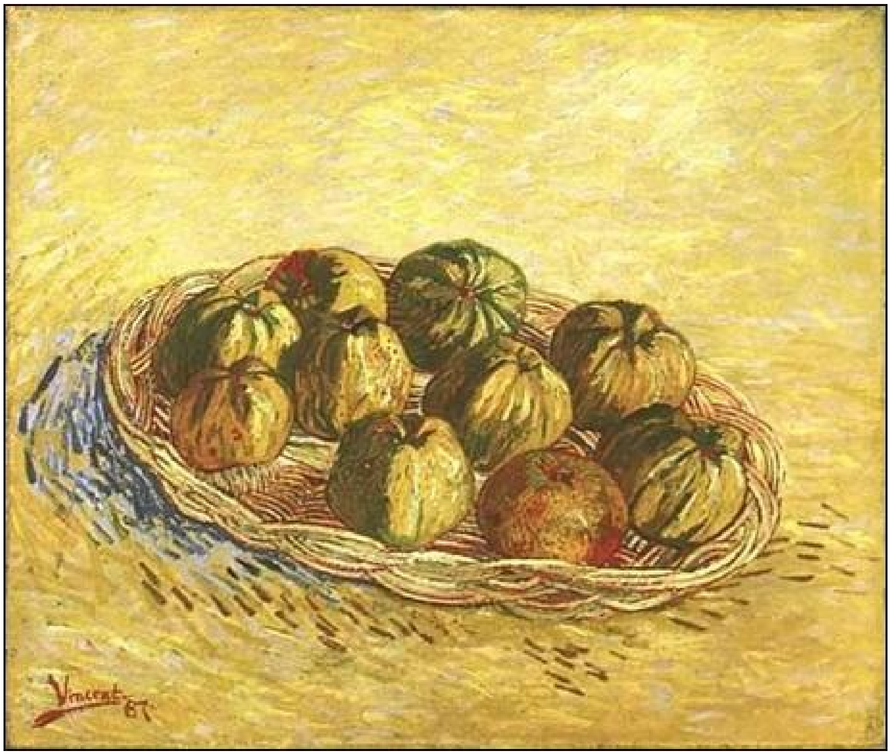
Still Life with Grapes, Pears and Lemons
Oil on canvas
48.5 x 65.0 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



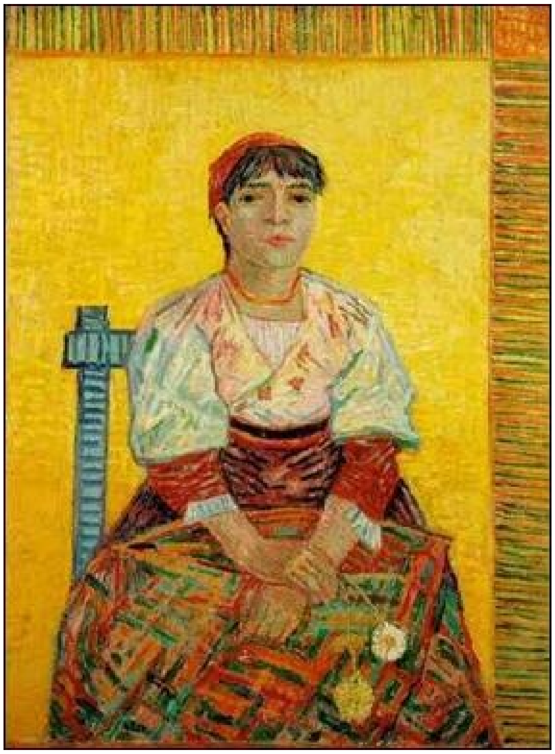
Still Life with Red Cabbages and Onions
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 64.5 cm.
Paris: Autumn, 1887



Still Life with Apples
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 61.5 cm.
Paris: Autumn-Winter, 1887/88

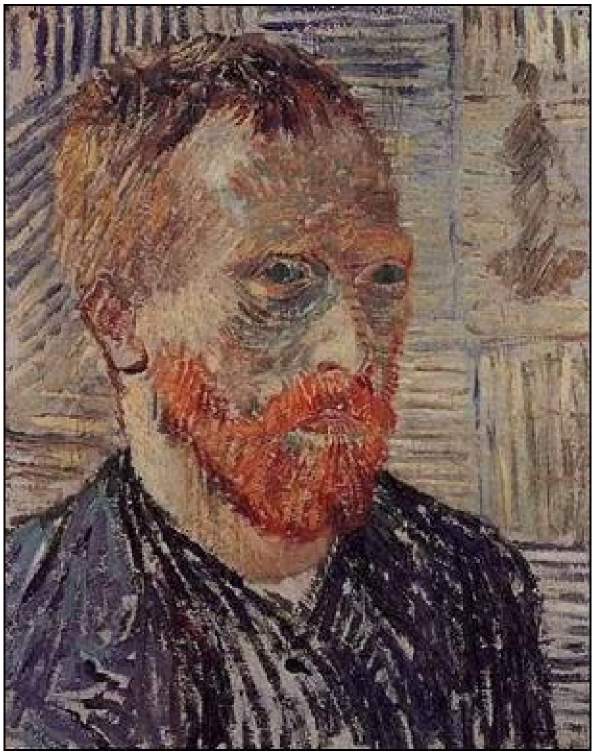


Still Life with Basket of Apples
Oil on canvas
46.7 x 55.2 cm.
Paris: Autumn-Winter, 1887/88

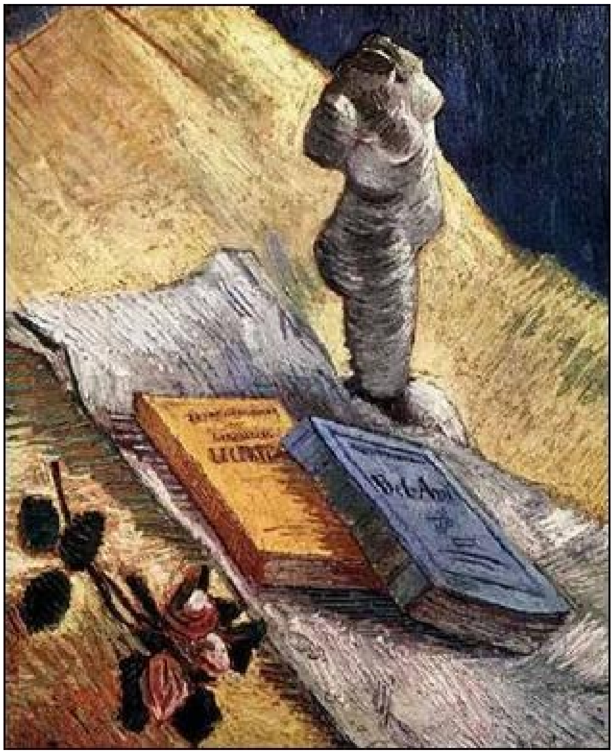


Italian Woman (Agostina Segatori?)

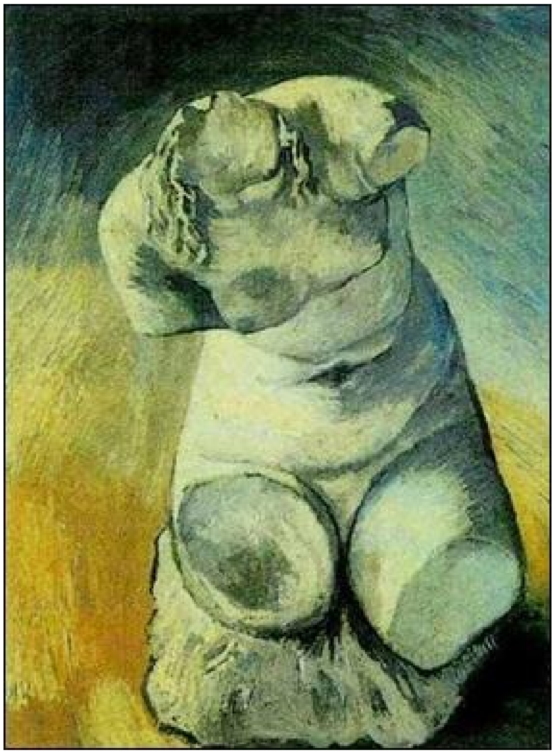
Oil on canvas
81.0 x 60.0 cm.
Paris: December, 1887



Self-Portrait with a Japanese Print
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 35.0 cm.
Paris: December, 1887

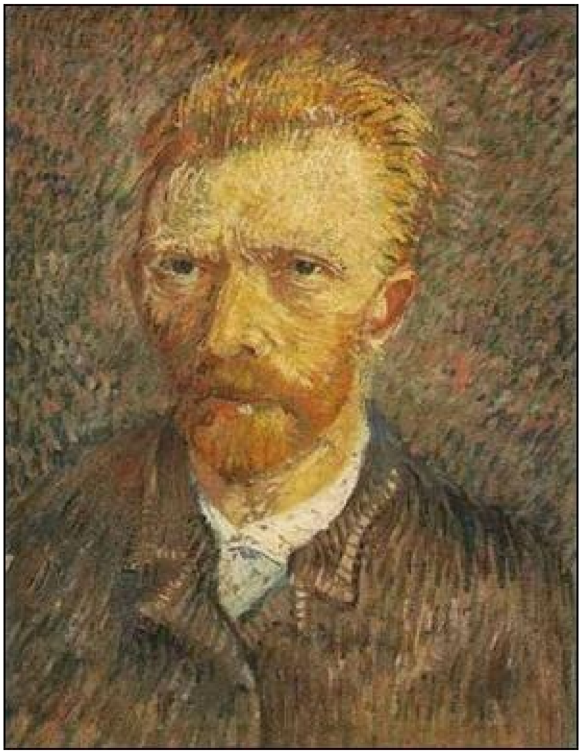


Still Life with Plaster Statuette, a Rose and Two Novels
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 46.5 cm.
Paris: December, 1887

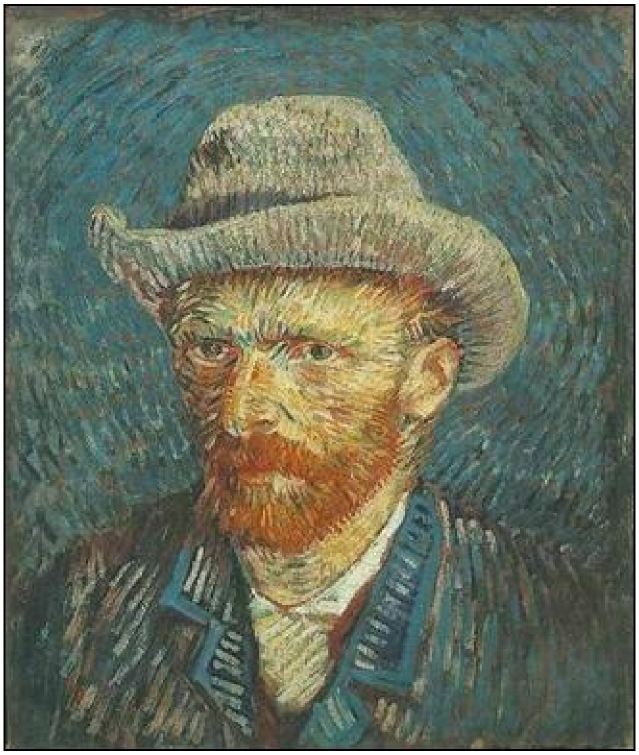


Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso

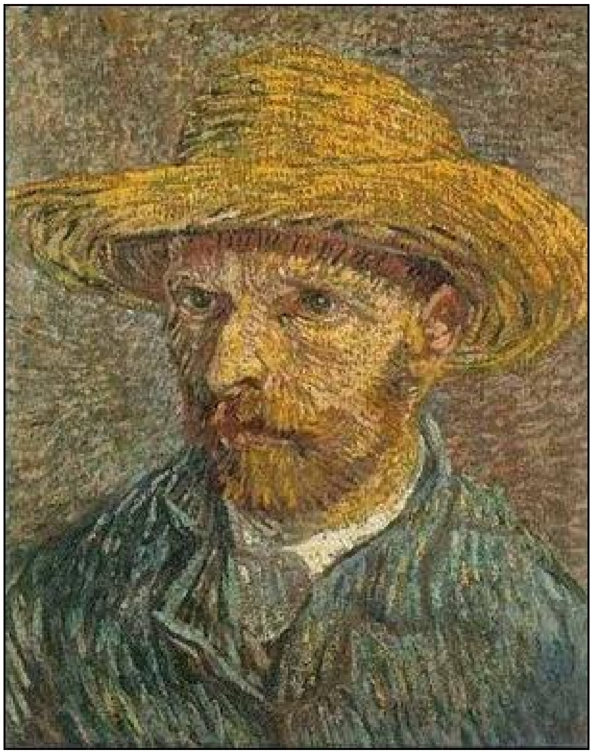
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 54.0 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887/88



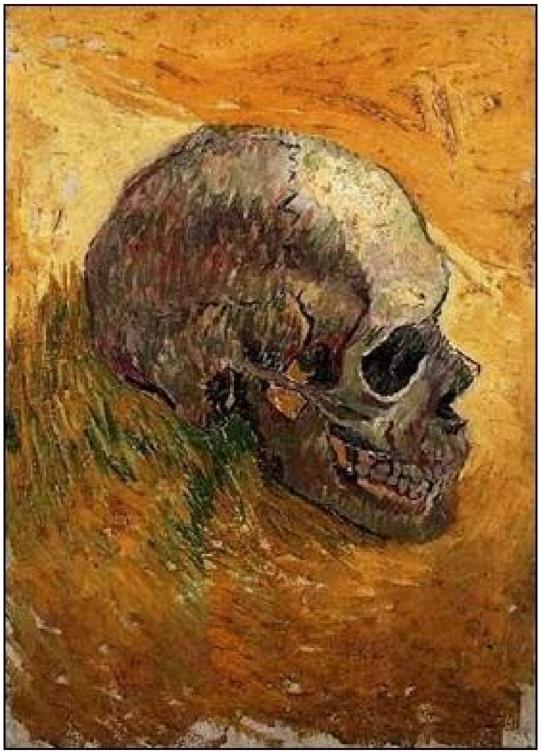
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 35.5 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887-88



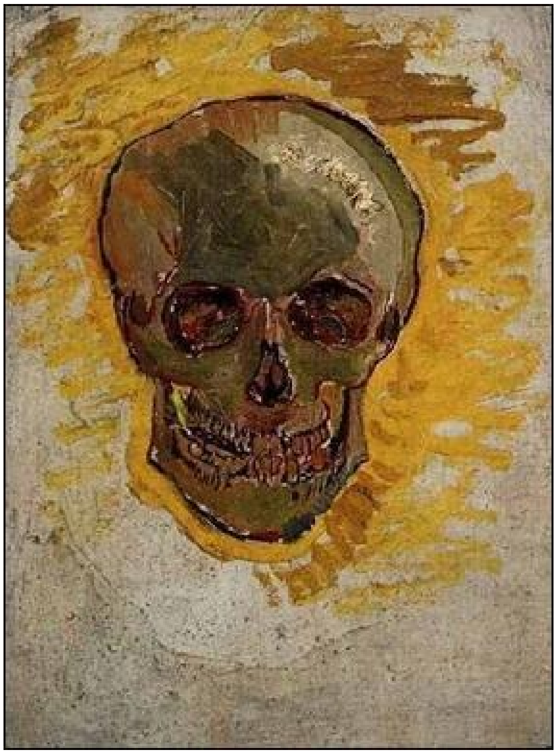
Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 37.5 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887-88



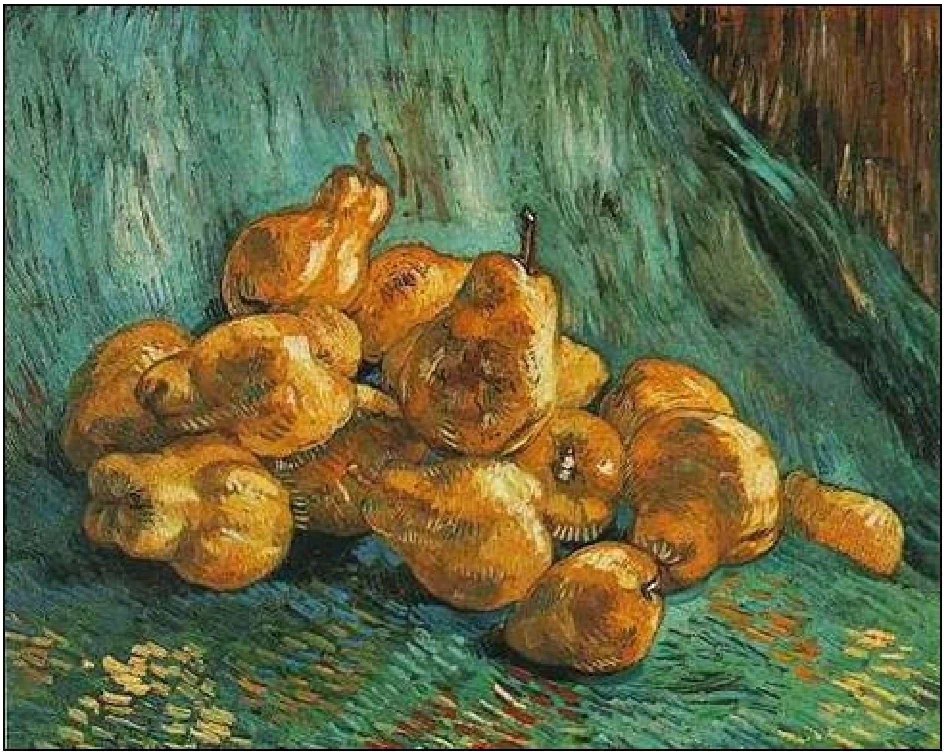
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Oil on canvas
40.6 x 31.8 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887-88



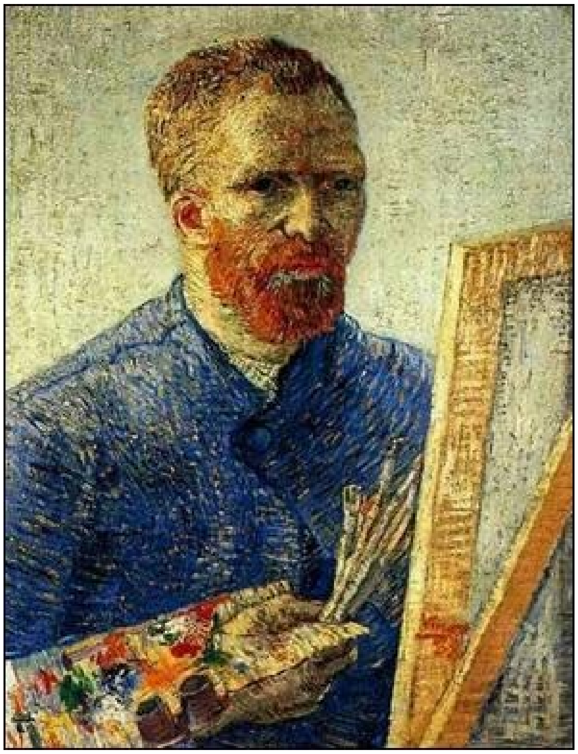
Skull
Oil on canvas on triplex board
43.0 x 31.0 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887/88



Skull
Oil on canvas on triplex board
41.5 x 31.5 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887/88

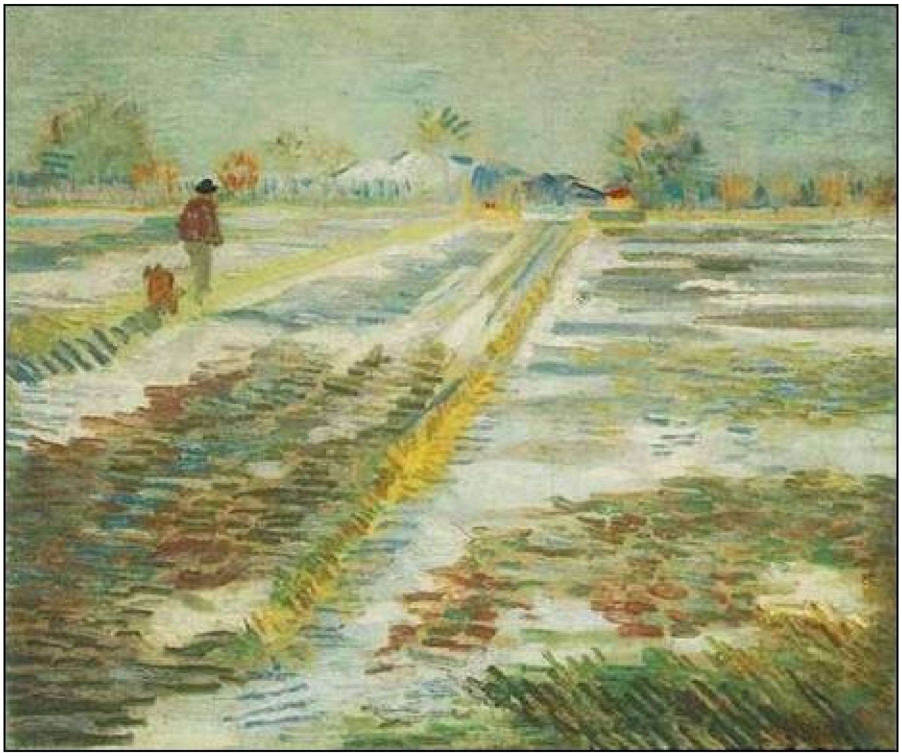


Still Life with Quince Pears
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 59.5 cm.
Paris: Winter, 1887/88

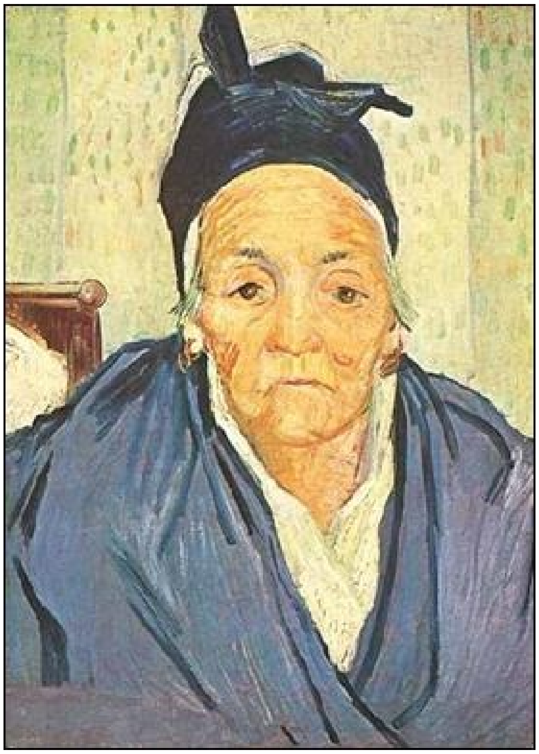


Self-Portrait in Front of the Easel
Oil on canvas
65.5 x 50.5 cm.
Paris: early 1888

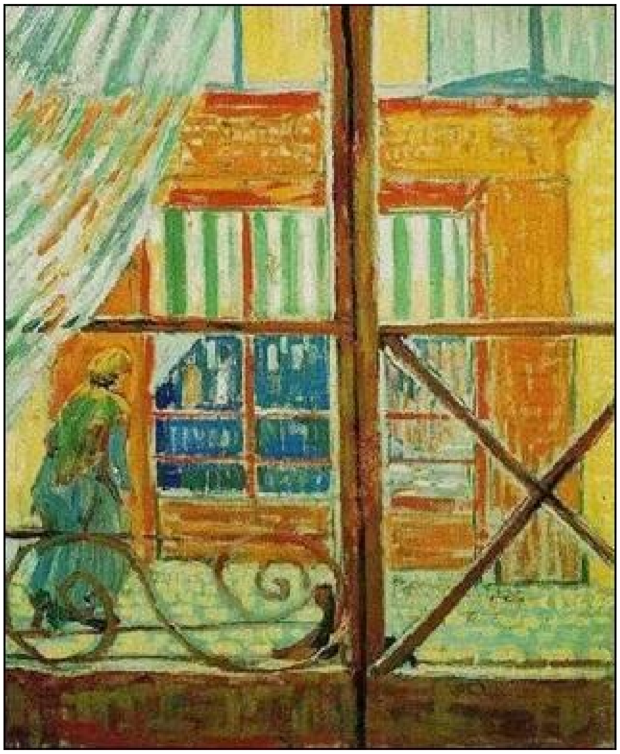
Arles Works



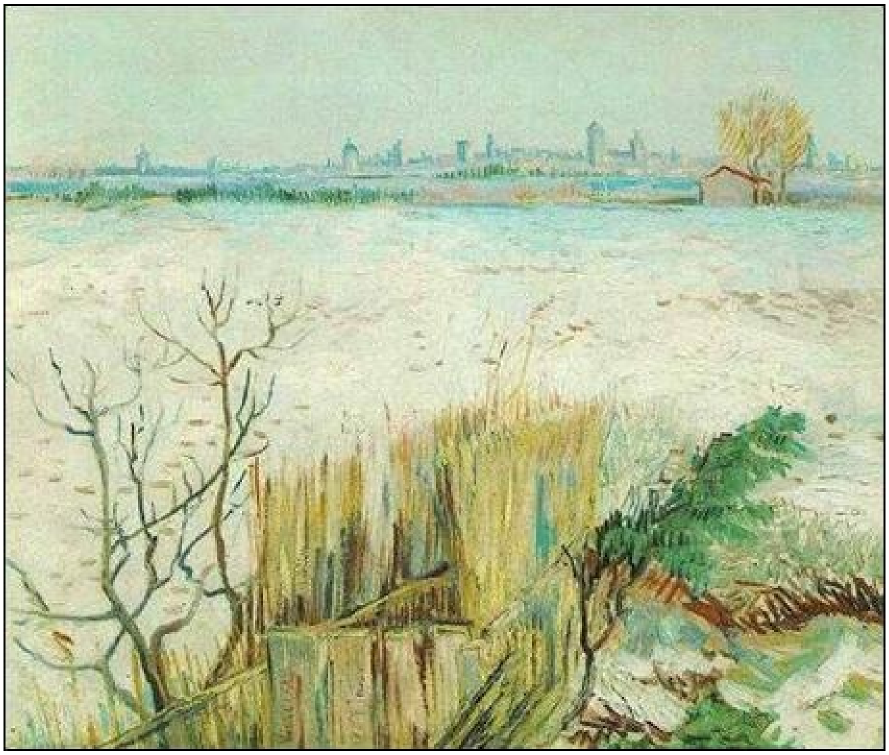
Landscape with Snow
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 46.0 cm.
Arles: February, 1888



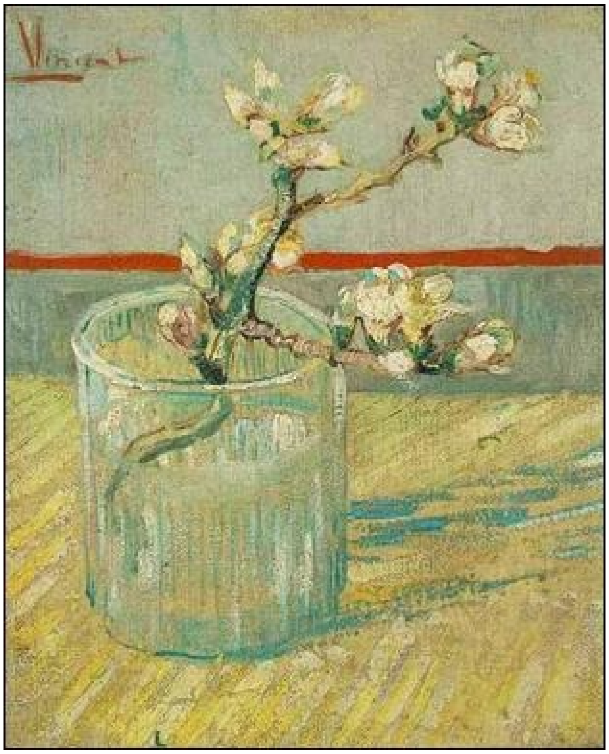
Old Woman of Arles, An
Oil on canvas
58.0 x 42.5 cm.
Arles: February, 1888



Pork-Butcher's Shop Seen from a Window, A
Oil on canvas on cardboard
39.5 x 32.5 cm.
Arles: February, 1888

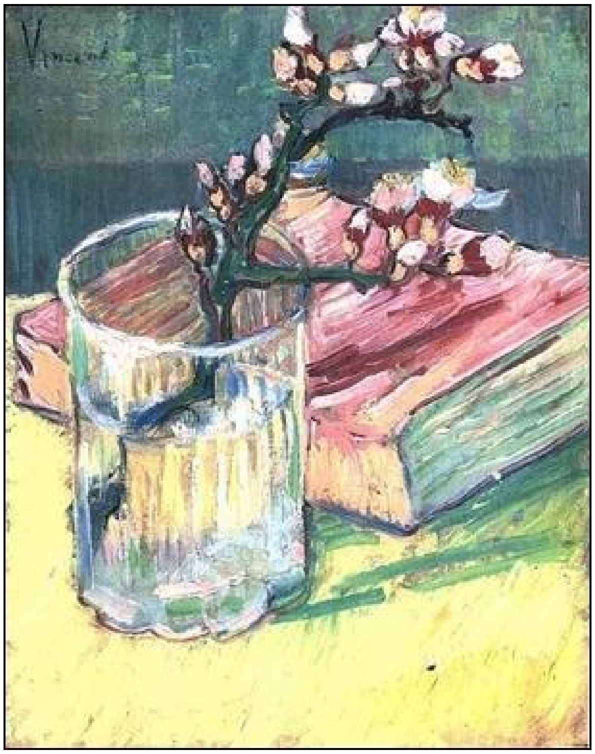


Snowy Landscape with Arles in the Background
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 60.0 cm.
Arles: February, 1888

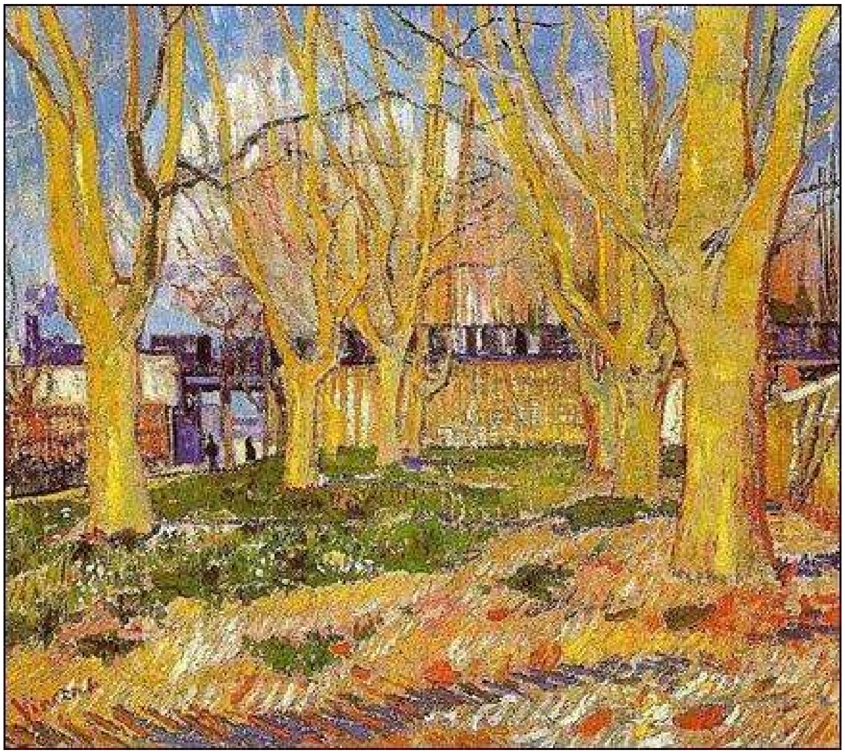


Blossoming Almond Branch in a Glass

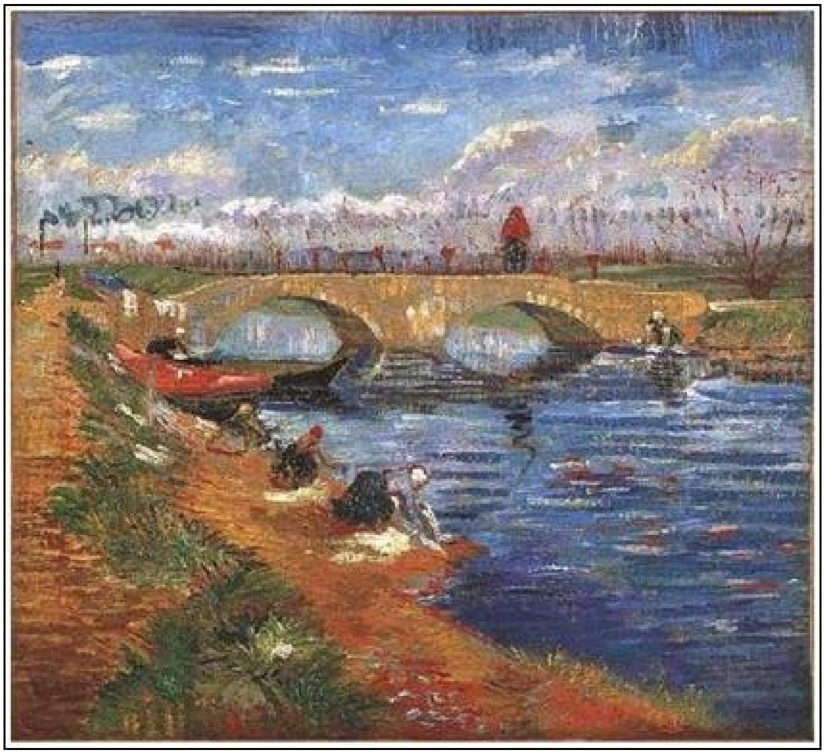
Oil on canvas
24.0 x 19.0 cm.
Arles: early March, 1888



Blossoming Almond Branch in a Glass with a Book
Oil on canvas
24.0 x 19.0 cm.
Arles: early March, 1888

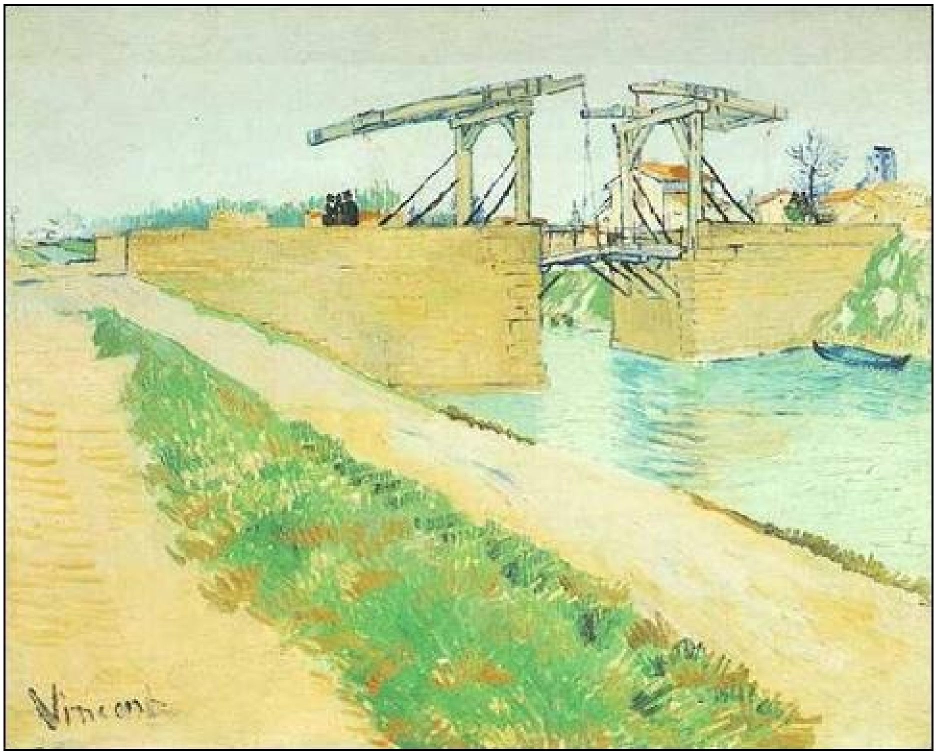


Avenue of Plane Trees near Arles Station
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 49.5 cm.
Arles: March, 1888

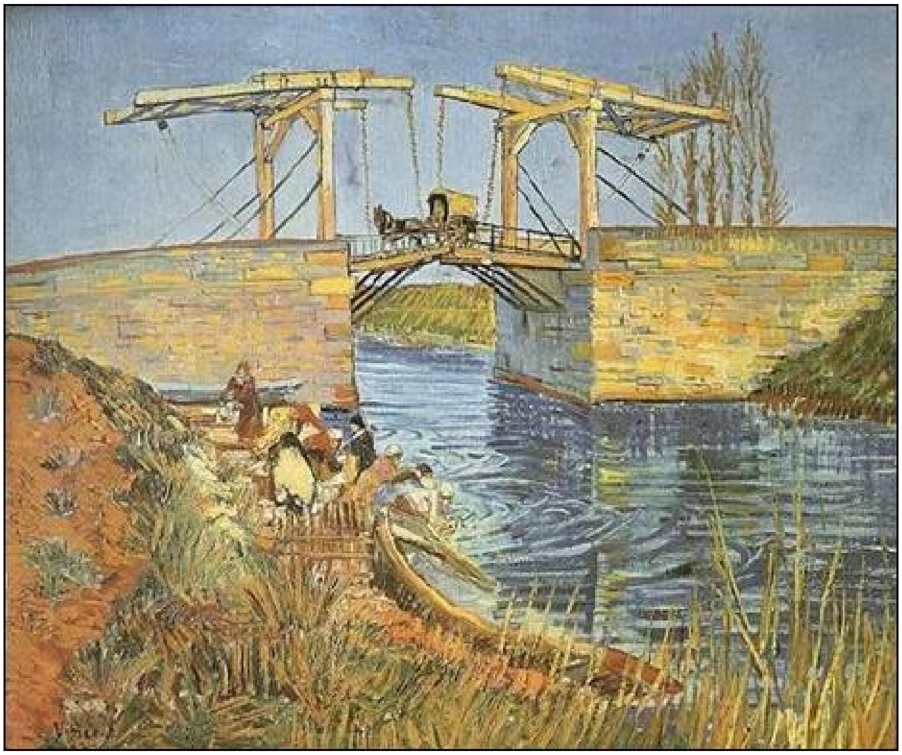


Gleize Bridge over the Vigueirat Canal, The

Oil on canvas
46.0 x 49.0 cm.
Arles: March, 1888

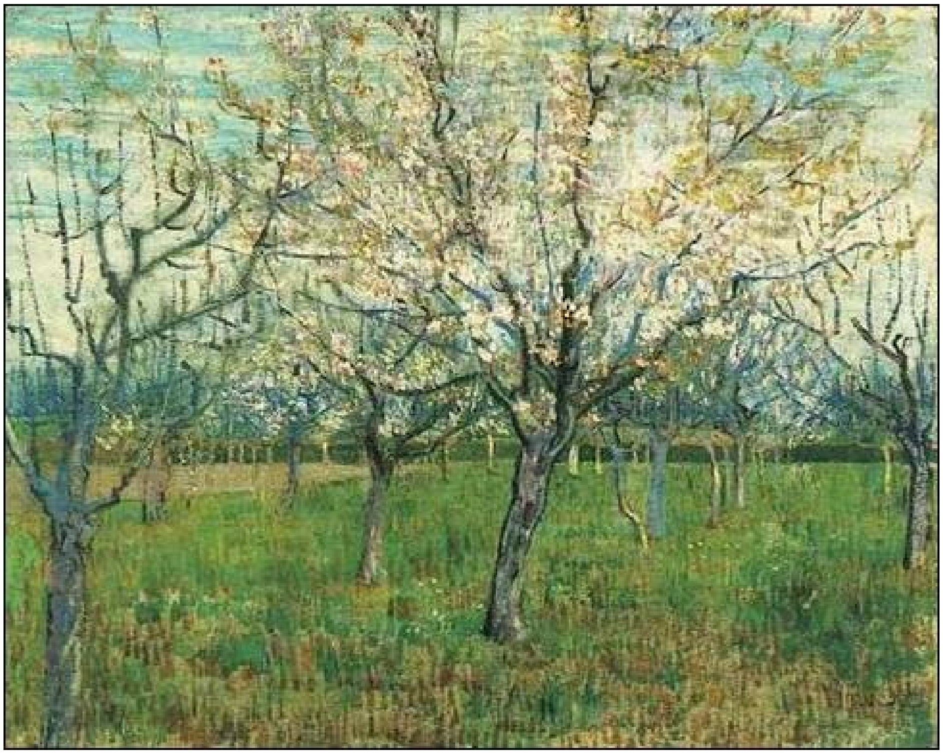


Langlois Bridge at Arles with Road Alongside the Canal, The
Oil on canvas
59.5 x 74.0 cm.
Arles: March, 1888

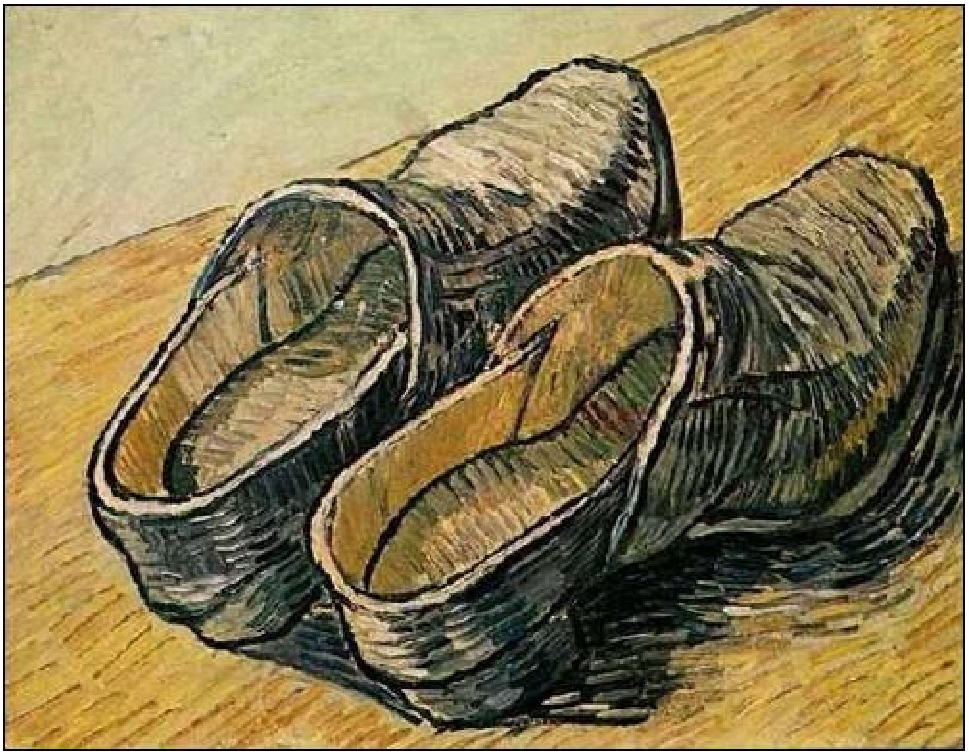


Langlois Bridge at Arles with Women Washing, The

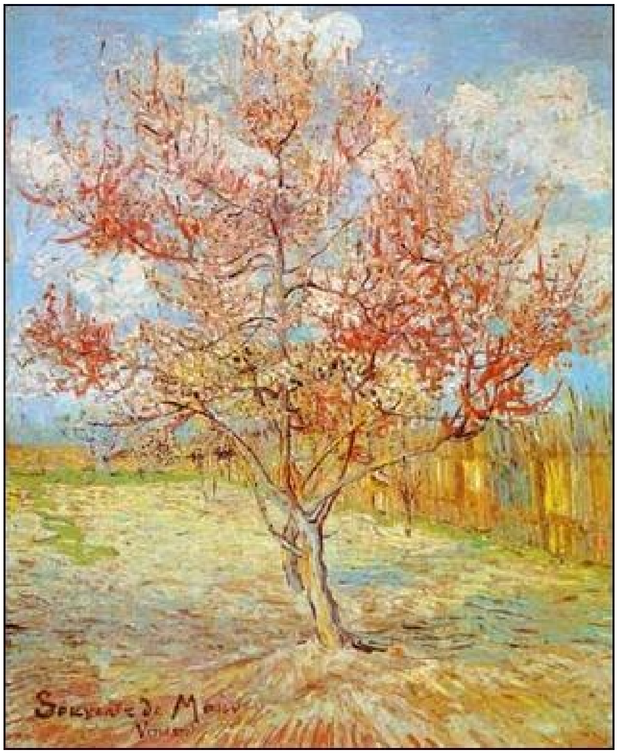
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: March, 1888



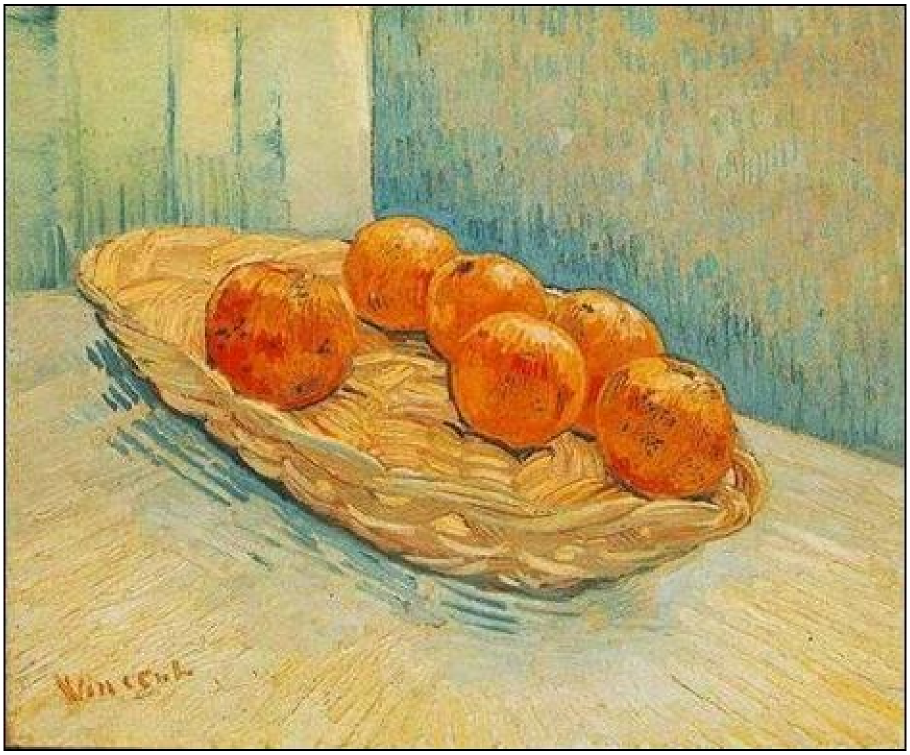
Orchard with Blossoming Apricot Trees
Oil on canvas
64.5 x 80.5 cm.
Arles: March, 1888



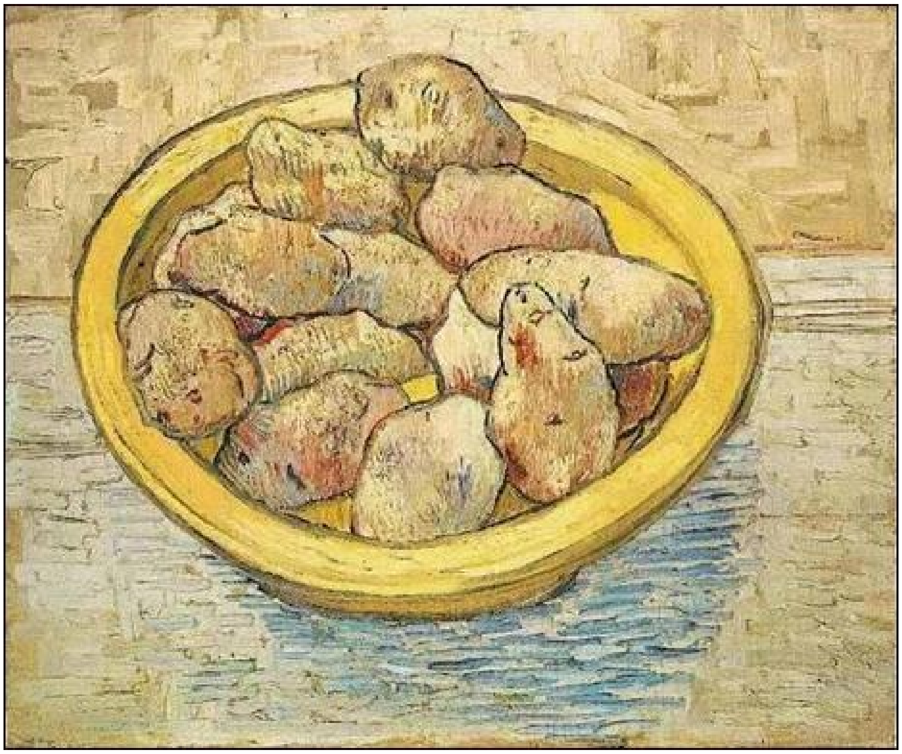
Pair of Leather Clogs, A
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 40.5 cm.
Arles: March, 1888


Souvenir de Mauve
Vincent

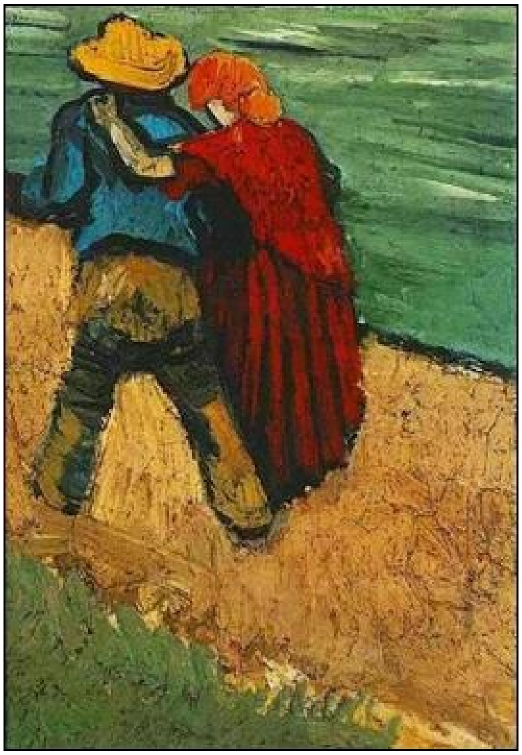
Pink Peach Tree in Blossom
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 59.5 cm.
Arles: March, 1888



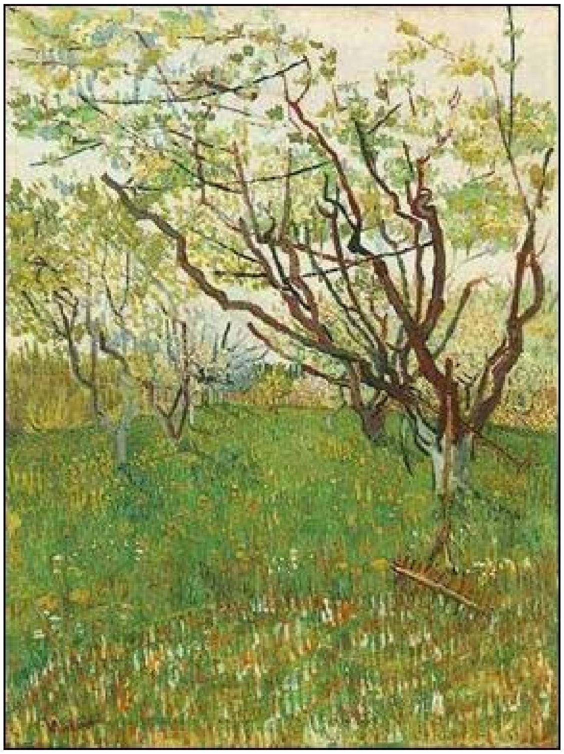
Still Life with Basket and Six Oranges
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: March, 1888



Still Life: Potatoes in a Yellow Dish
Oil on canvas
39.0 x 47.0 cm.
Arles: March, 1888



Two Lovers (Fragment)
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 23.0 cm.
Arles: March, 1888

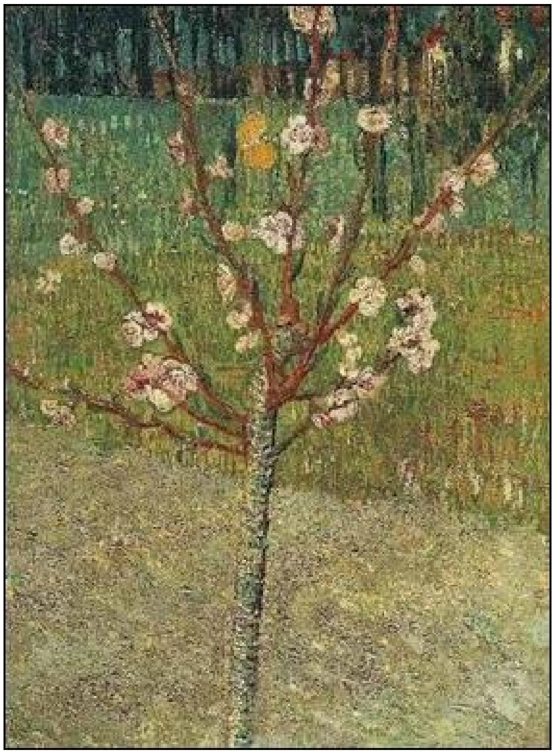


Orchard in Blossom

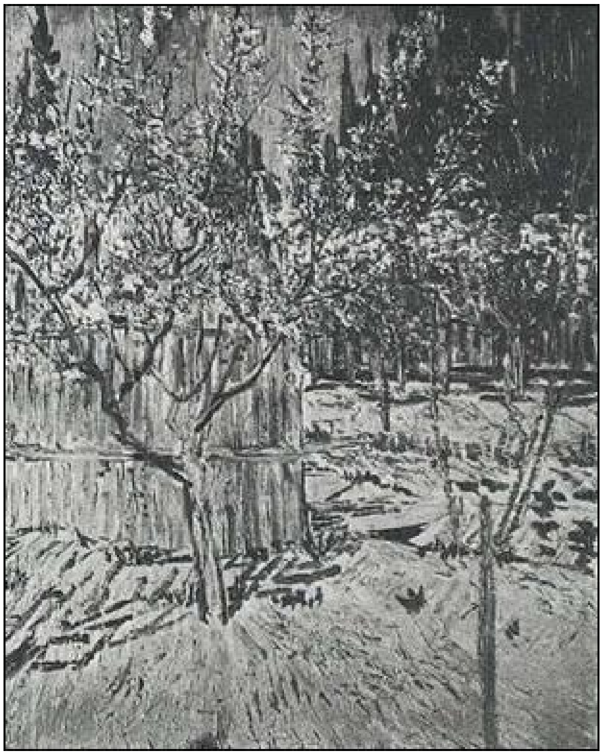
Oil on canvas

72.4 x 53.5 cm.

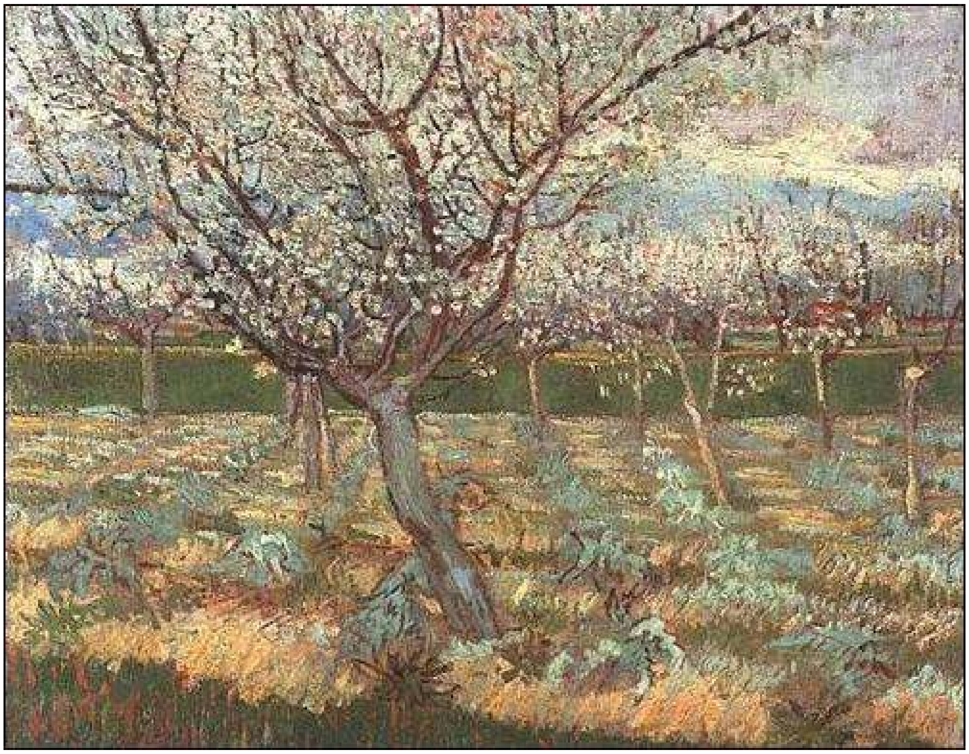
Arles: March-April, 1888



Almond Tree in Blossom
Oil on canvas
48.5 x 36.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

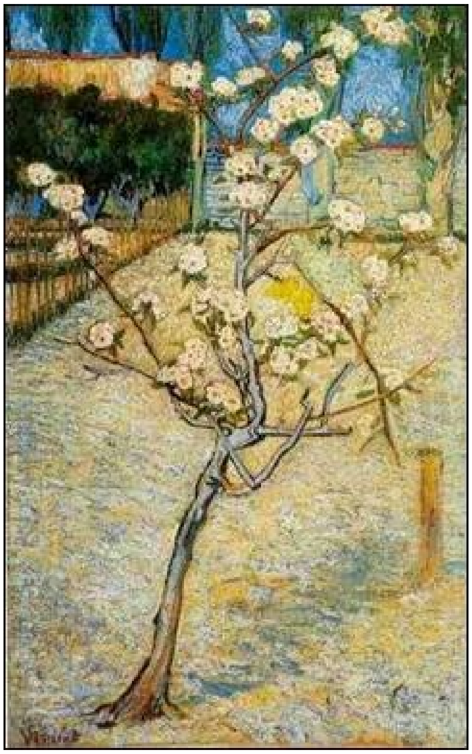


Apricot Trees in Blossom
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 33.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

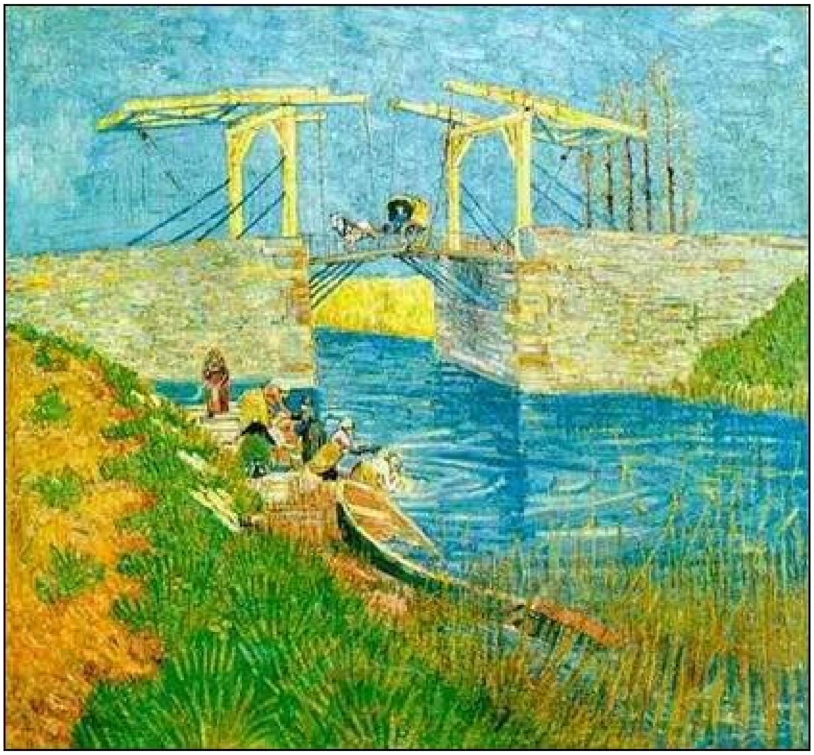


Apricot Trees in Blossom

Oil on canvas
55.0 x 65.5 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

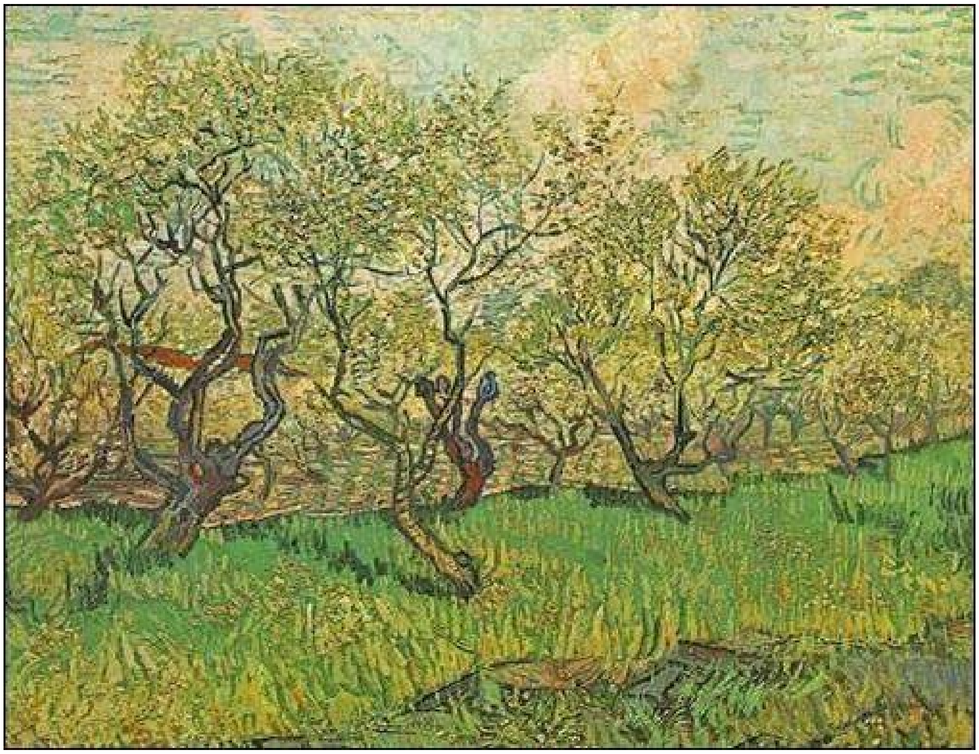


Blossoming Pear Tree
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 46.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

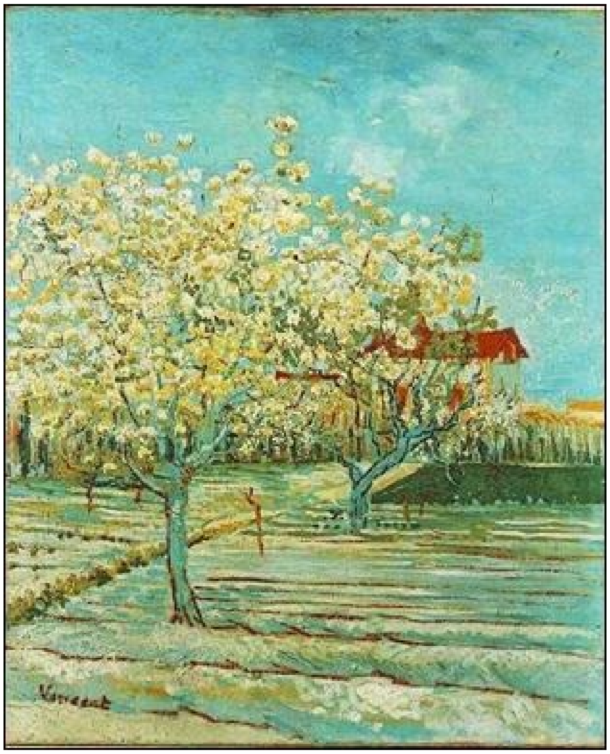


Langlois Bridge at Arles, The

Oil on canvas
60.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

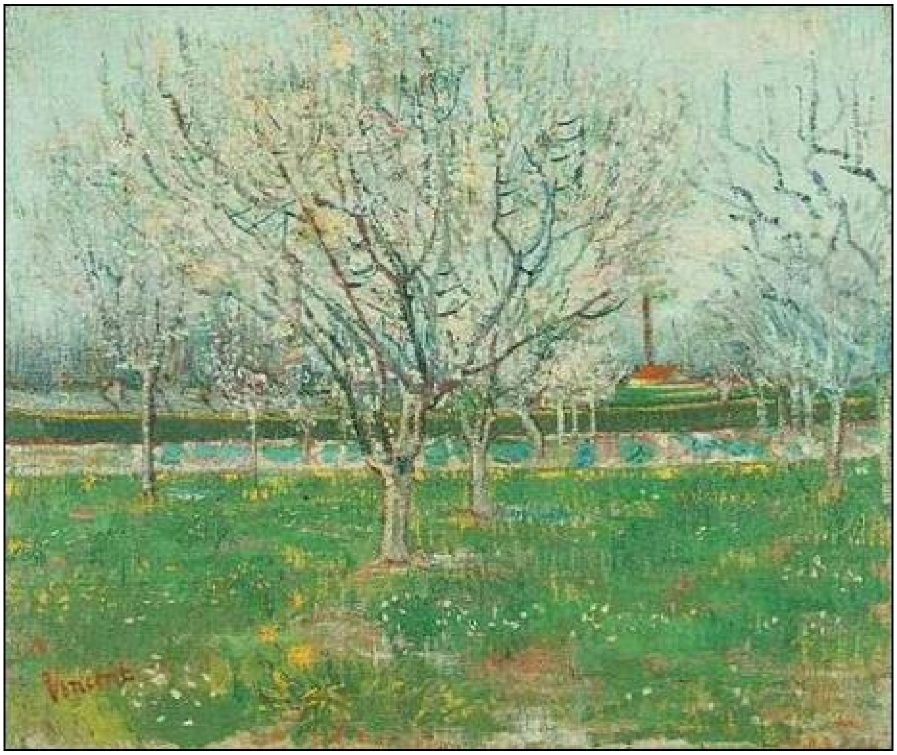


Orchard in Blossom
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888



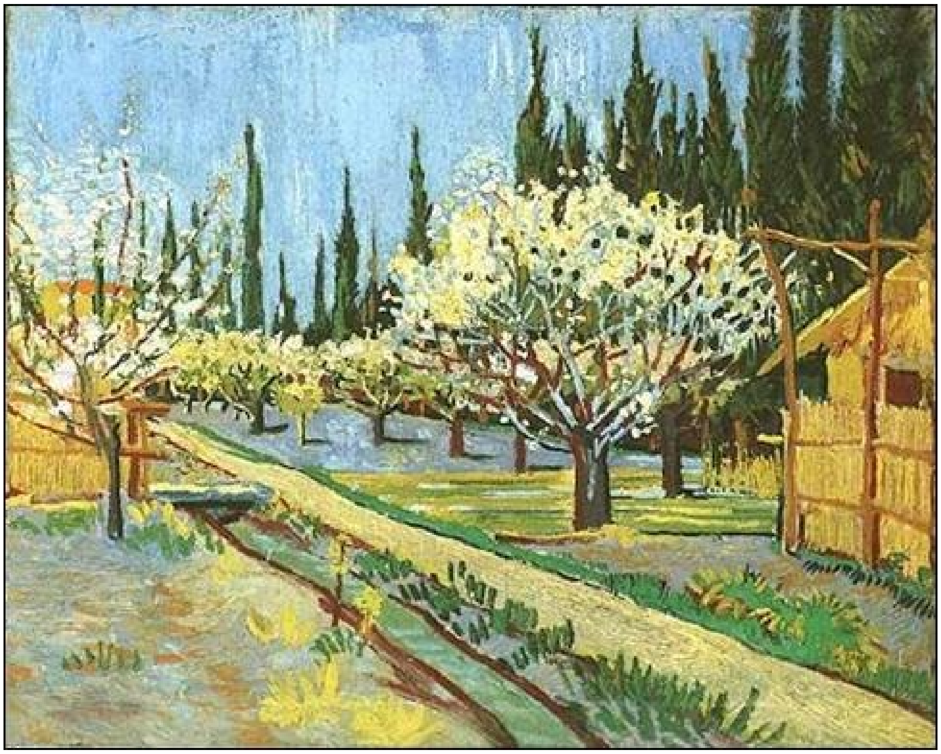
Orchard in Blossom

Oil on canvas
72.0 x 58.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

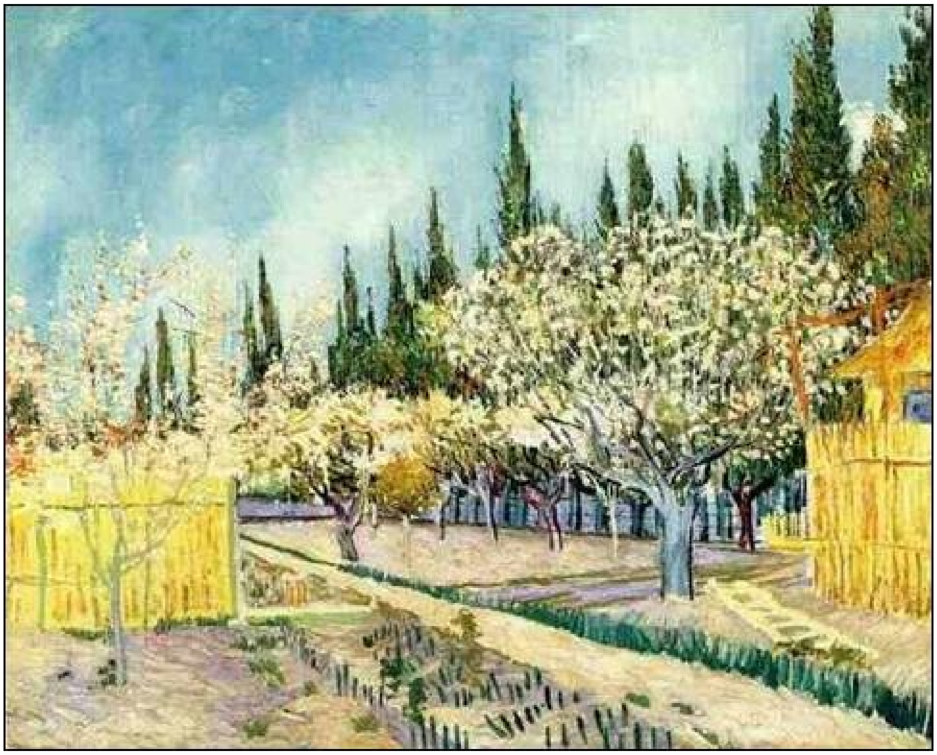


Orchard in Blossom (Plum Trees)

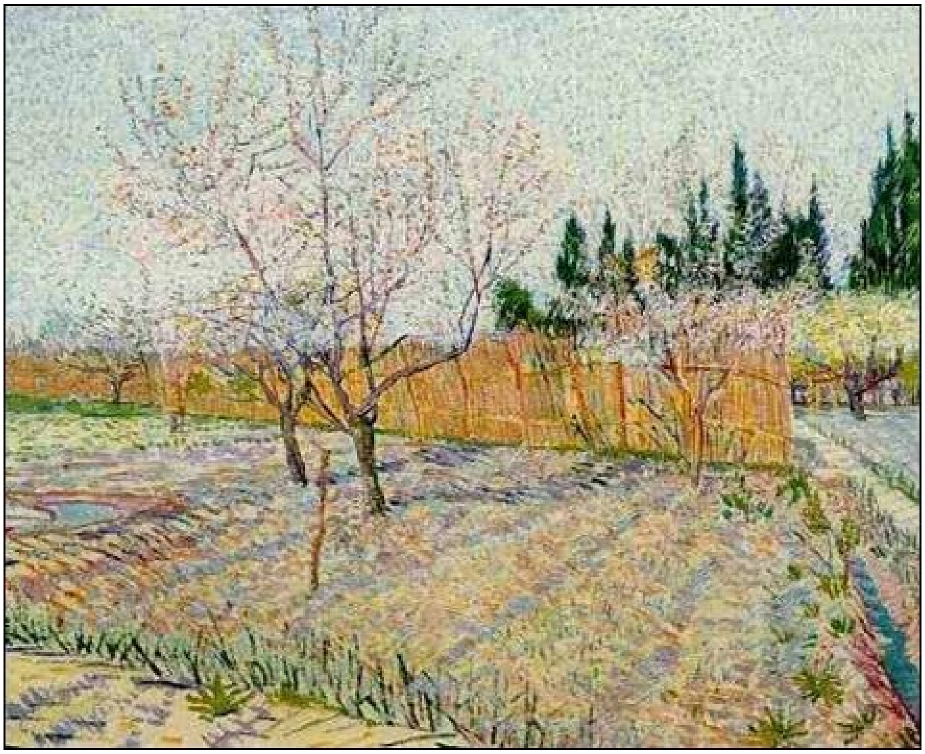
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888



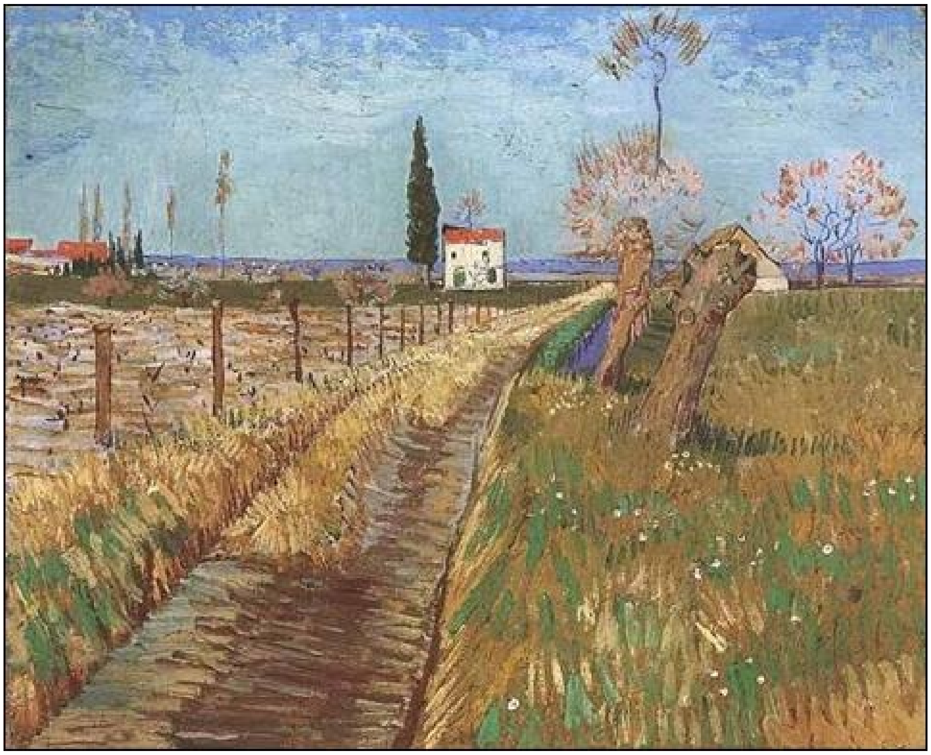
Orchard in Blossom, Bordered by Cypresses
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 40.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888



Orchard in Blossom, Bordered by Cypresses
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

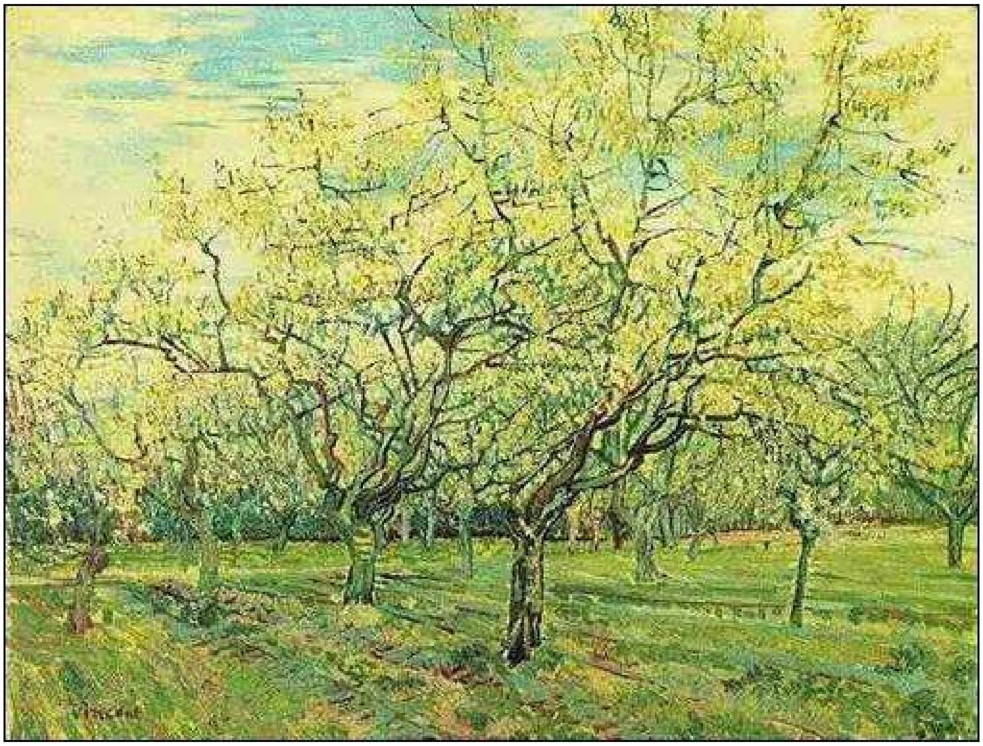


Orchard with Peach Trees in Blossom
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888



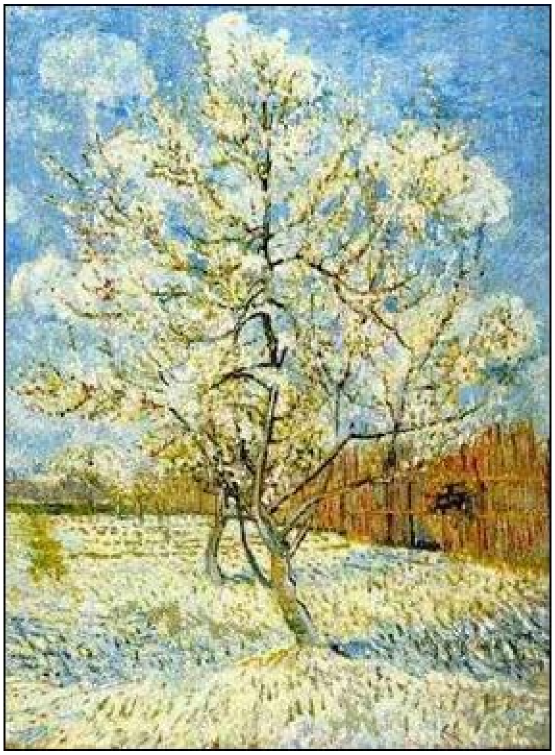
Path Through a Field with Willows

Oil on canvas
31.5 x 38.5 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

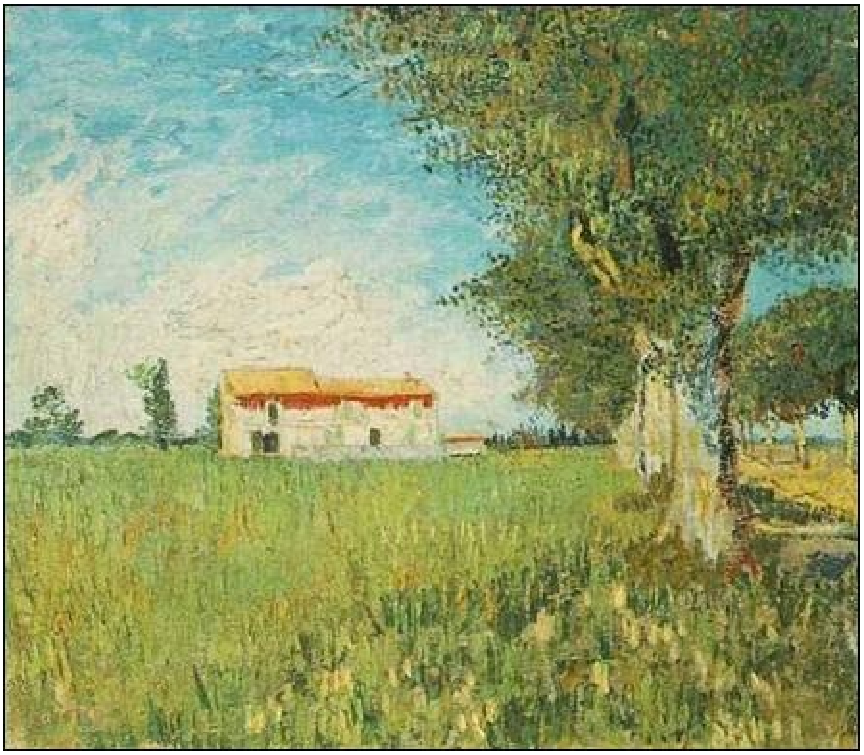


White Orchard, The

Oil on canvas
60.0 x 81.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1888

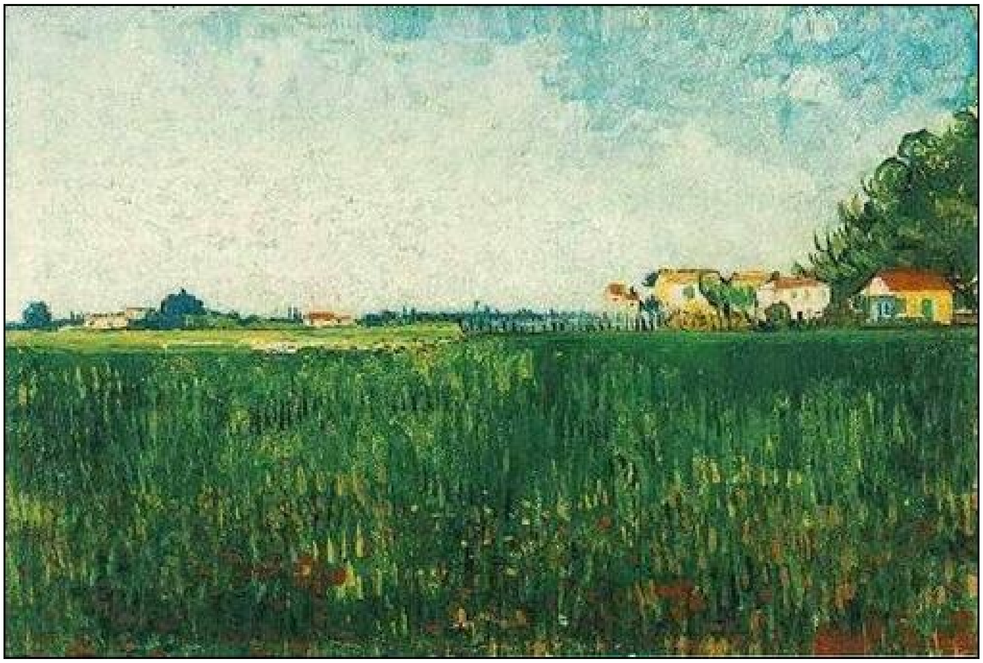


Peach Tree in Blossom
Oil on canvas
80.5 x 59.5 cm.
Arles: April-May, 1888

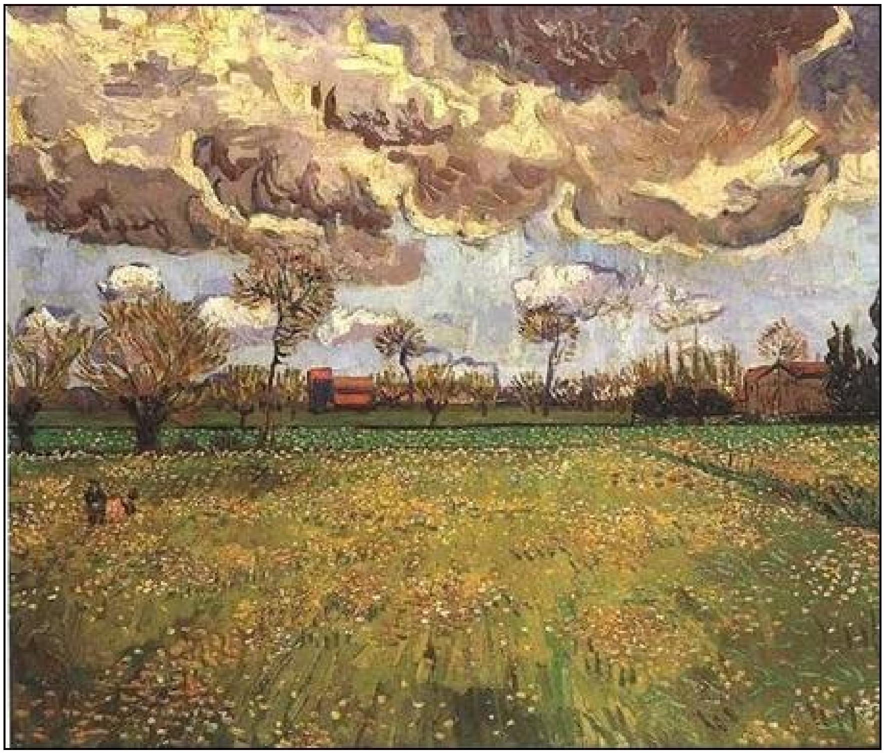


Farmhouse in a Wheat Field

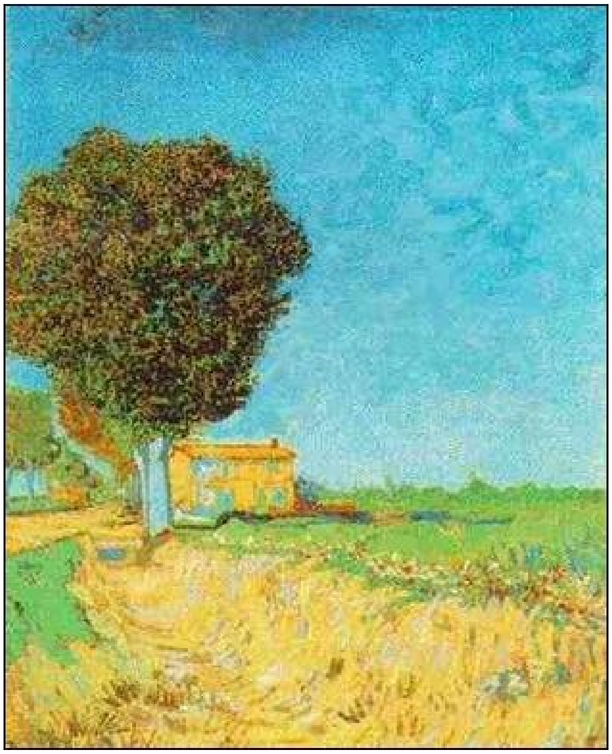
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 50.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



Farmhouses in a Wheat Field Near Arles
Oil on canvas
24.5 x 35.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888

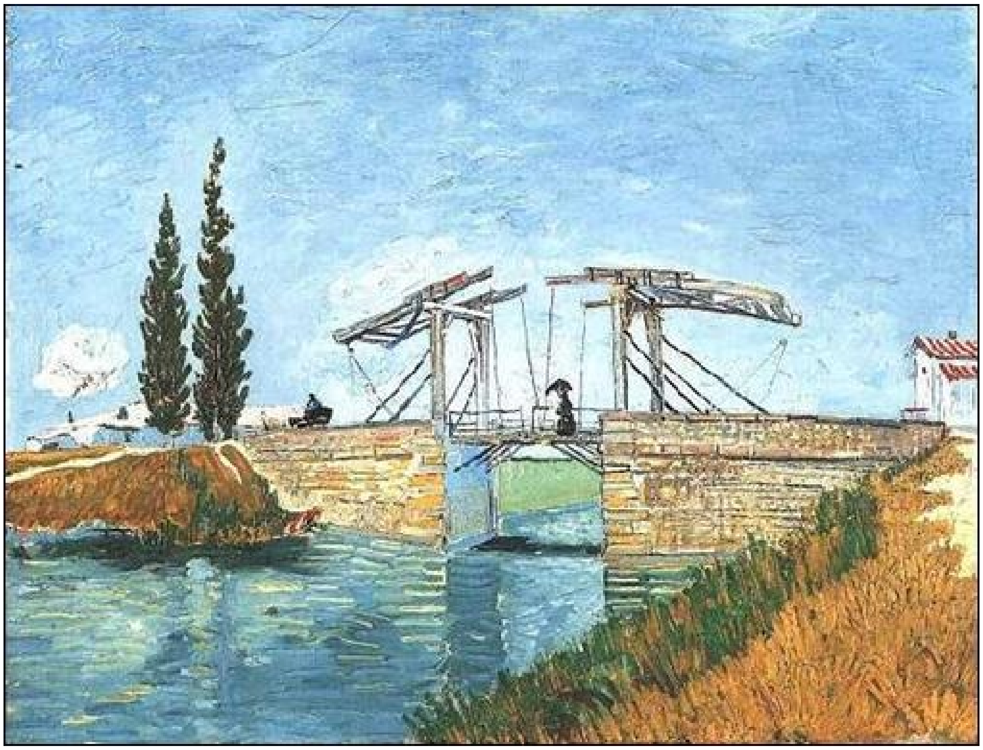


Landscape Under a Stormy Sky
Oil on canvas
59.5 x 70.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888

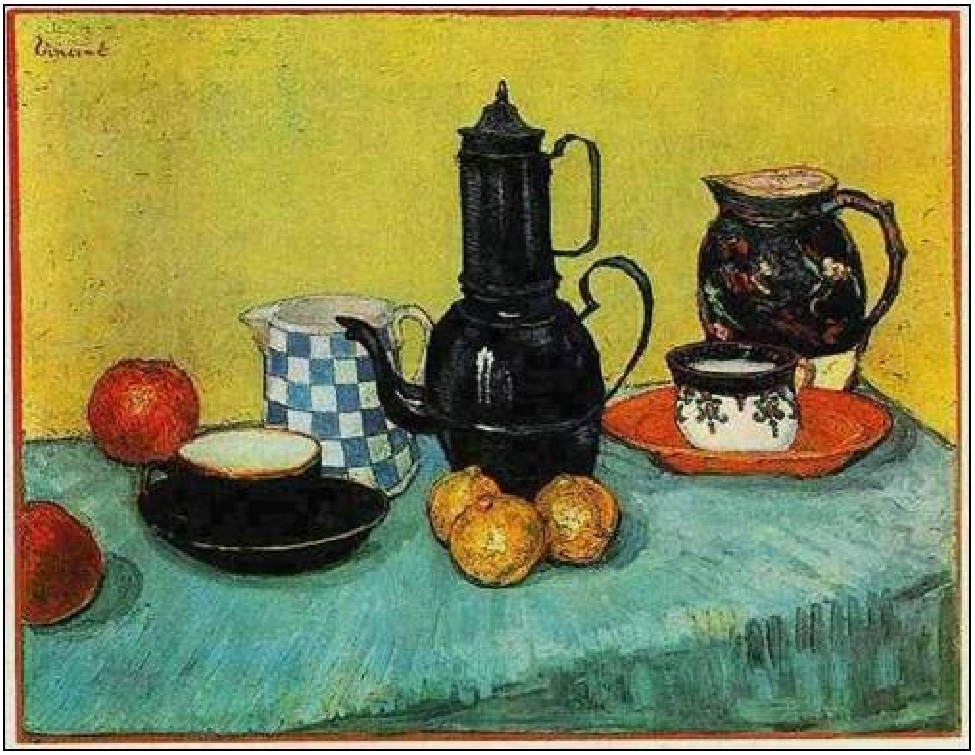


Lane near Arles, A

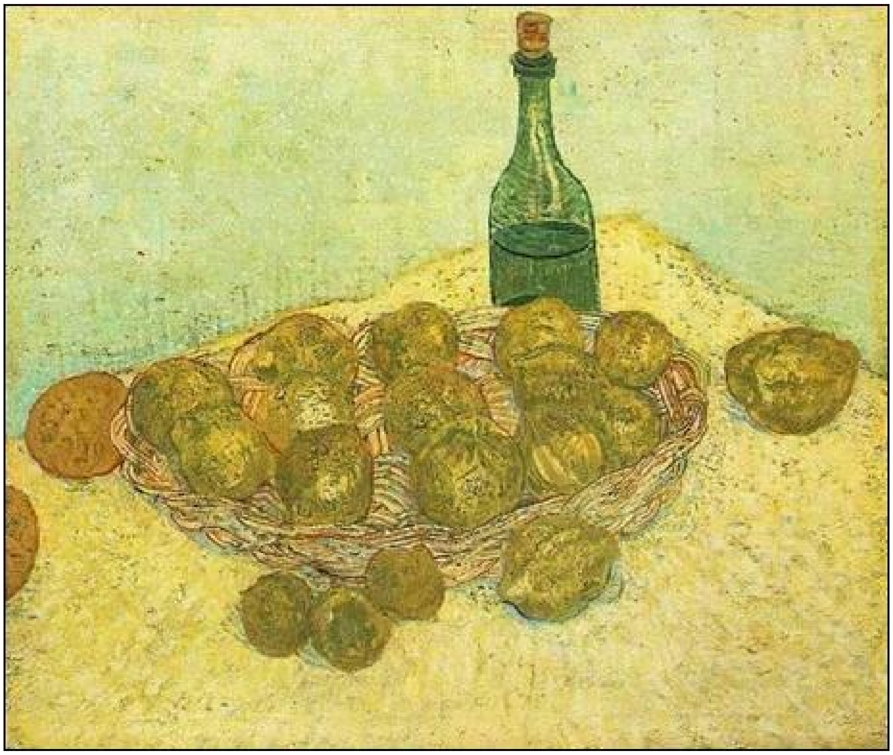
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 50.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



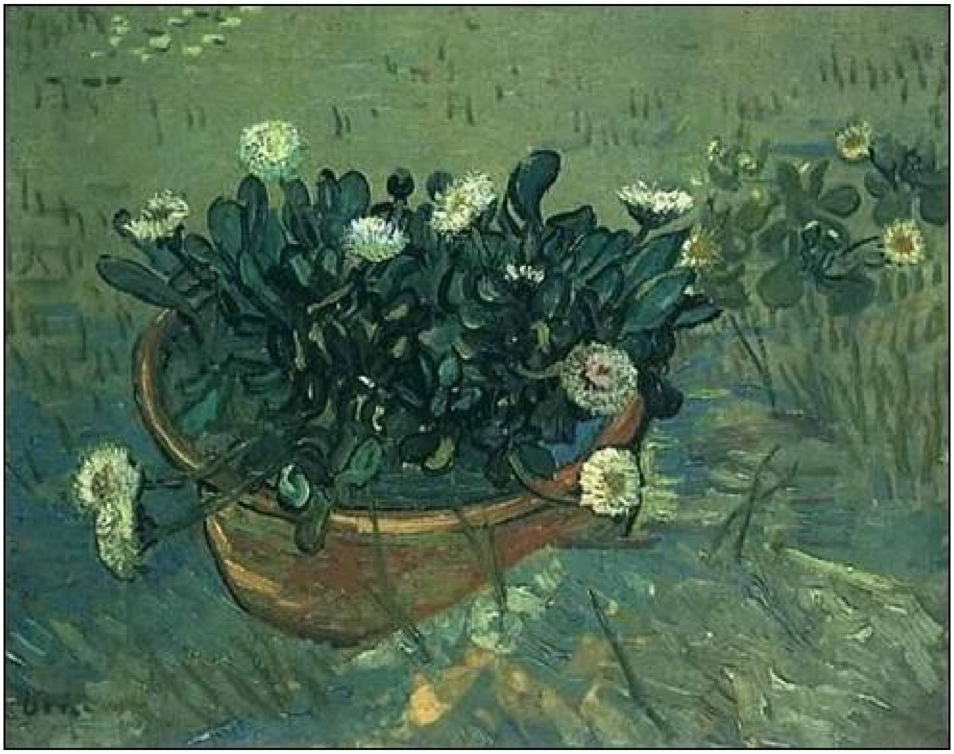
Langlois Bridge at Arles, The
Oil on canvas
49.5 x 64.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



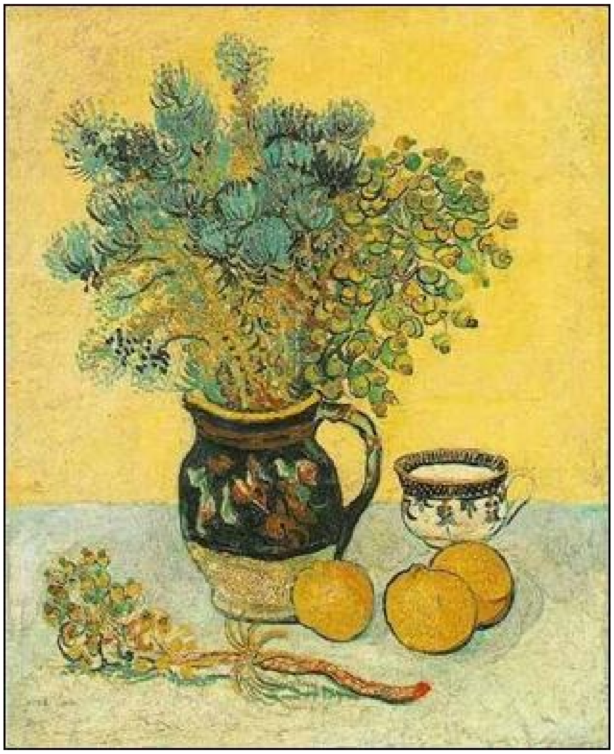
Still Life: Blue Enamel Coffeepot, Earthenware and Fruit
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



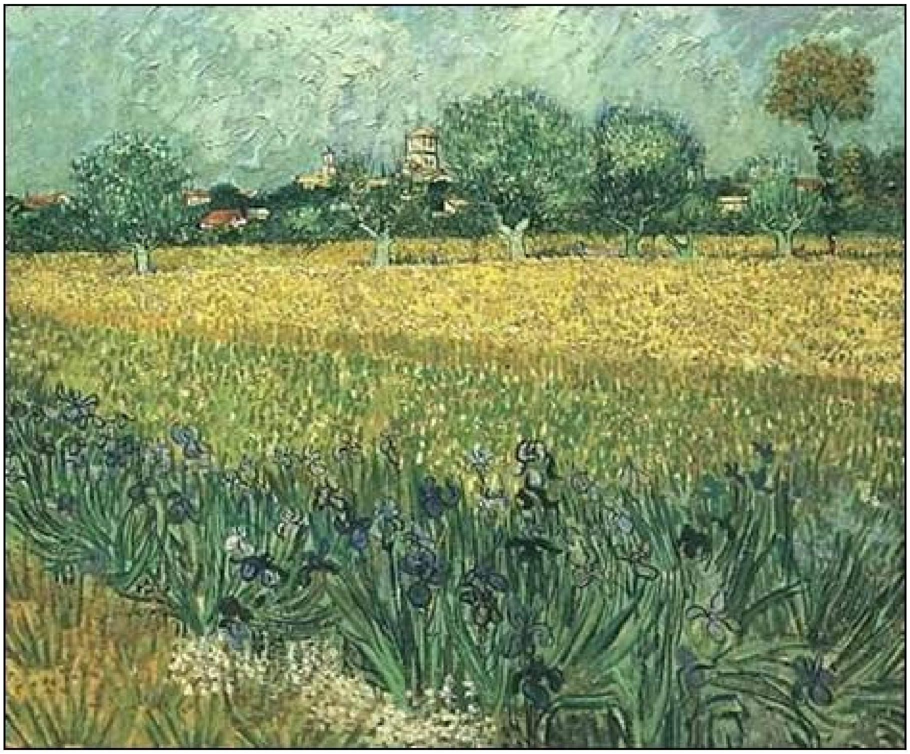
Still Life: Bottle, Lemons and Oranges
Oil on canvas
53.0 x 63.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



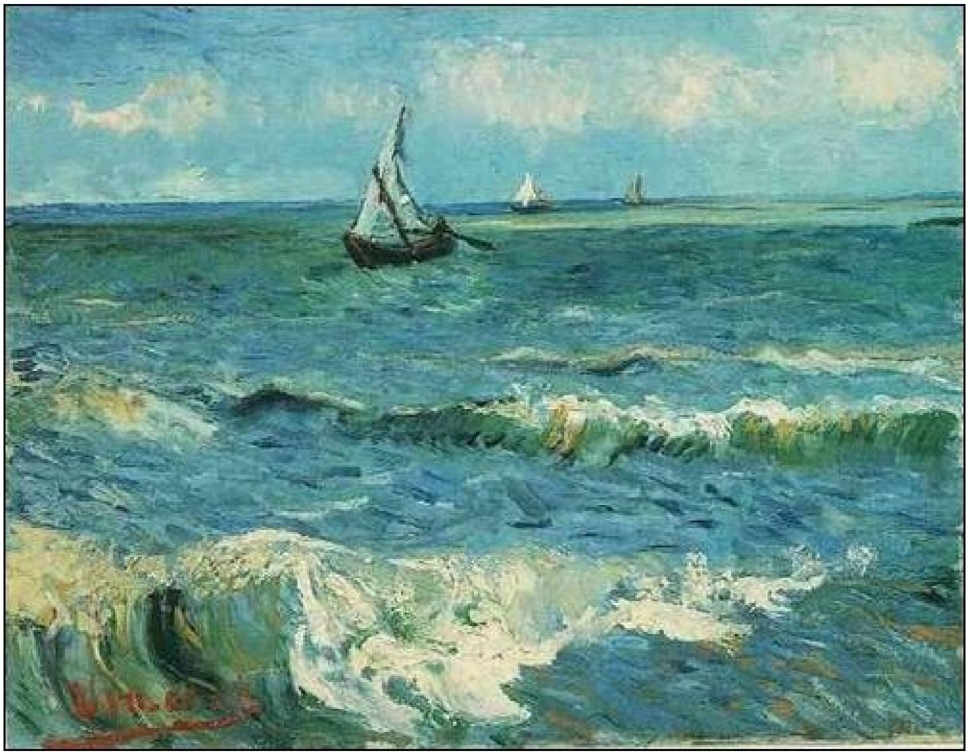
Still Life: Bowl with Daisies
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 42.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



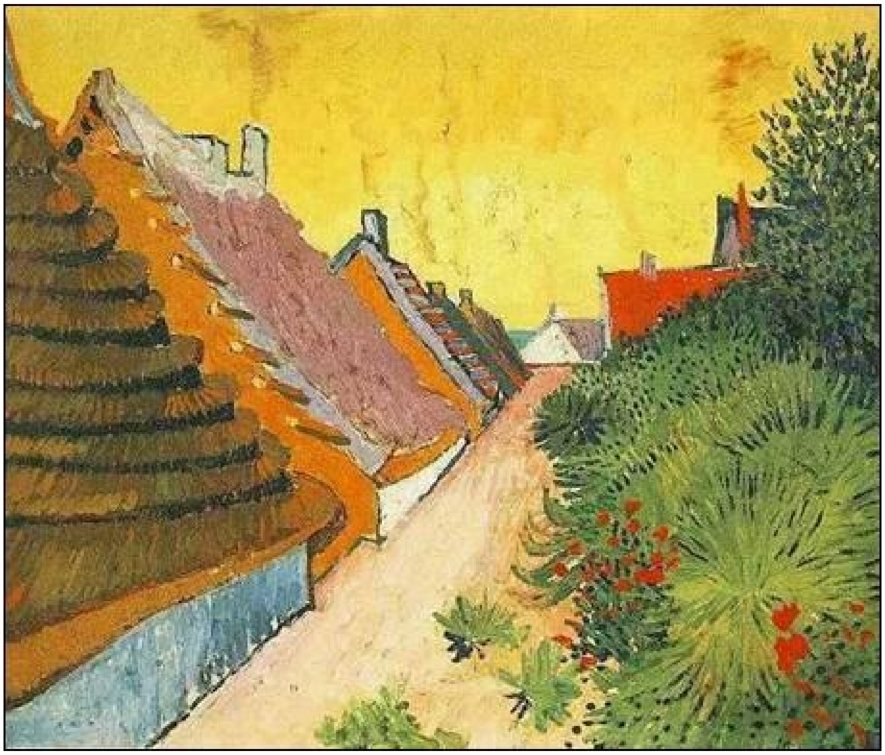
Still Life: Majolica Jug with Wildflowers
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 46.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



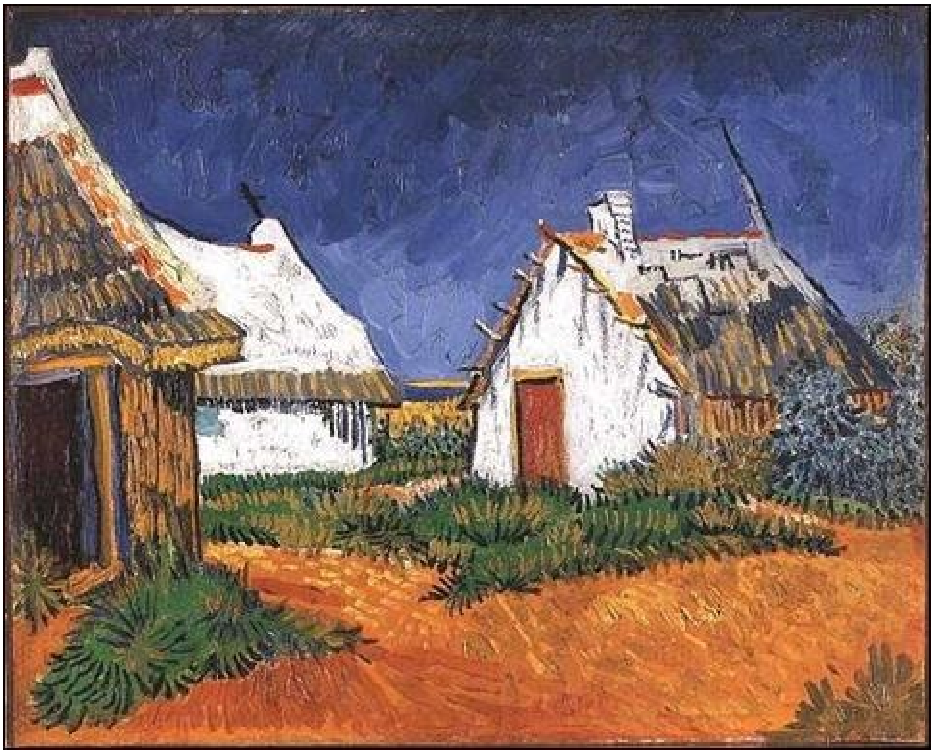
View of Arles with Irises in the Foreground
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: May, 1888



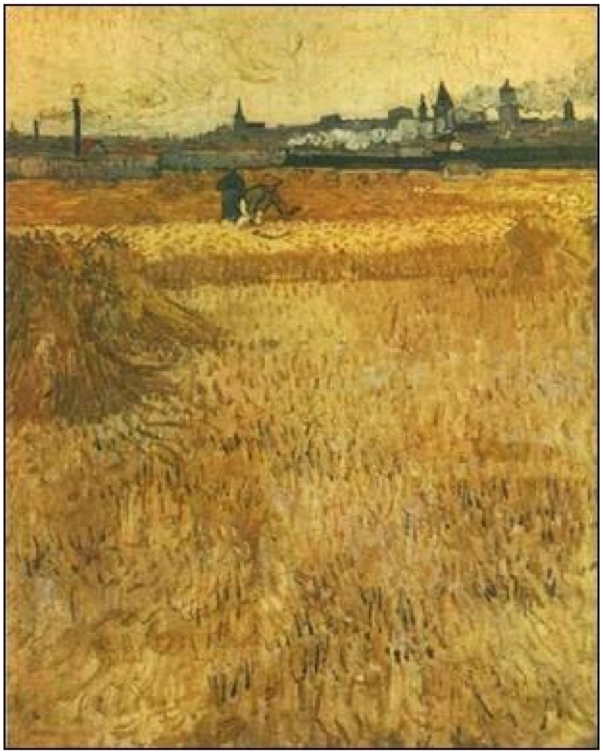
Seascape at Saintes-Maries
Oil on canvas
51.0 x 64.0 cm.
Arles: early June, 1888



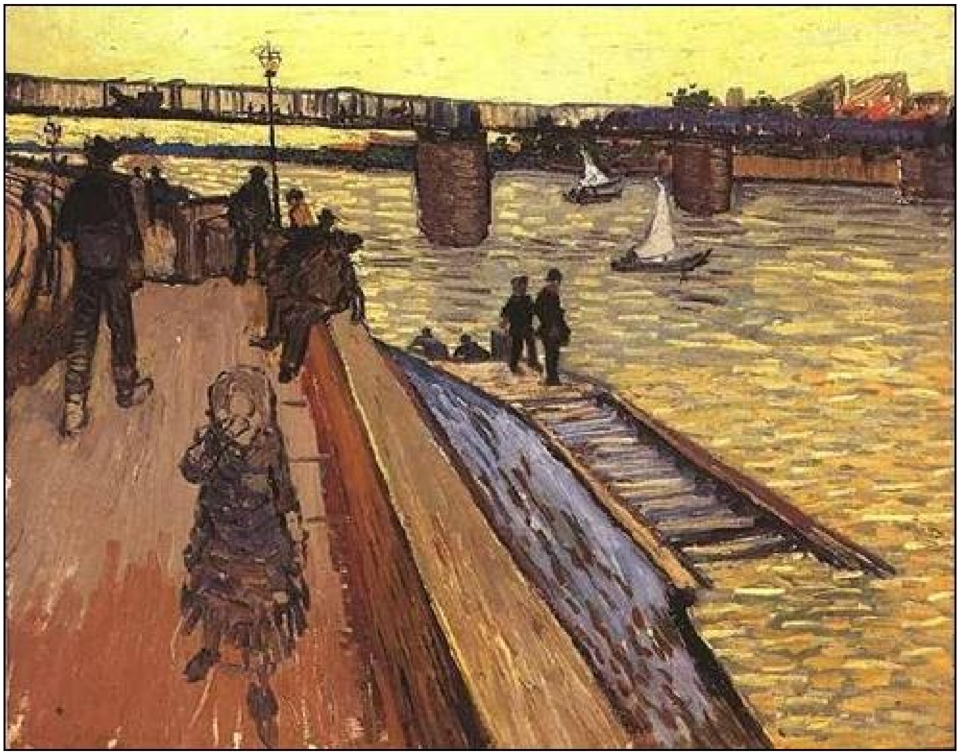
Street in Saintes-Maries
Oil on canvas
38.3 x 46.1 cm.
Arles: early June, 1888



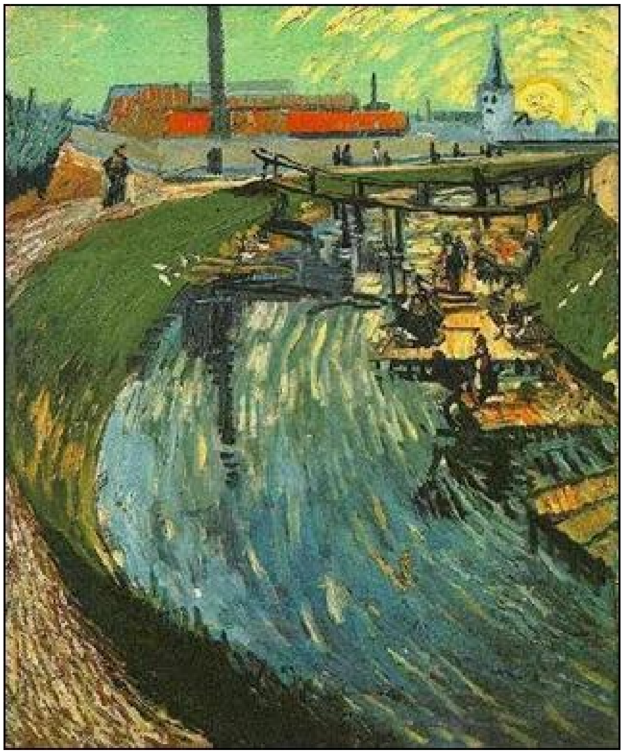
Three White Cottages in Saintes-Maries
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 41.5 cm.
Arles: early June, 1888



Arles: View from the Wheat Fields
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888

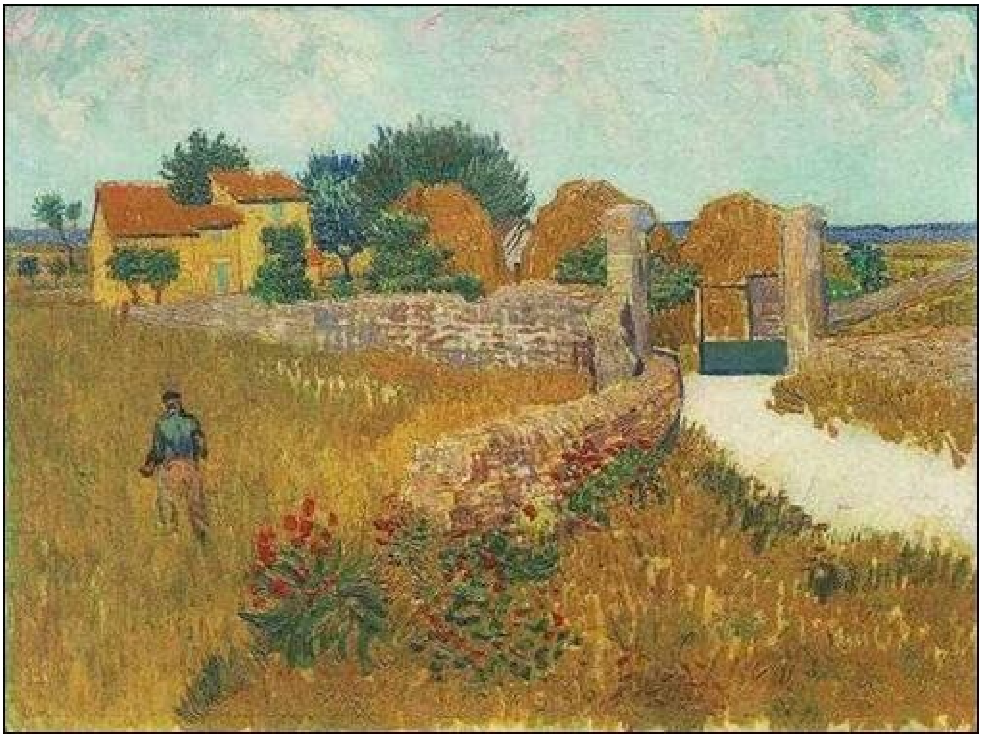


Bridge at Trinquetaille, The
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888

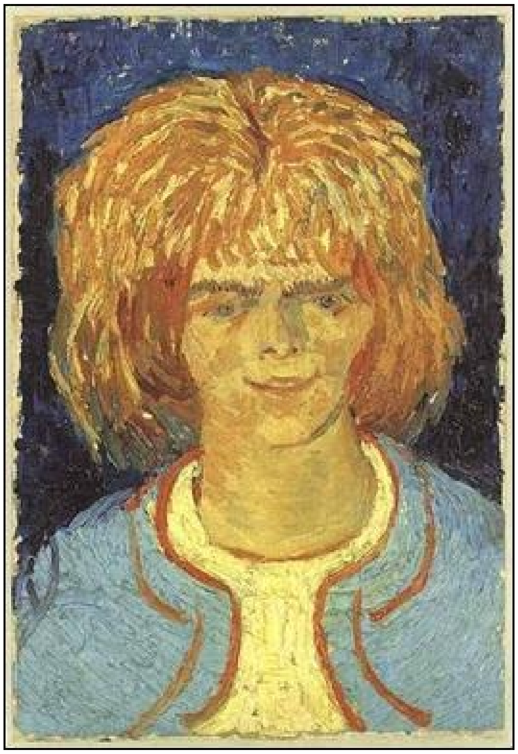


Canal with Women Washing

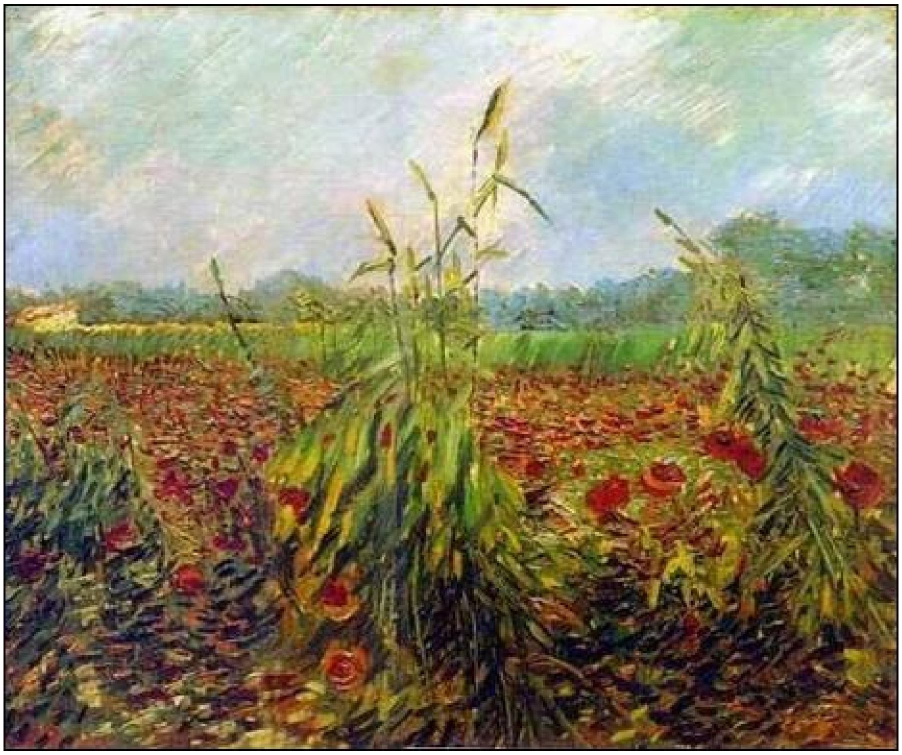
Oil on canvas
74.0 x 60.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



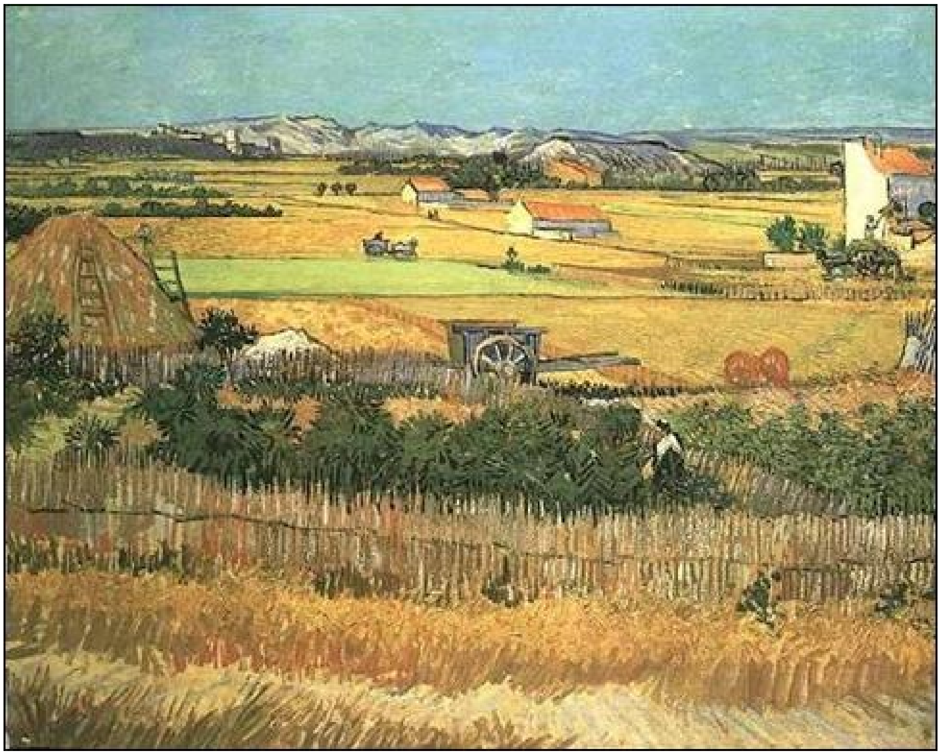
Farmhouse in Provence
Oil on canvas
46.1 x 60.9 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



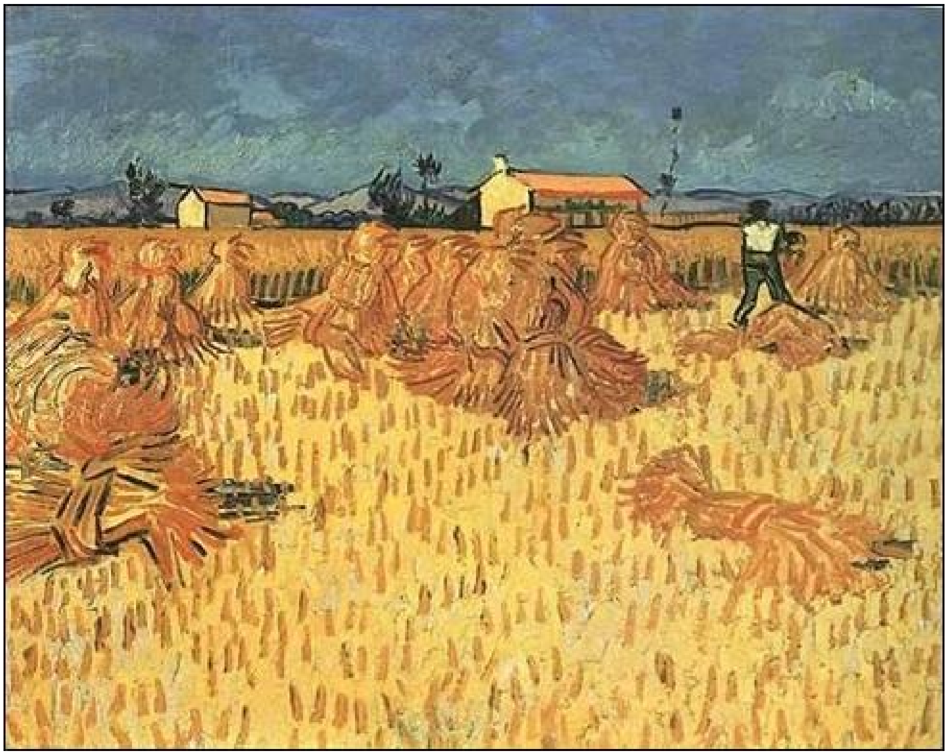
Girl with Ruffled Hair (“The Mudlark”)
Oil on canvas
35.5 x 24.5 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



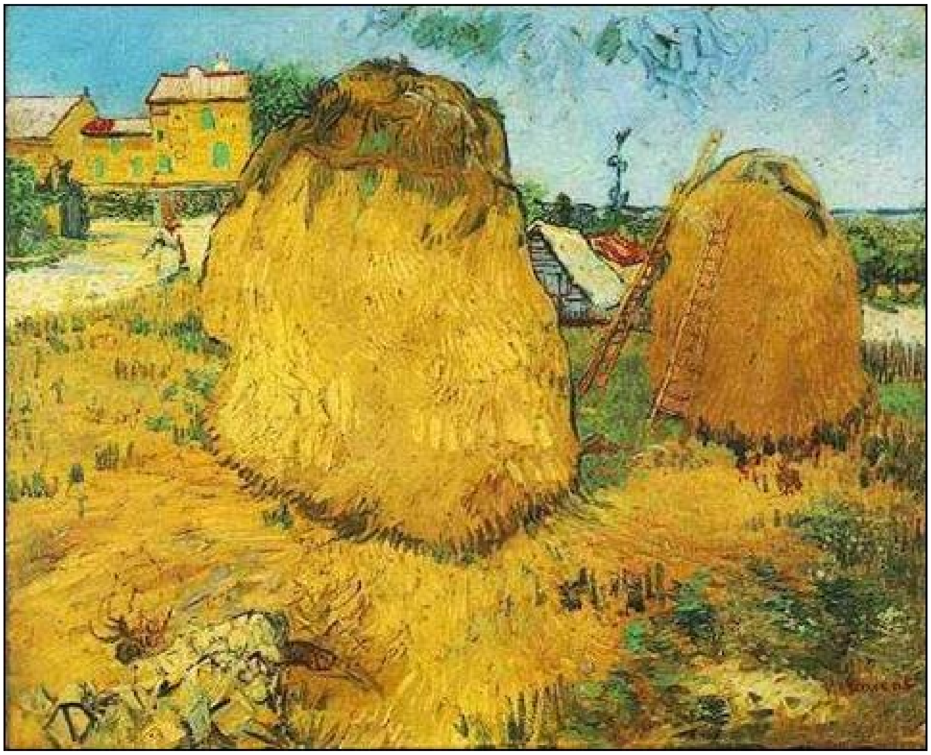
Green Ears of Wheat
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



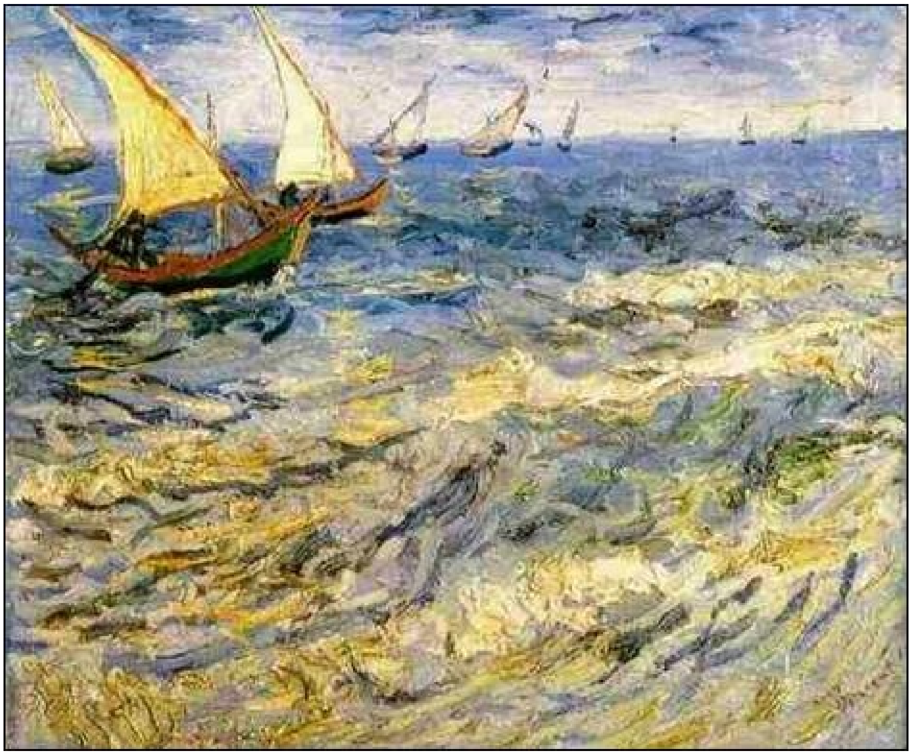
Harvest at La Crau, with Montmajour in the Background
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



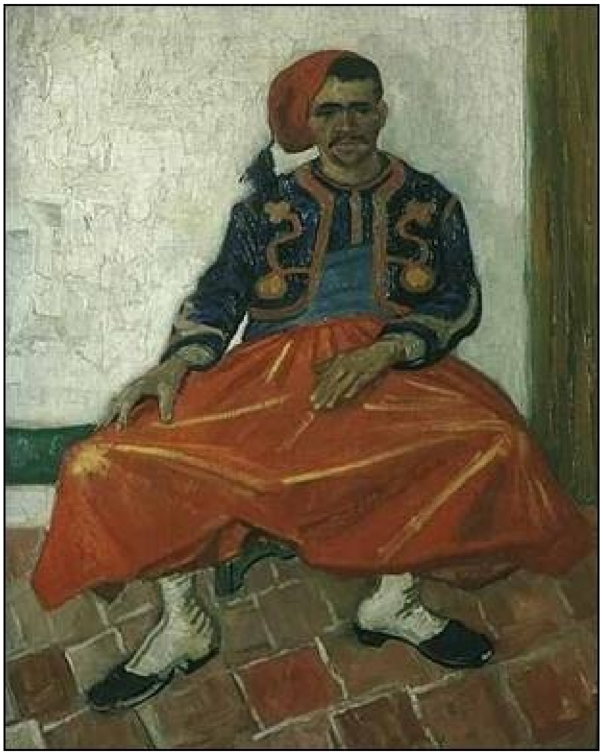
Harvest in Provence
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 60.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



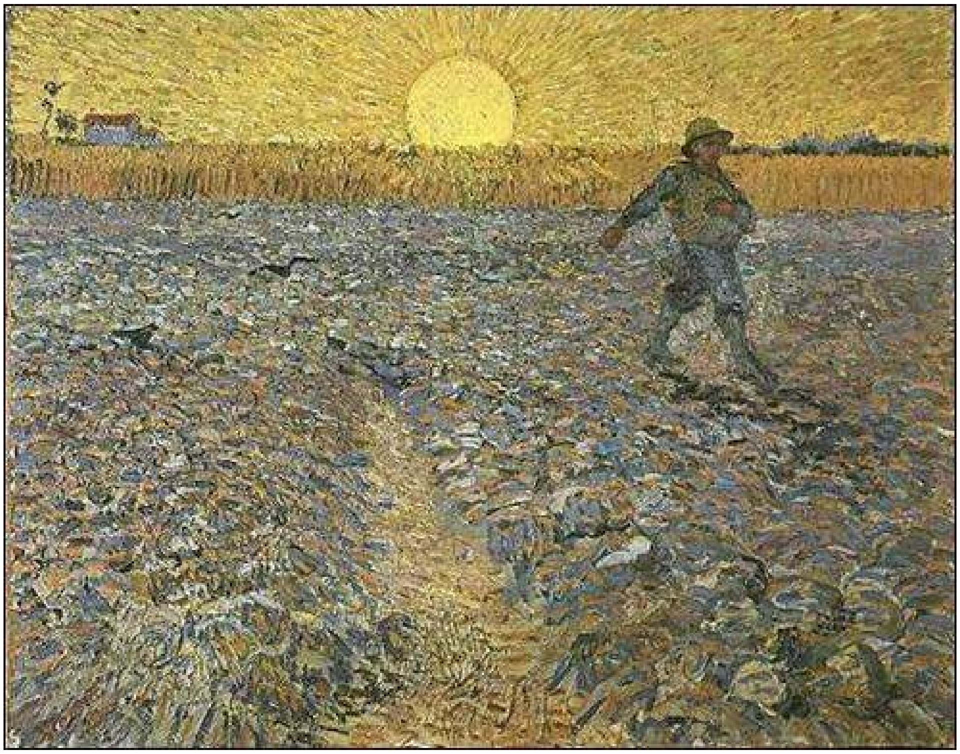
Haystacks in Provence
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.5 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



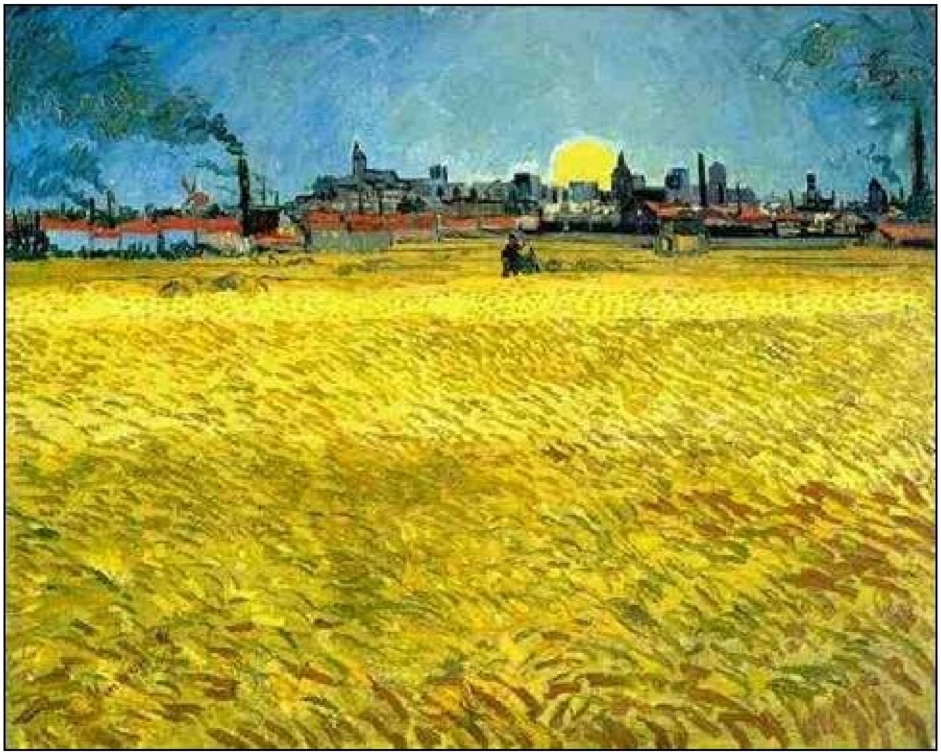
Seascape at Saintes-Maries
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 53.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



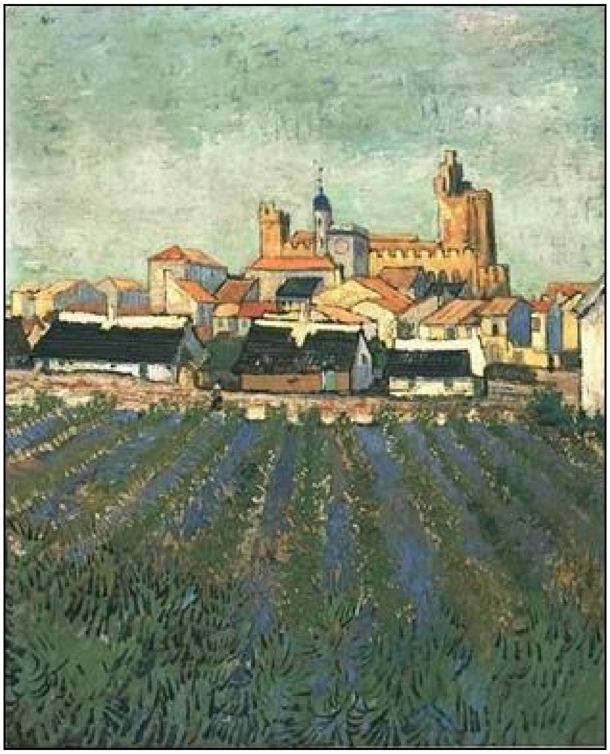
Seated Zouave, The
Oil on canvas
81.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



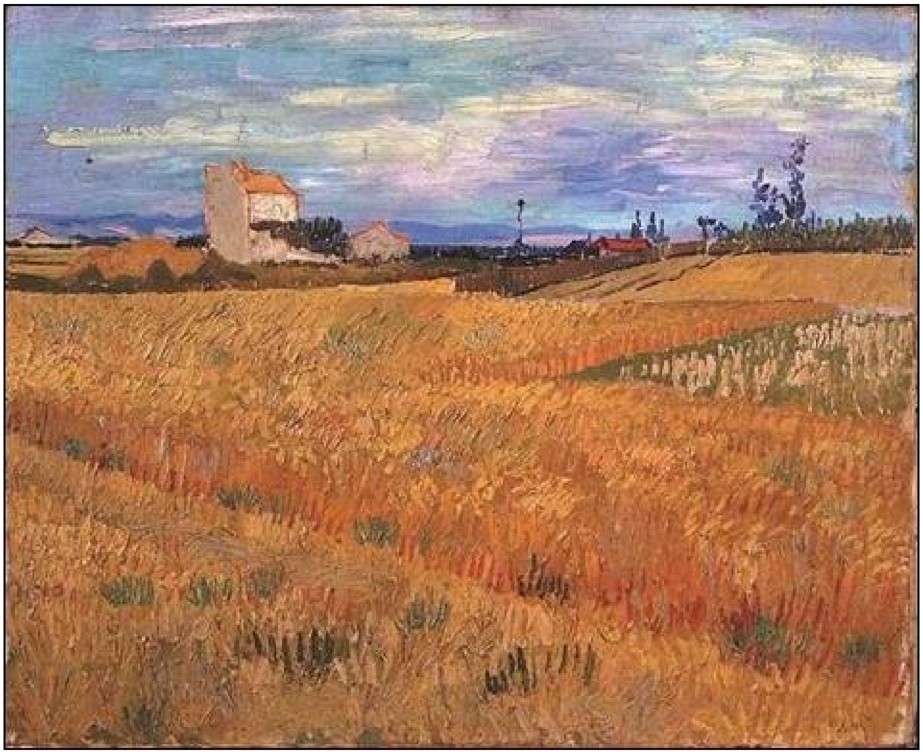
Sower, The
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 80.5 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



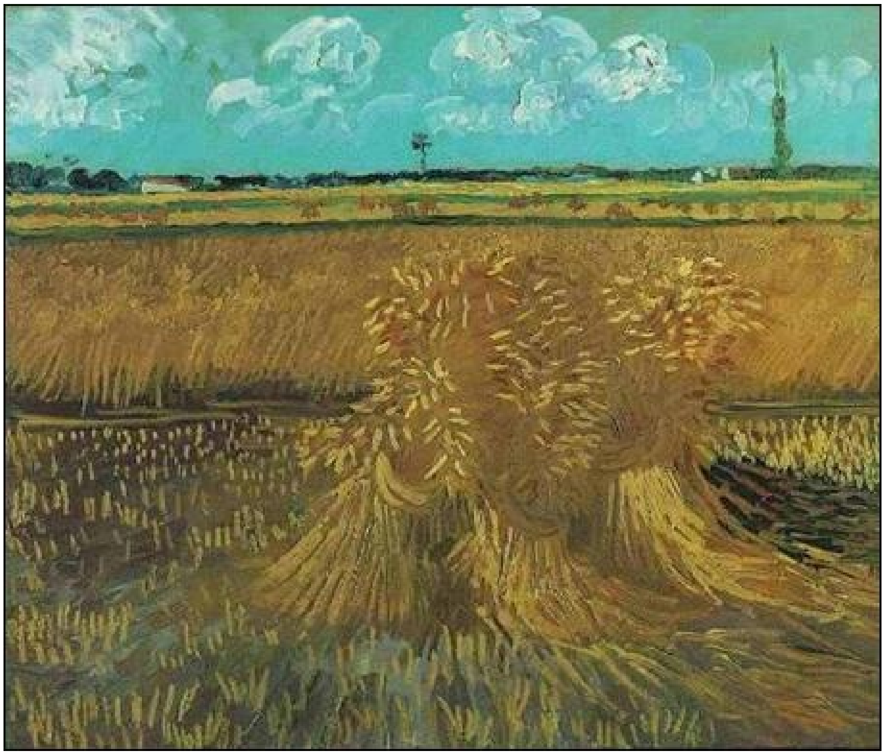
Sunset: Wheat Fields Near Arles
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



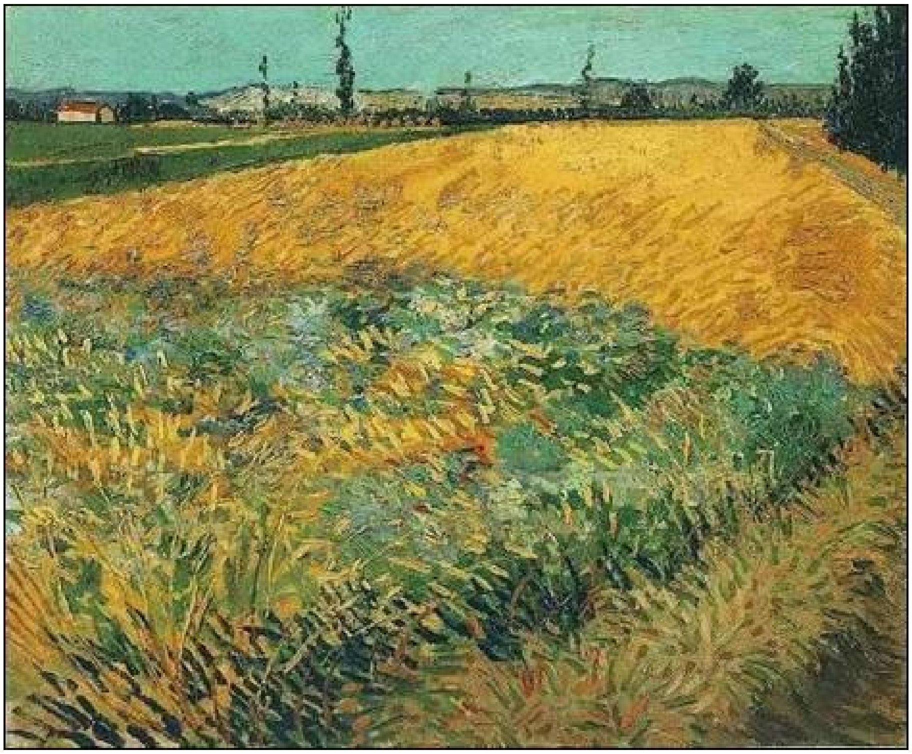
View of Saintes-Maries
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 53.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



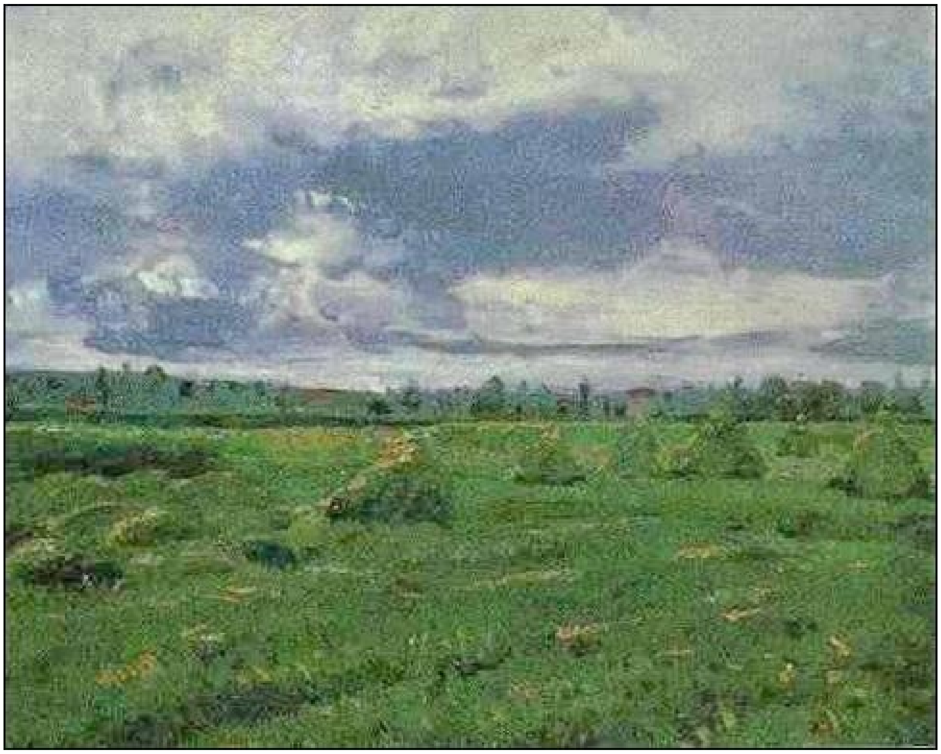
Wheat Field
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 61.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



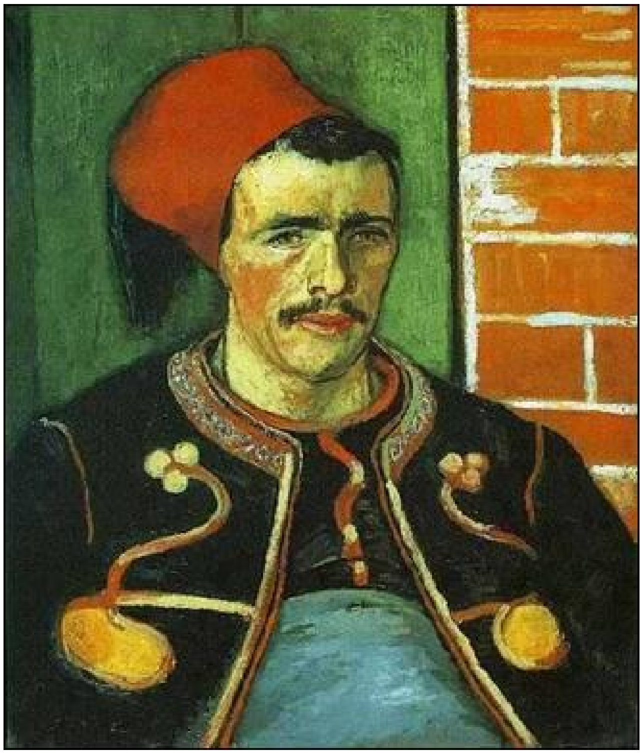
Wheat Field with Sheaves
Oil on canvas
55.2 x 66.6 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



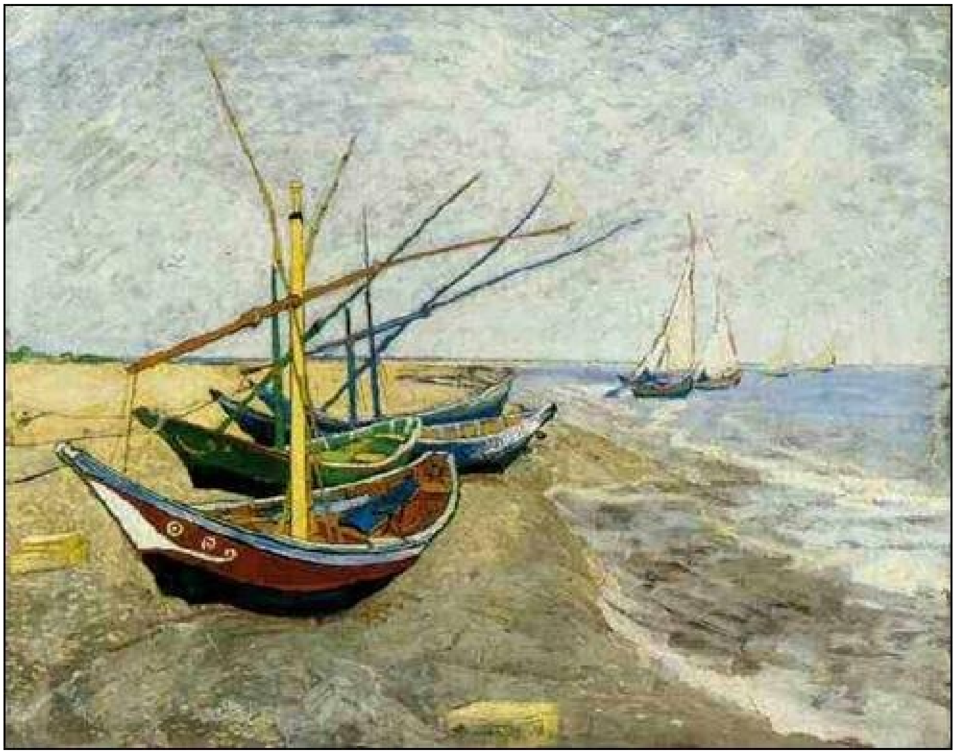
Wheat Field with the Alpilles Foothills in the Background
Oil on canvas on cardboard
54.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



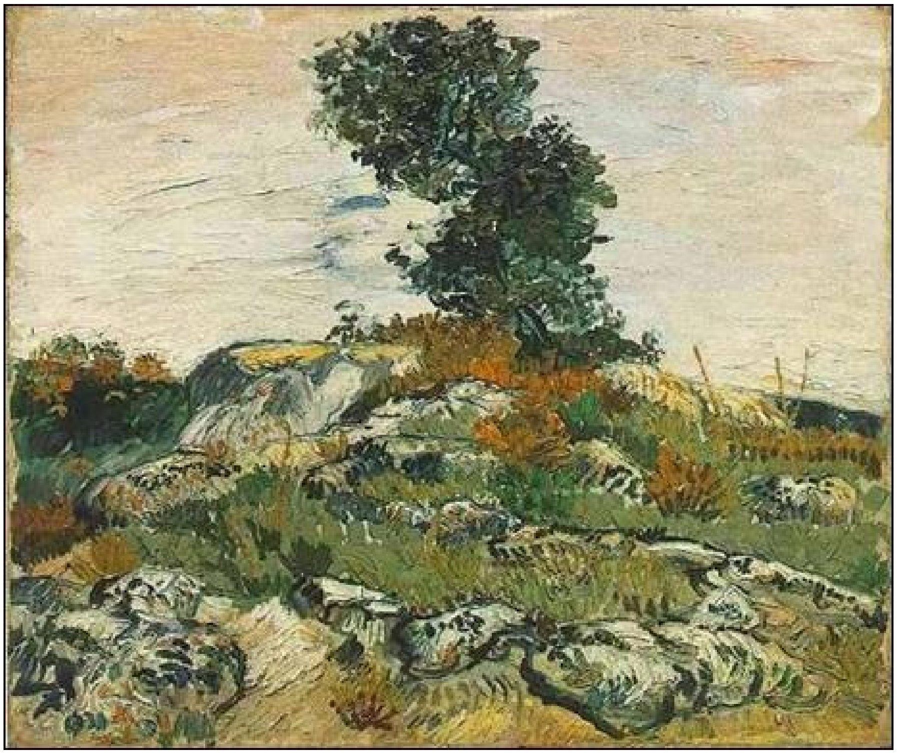
Wheat Fields with Stacks
Oil on canvas
28.5 x 37.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



Zouave (Half Length), The
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: June, 1888



Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.5 cm.
Arles: late June, 1888

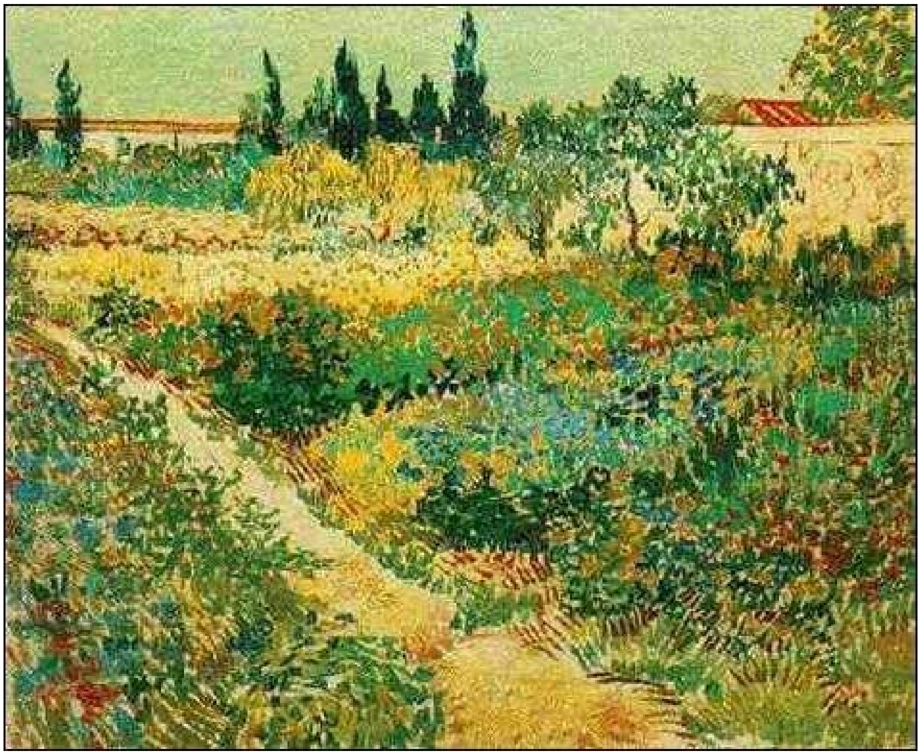


Rocks with Oak Tree

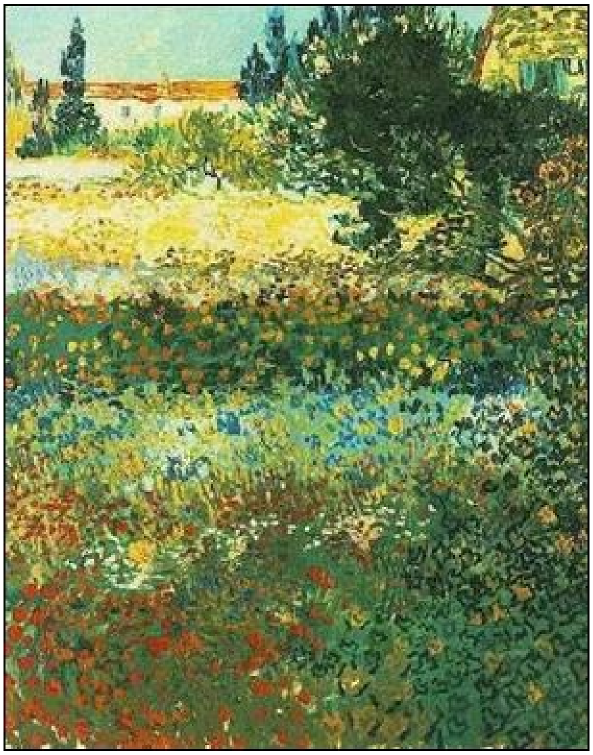
Oil on canvas

54.0 x 65.0 cm.

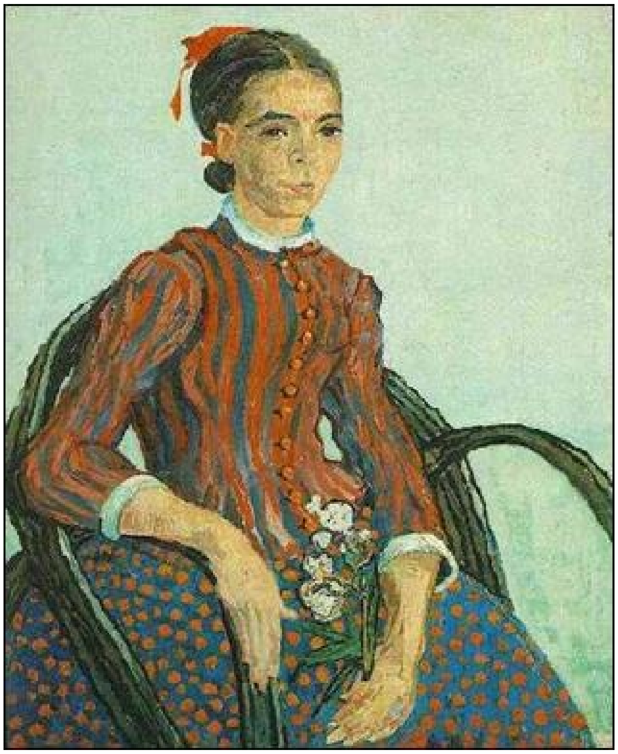
Arles: early July, 1888



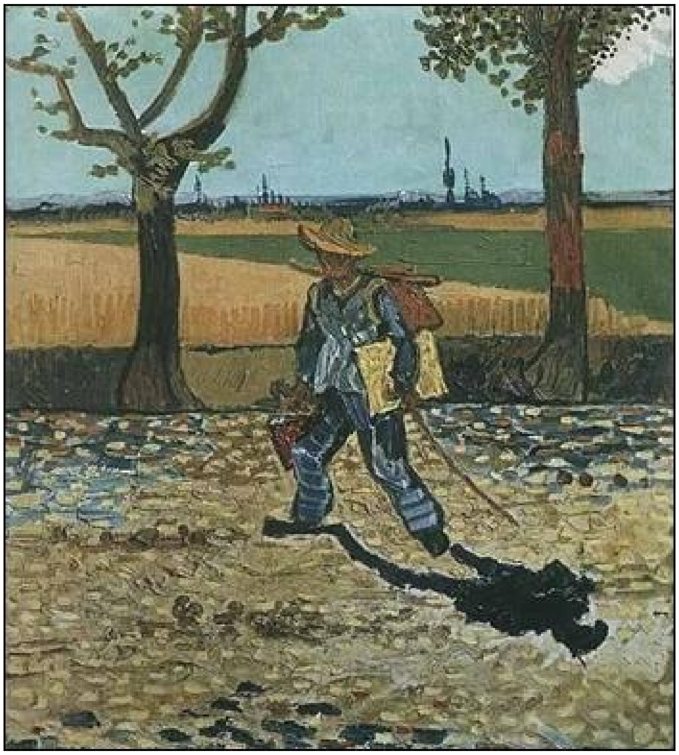
Flowering Garden with Path
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 91.0 cm.
Arles: July, 1888



Flowering Garden
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.0 cm.
Arles: July, 1888

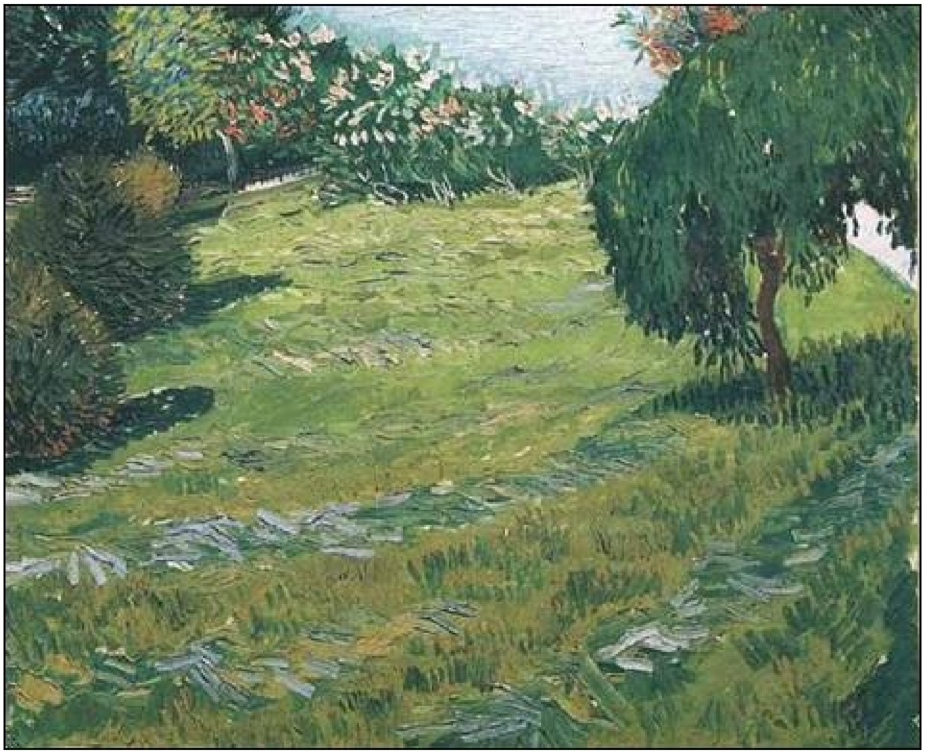


La Mousmé, Sitting
Oil on canvas
74.0 x 60.0 cm.
Arles: July, 1888

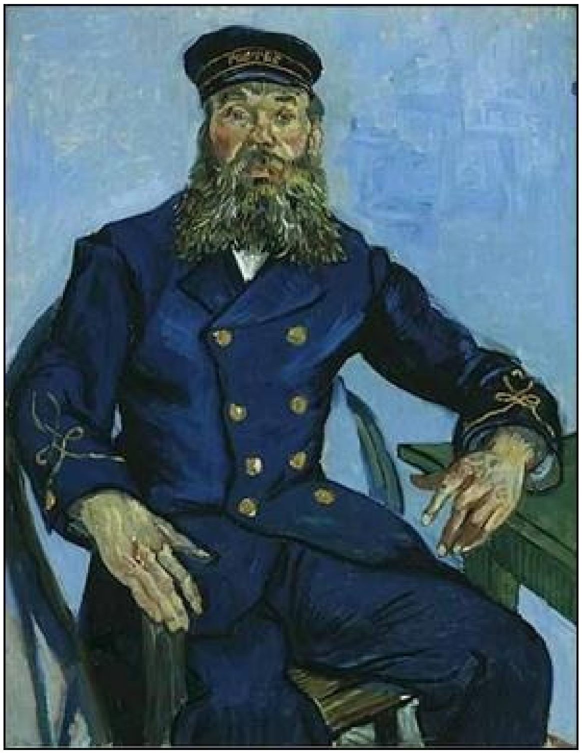


Painter on His Way to Work, The

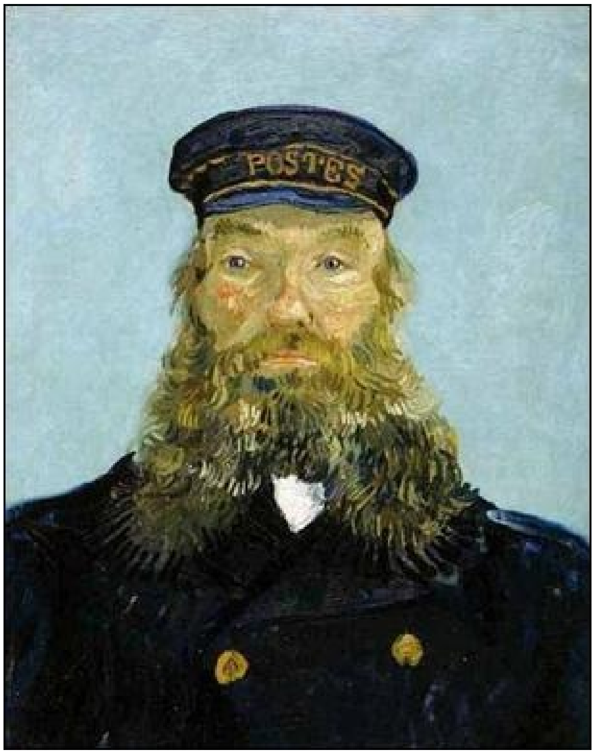
Oil on canvas
48.0 x 44.0 cm.
Arles: July, 1888



Sunny Lawn in a Public Park
Oil on canvas
60.5 x 73.5 cm.
Arles: July, 1888



Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Oil on canvas
81.2 x 65.3 cm.
Arles: early August, 1888

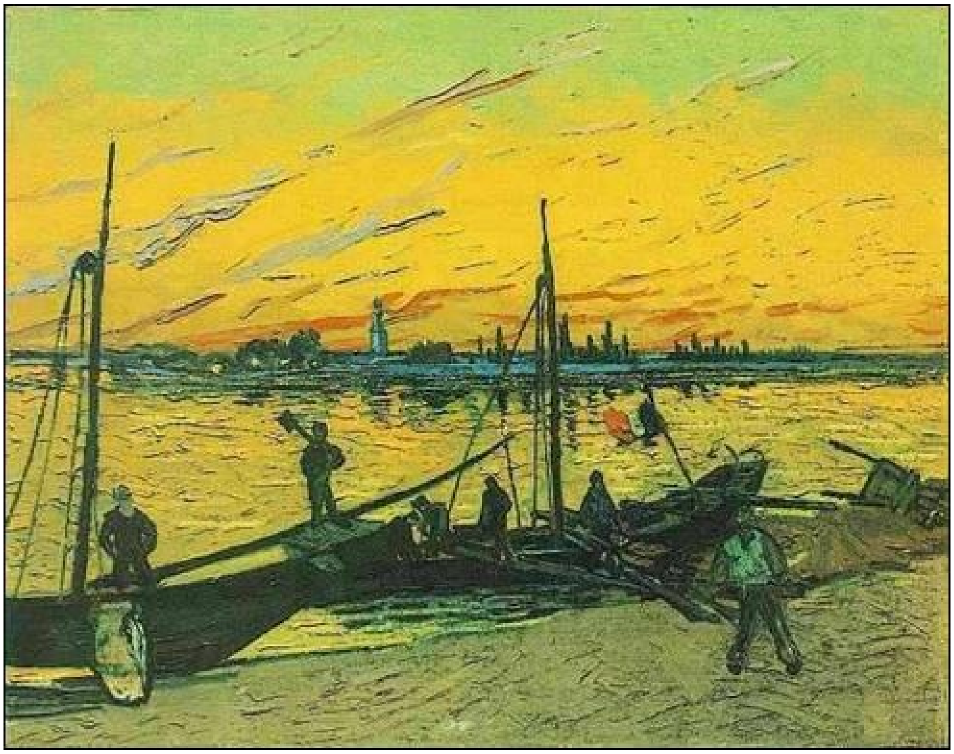


Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin

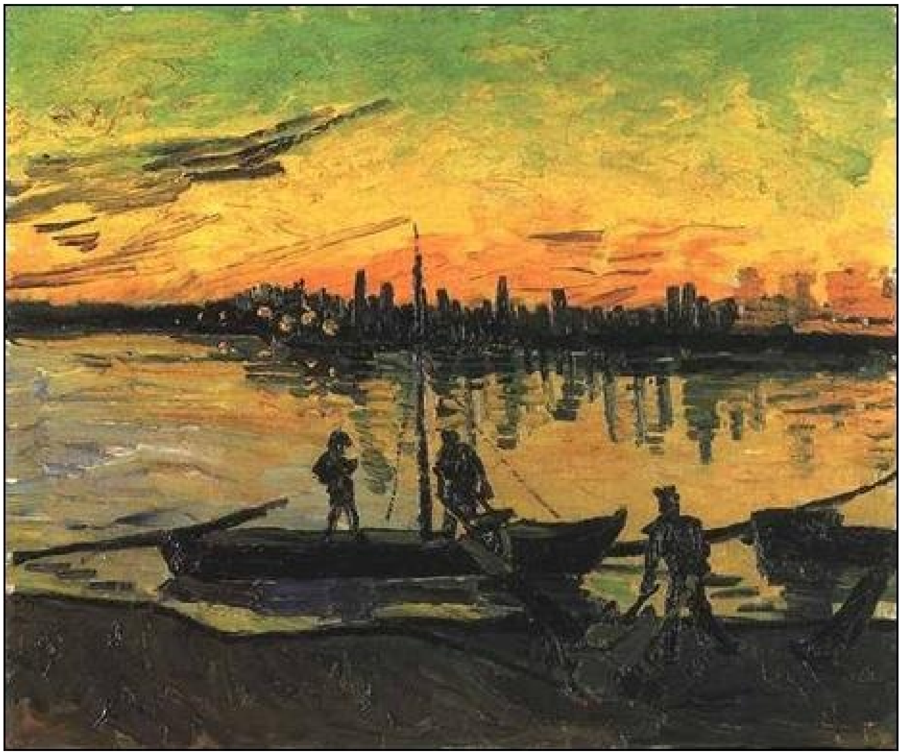
Oil on canvas

64.1 x 47.9 cm.

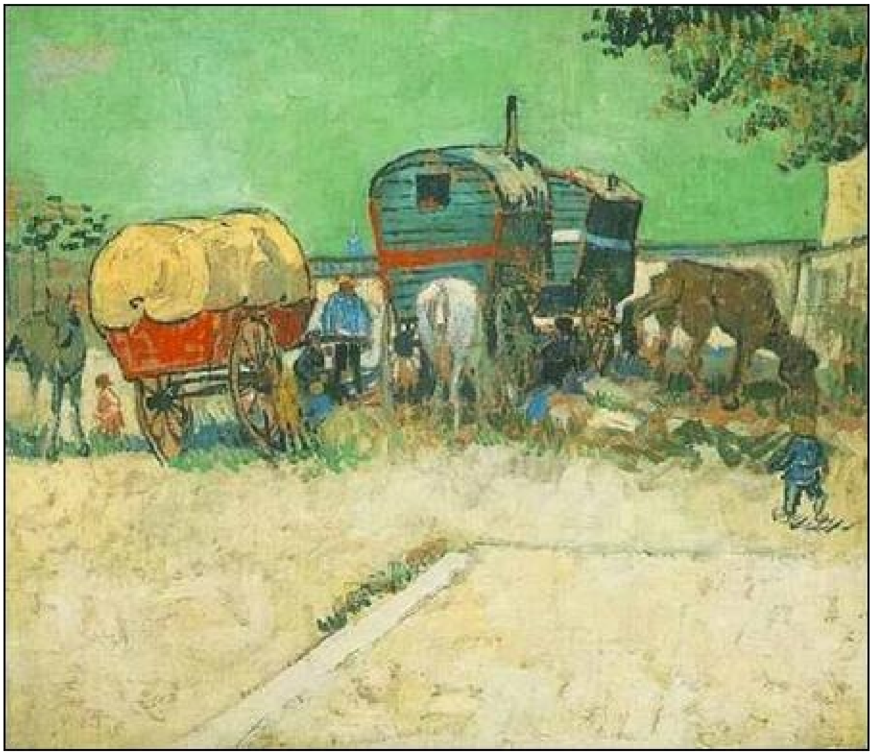
Arles: early August, 1888



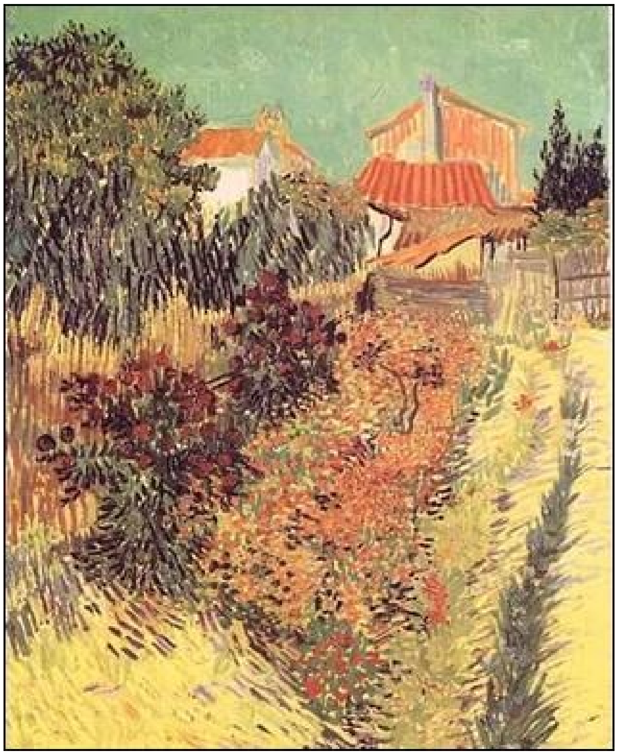
Coal Barges
Oil on canvas
71.0 x 95.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



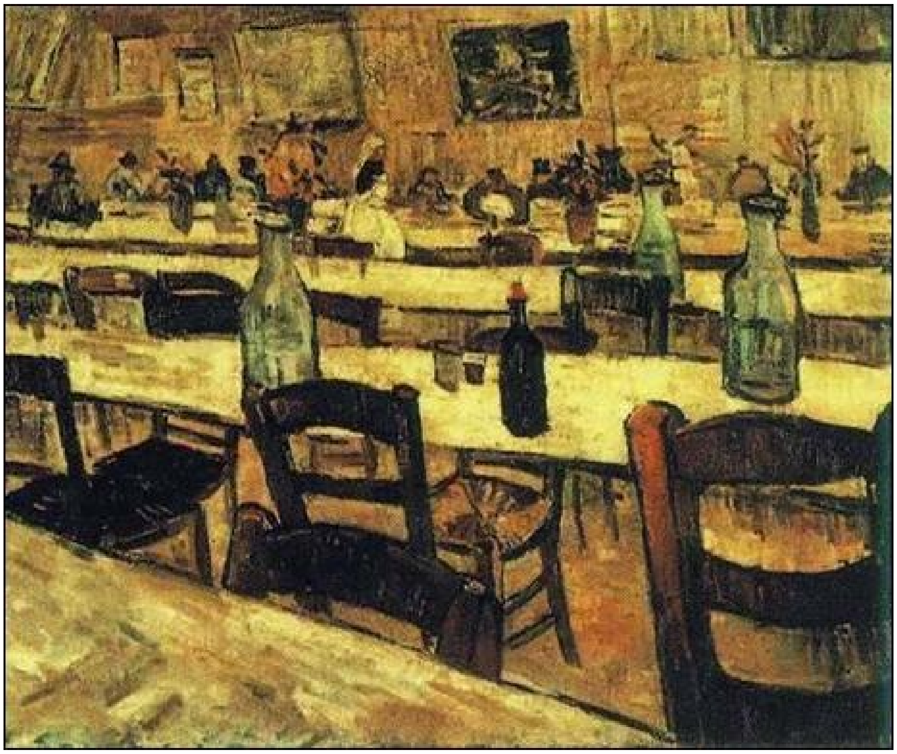
Coal Barges
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



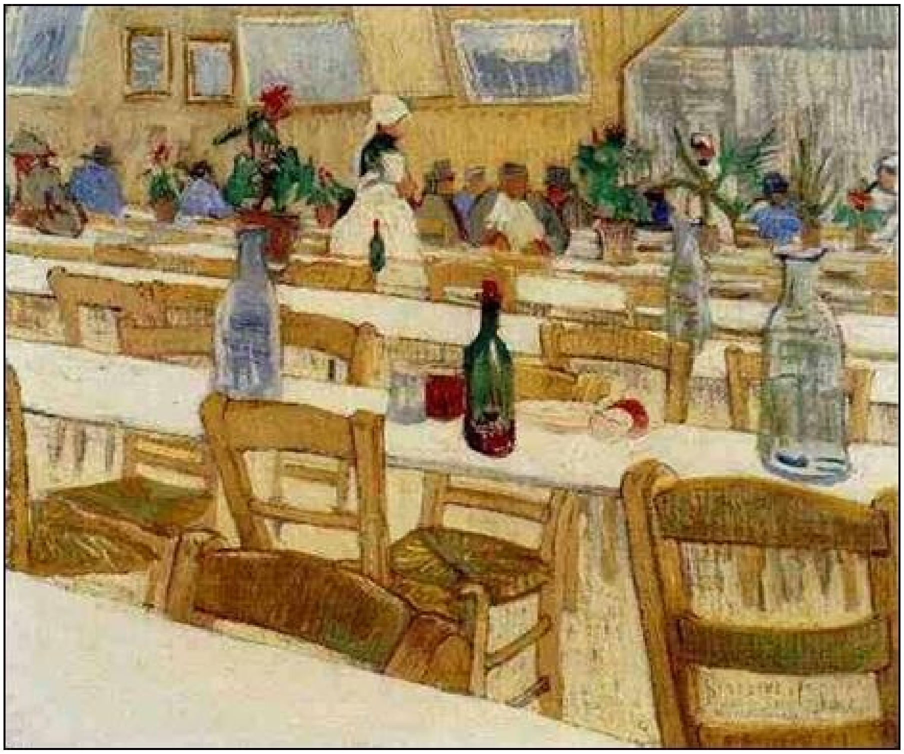
Encampment of Gypsies with Caravans
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 51.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



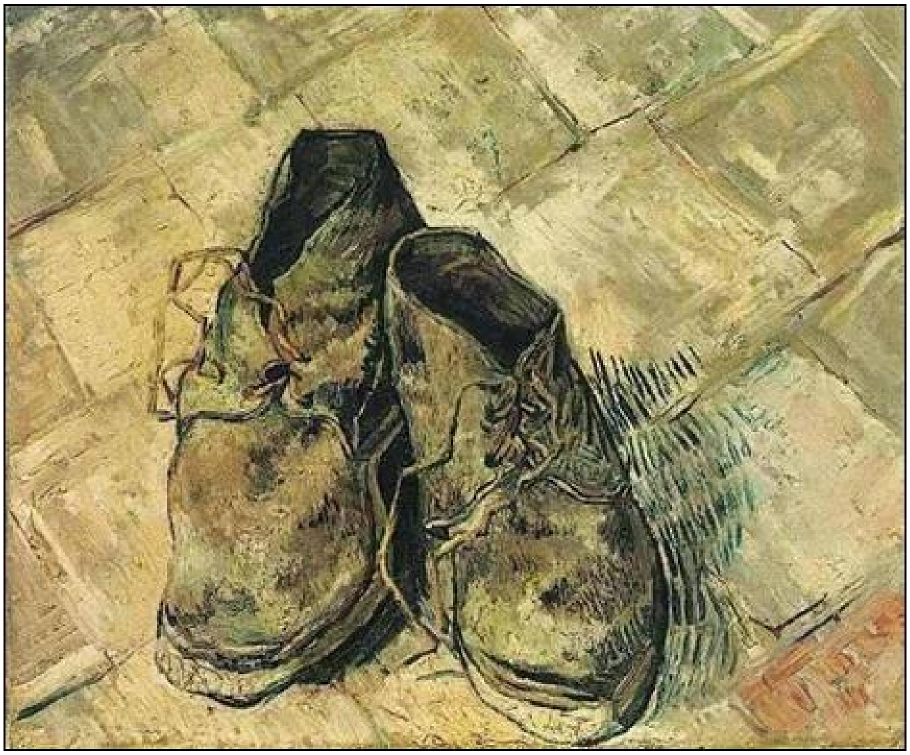
Garden Behind a House
Oil on canvas
63.5 x 52.5 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



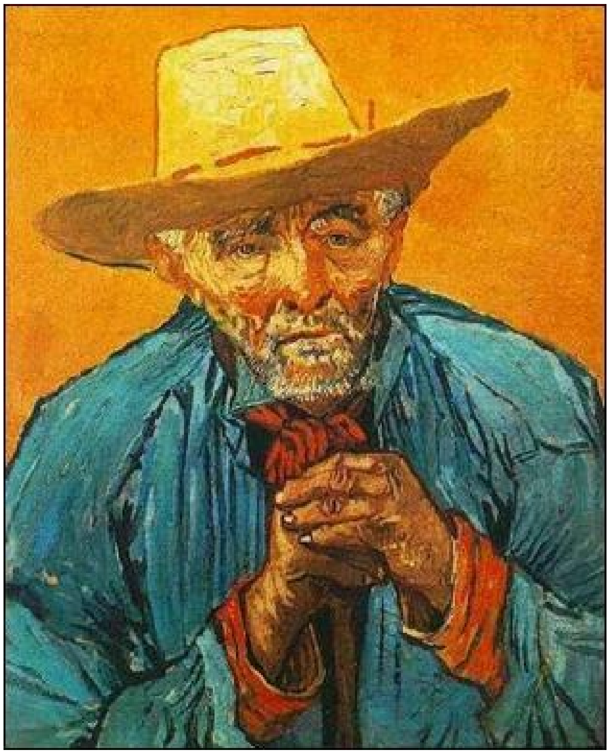
Interior of a Restaurant in Arles
Oil on canvas
65.5 x 81.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



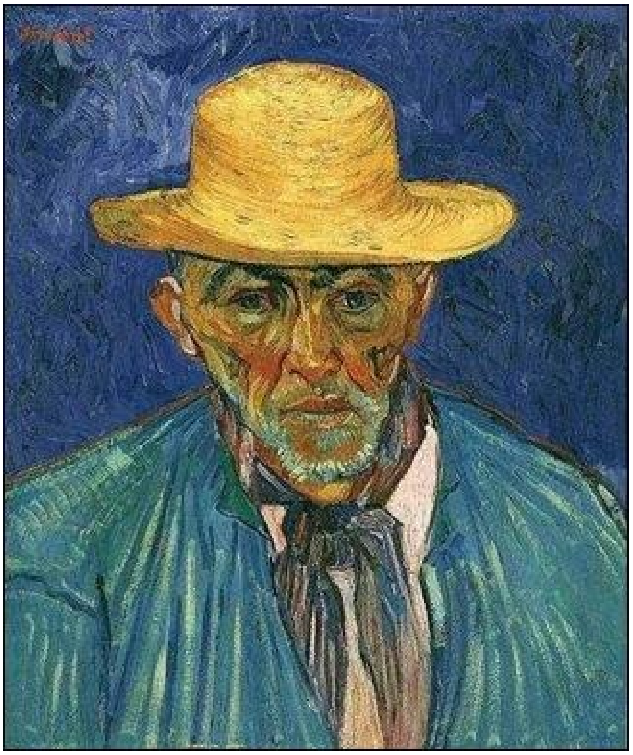
Interior of the Restaurant Carrel in Arles
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 64.5 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



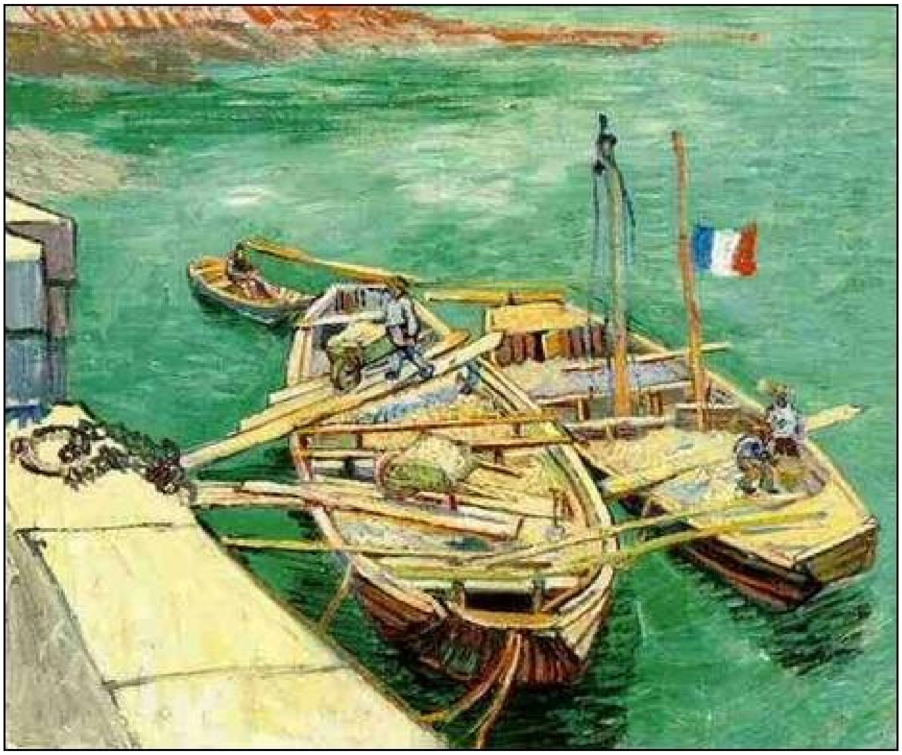
Pair of Shoes, A
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 53.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



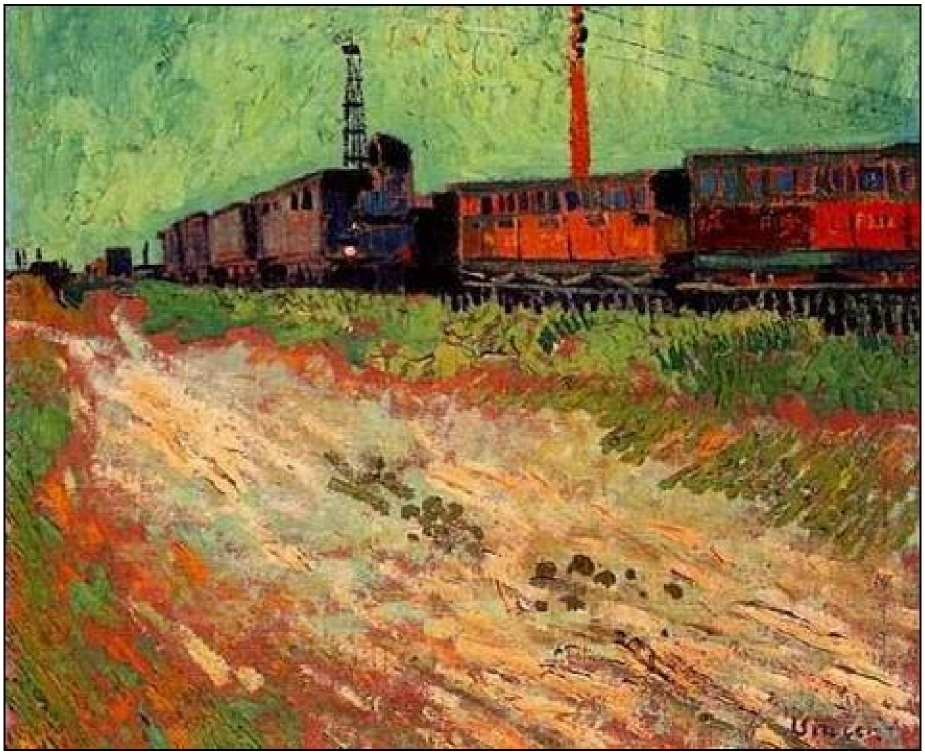
Portrait of Patience Escalier
Oil on canvas
69.0 x 56.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



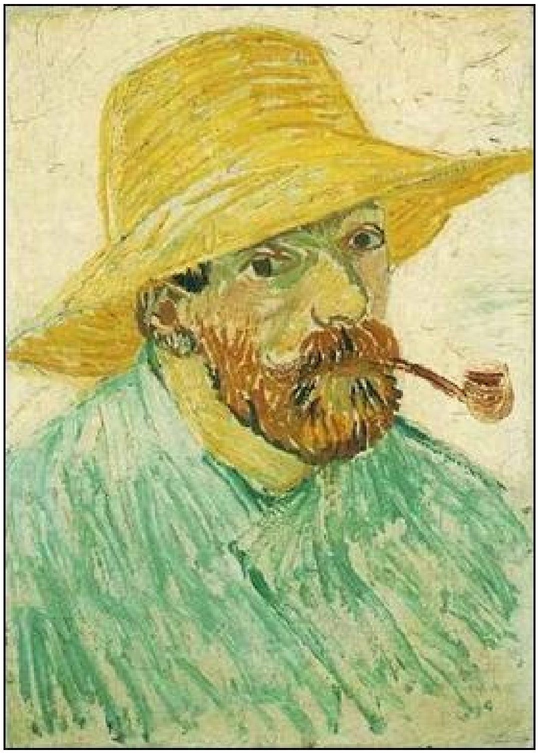
Portrait of Patience Escalier, Shepherd in Provence
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



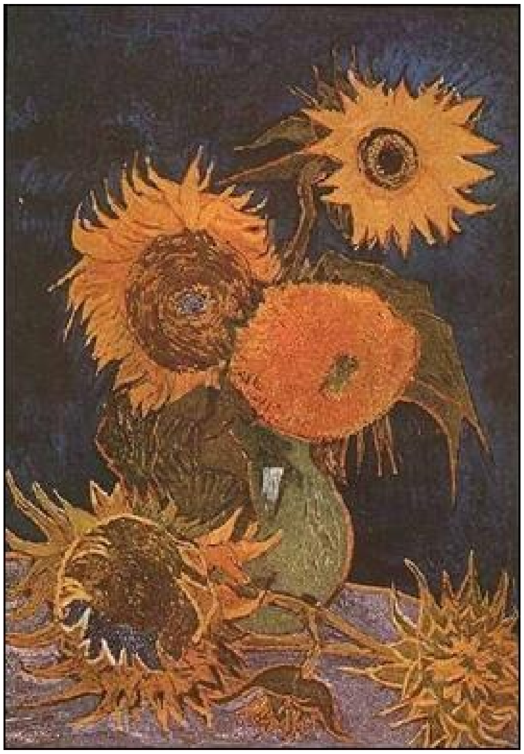
Quay with Men Unloading Sand Barges
Oil on canvas
55.1 x 66.2 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



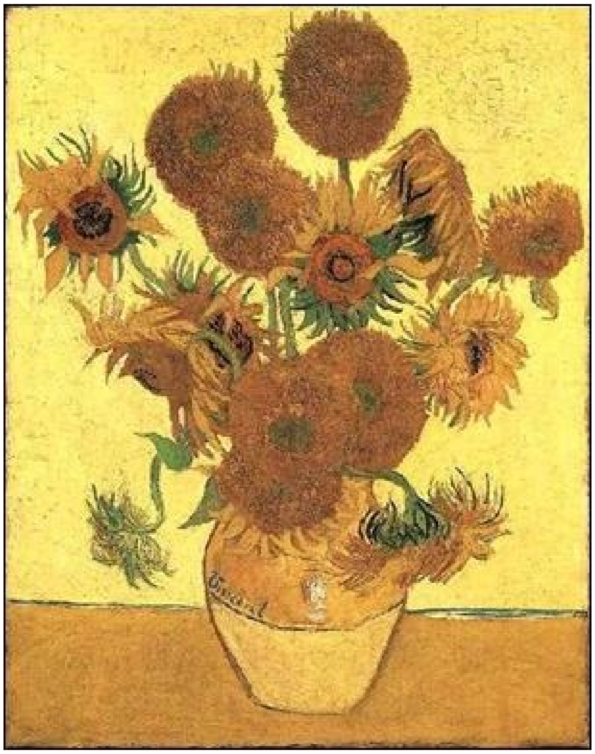
Railway Carriages
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 50.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



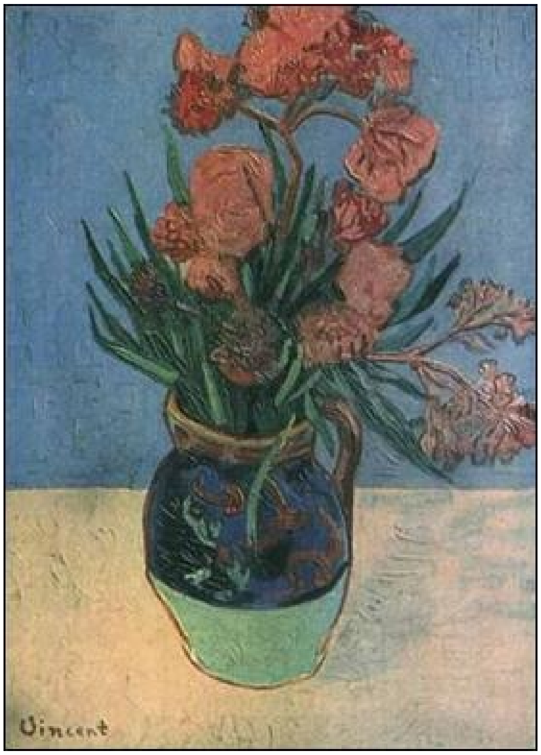
Self-Portrait with Pipe and Straw Hat
Oil on canvas on cardboard
42.0 x 30.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



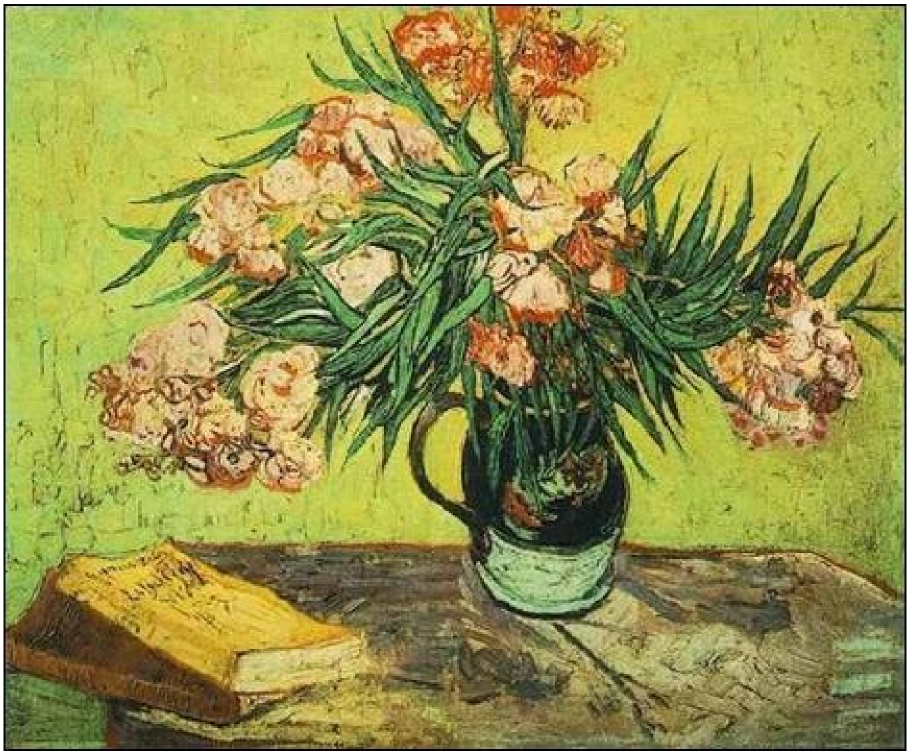
Still Life: Vase with Five Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
98.0 x 69.0 cm.Arles: August, 1888



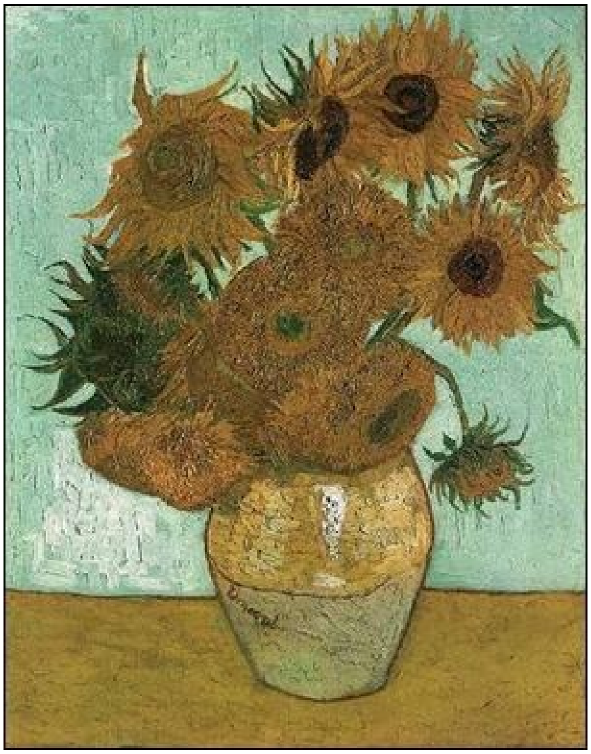
Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
93.0 x 73.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



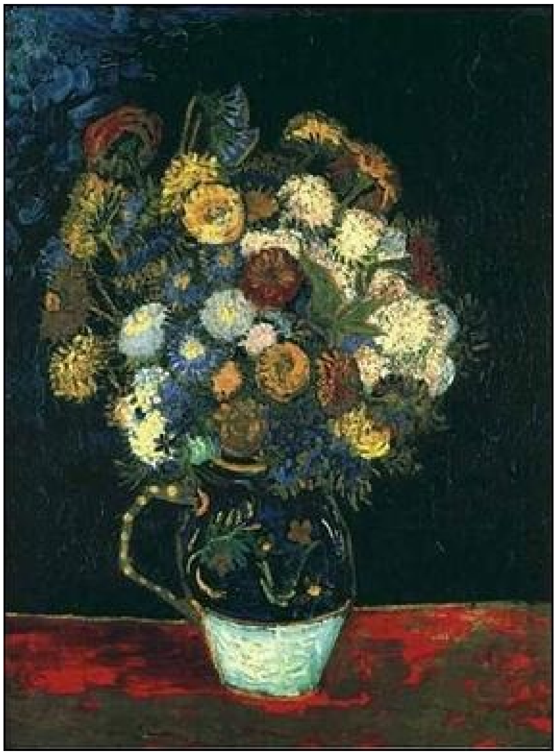
Still Life: Vase with Oleanders
Oil on canvas
56.0 x 36.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



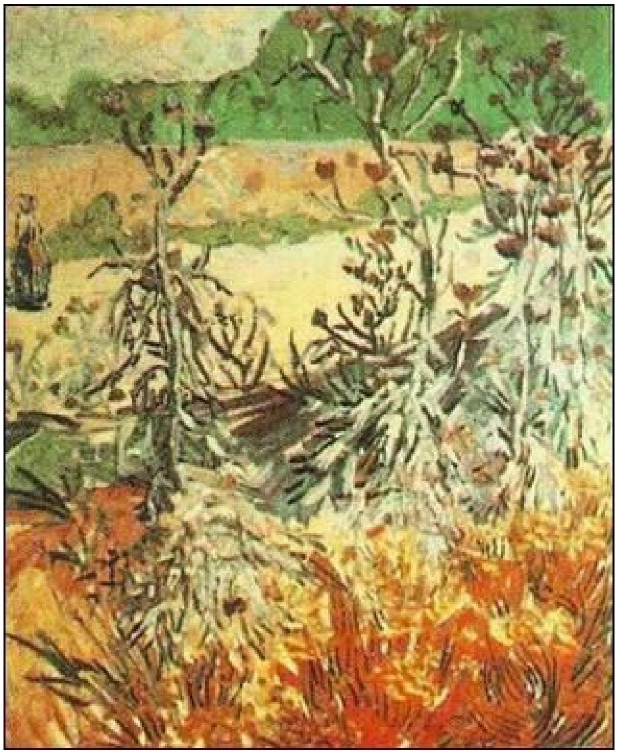
Still Life: Vase with Oleanders and Books
Oil on canvas
60.3 x 73.6 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



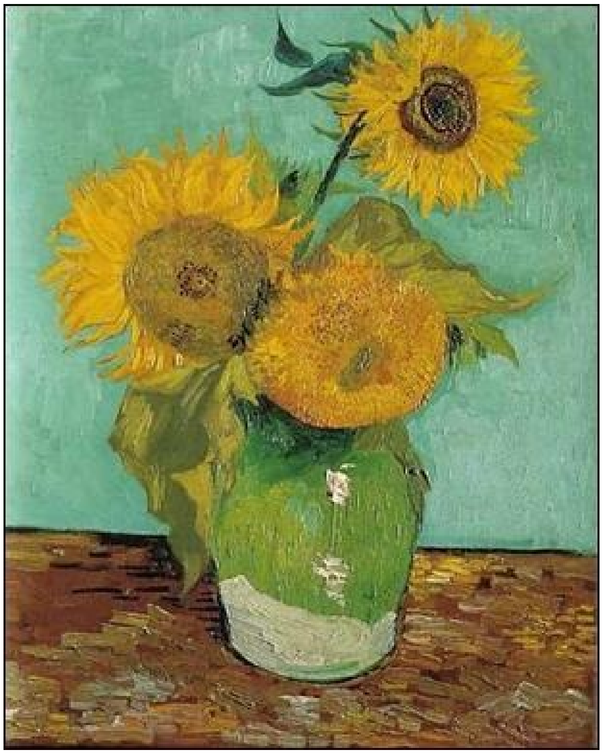
Still Life: Vase with Twelve Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
91.0 x 72.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



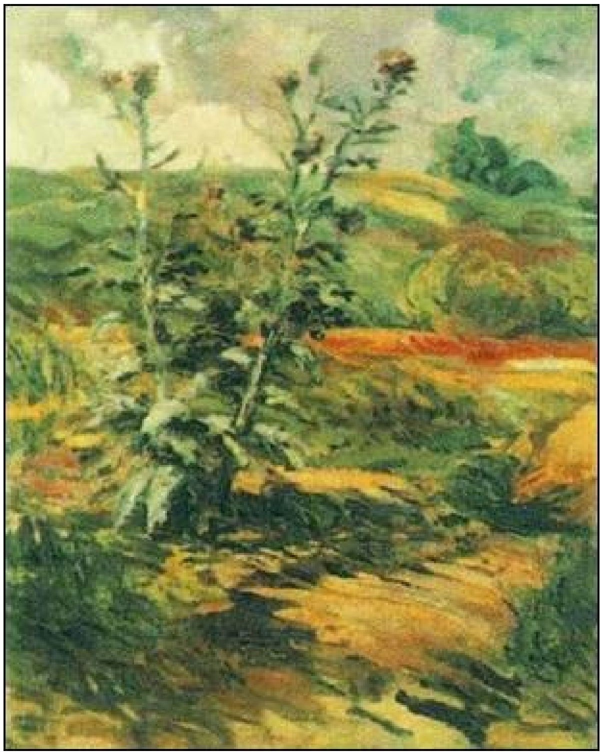
Still Life: Vase with Zinnias
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 49.5 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



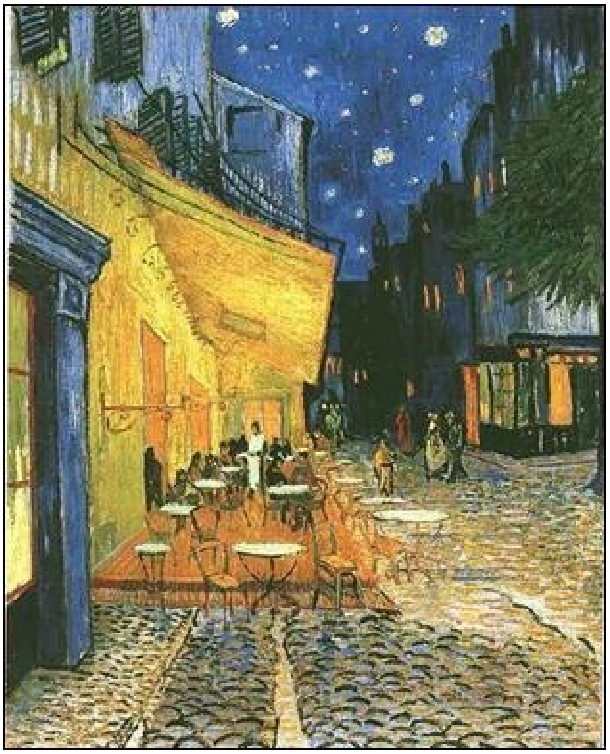
Thistles
Oil on canvas
59.0 x 49.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



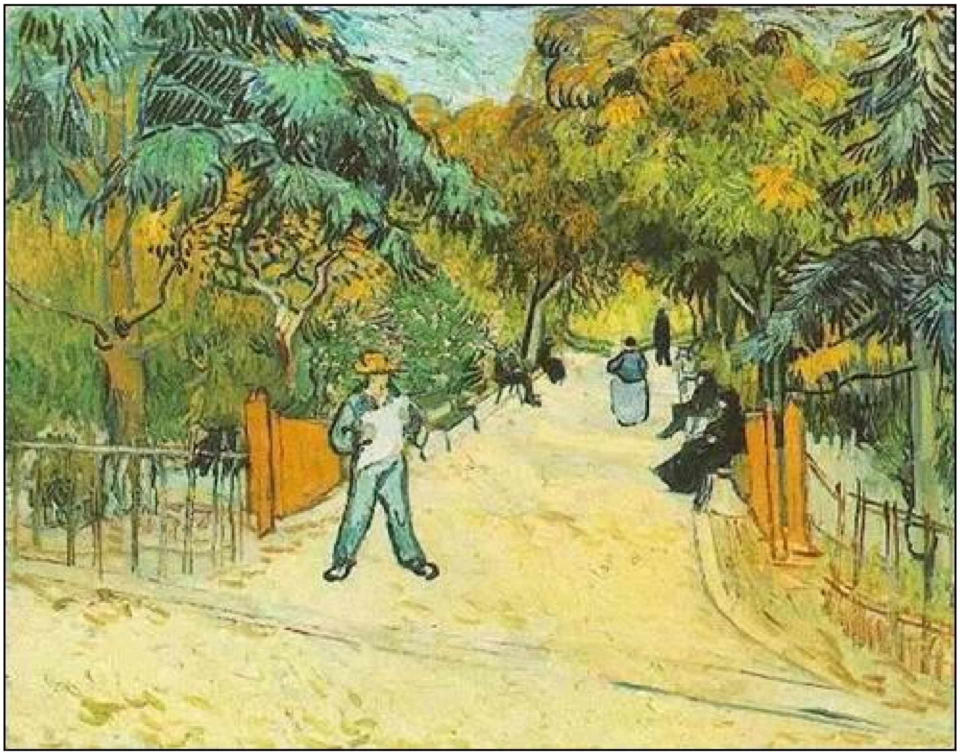
Three Sunflowers in a Vase
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 58.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



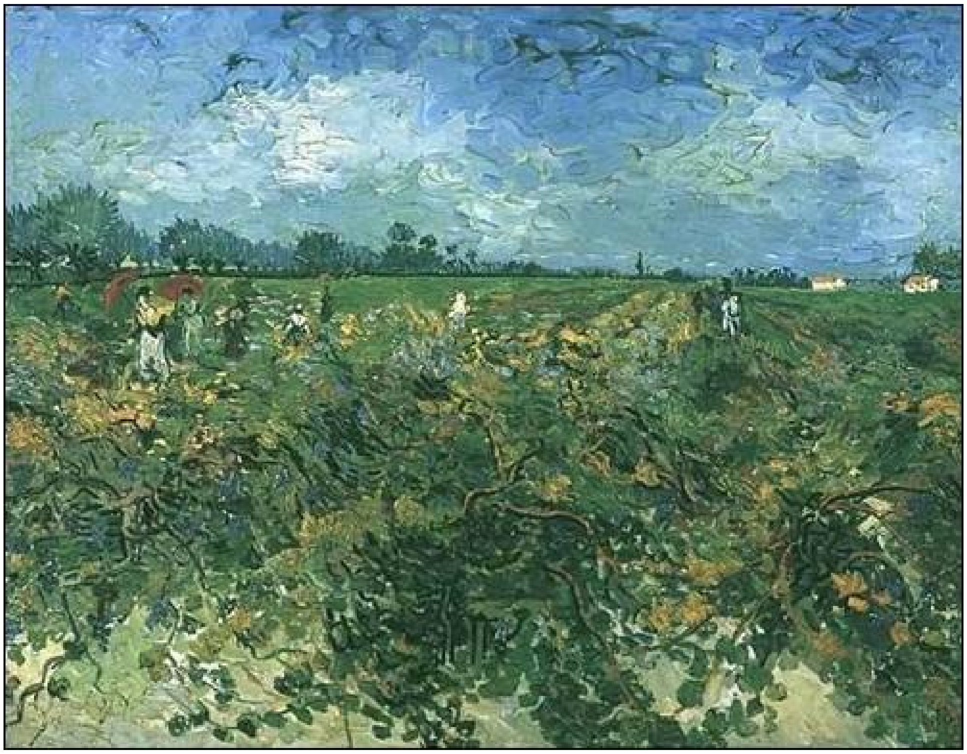
Two Thistles
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 45.0 cm.
Arles: August, 1888



Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night, The
Oil on canvas
81.0 x 65.5 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



Entrance to the Public Park in Arles
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 91.0 cm.
Arles: September, 1888

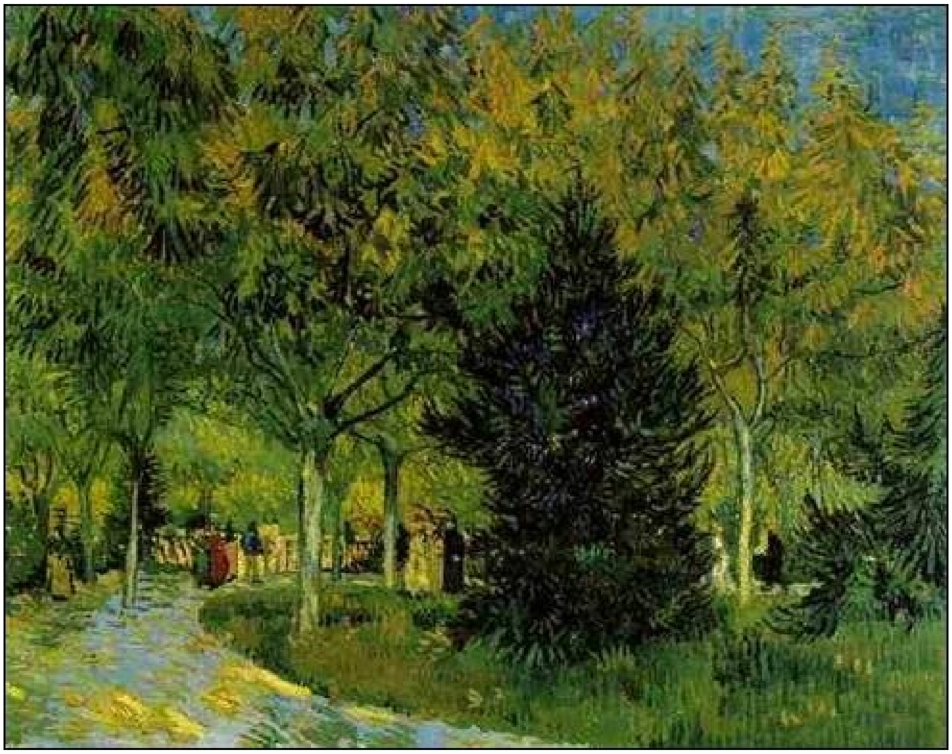


Green Vineyard, The

Oil on canvas

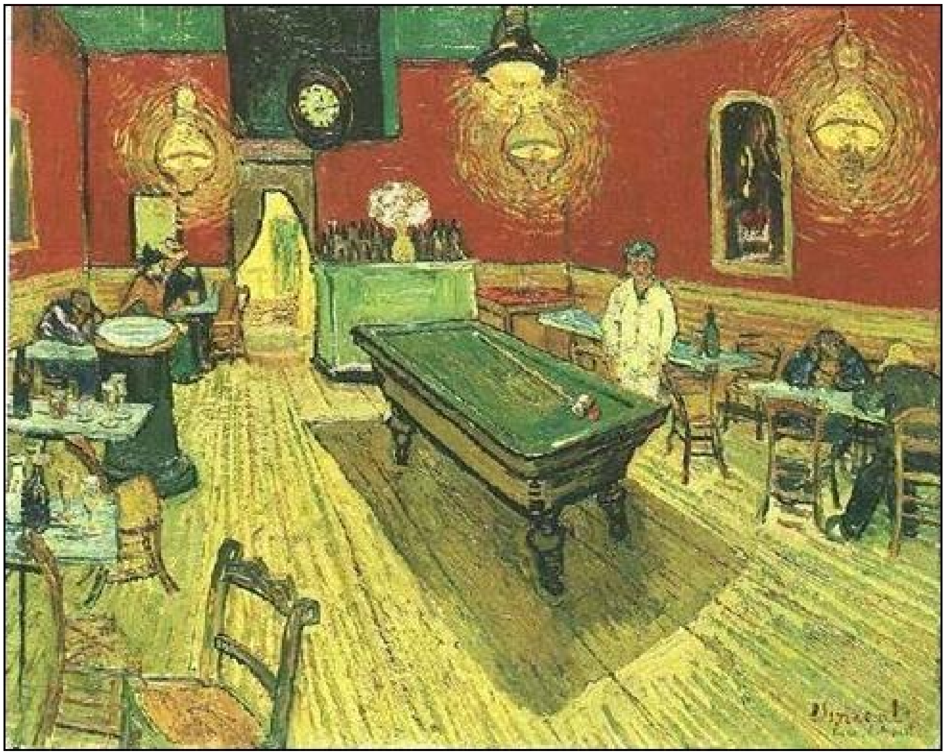
72.0 x 92.0 cm.

Arles: September, 1888

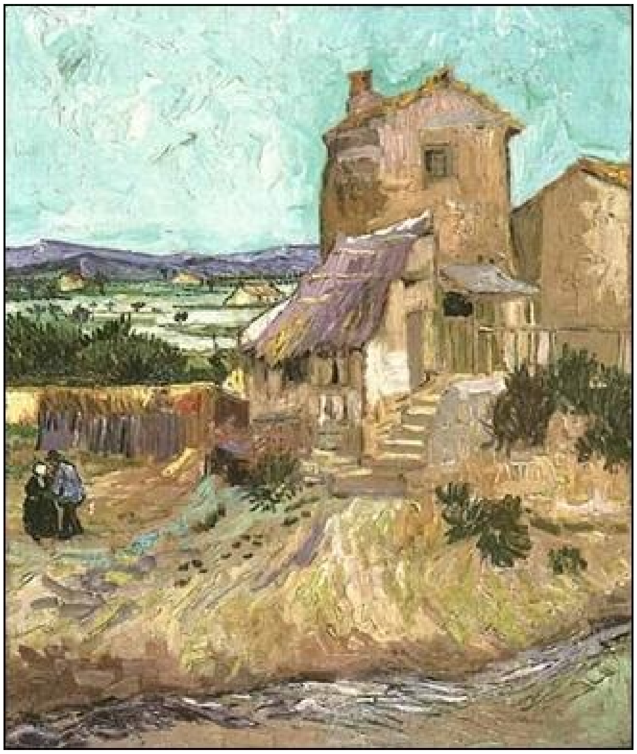


Lane in the Public Garden at Arles, A

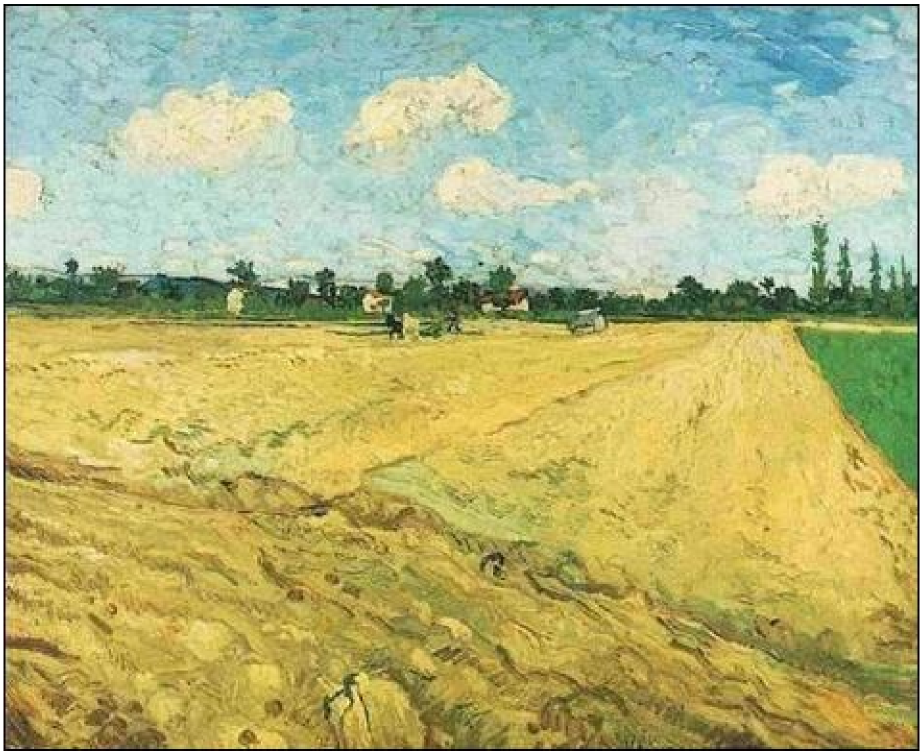
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



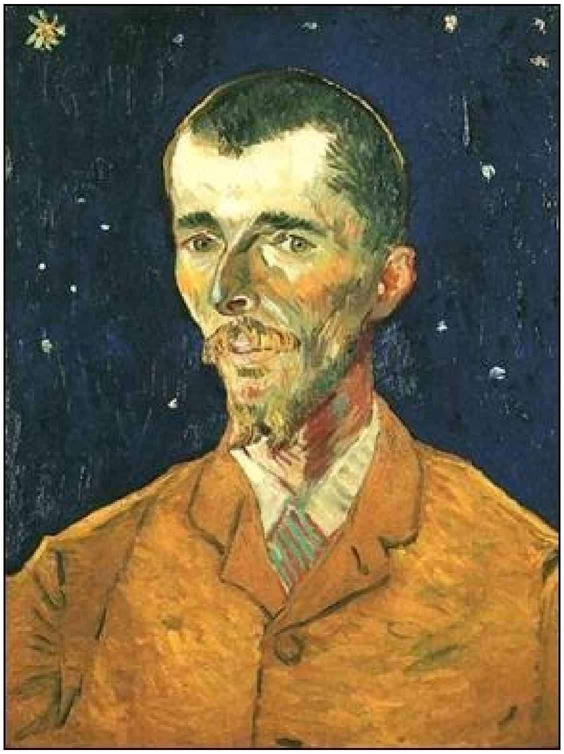
The Night Café in the Place Lamartine in Arles
Oil on canvas
70.0 x 89.0 cm.
Arles: 5-8 September 1888



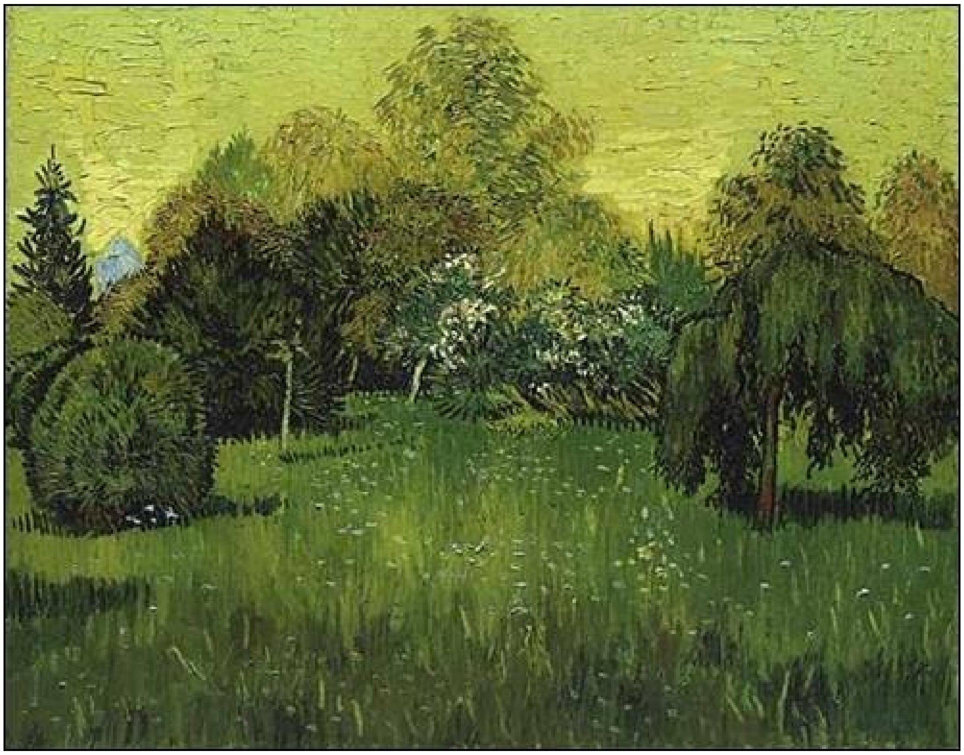
Old Mill, The
Oil on canvas
64.5 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



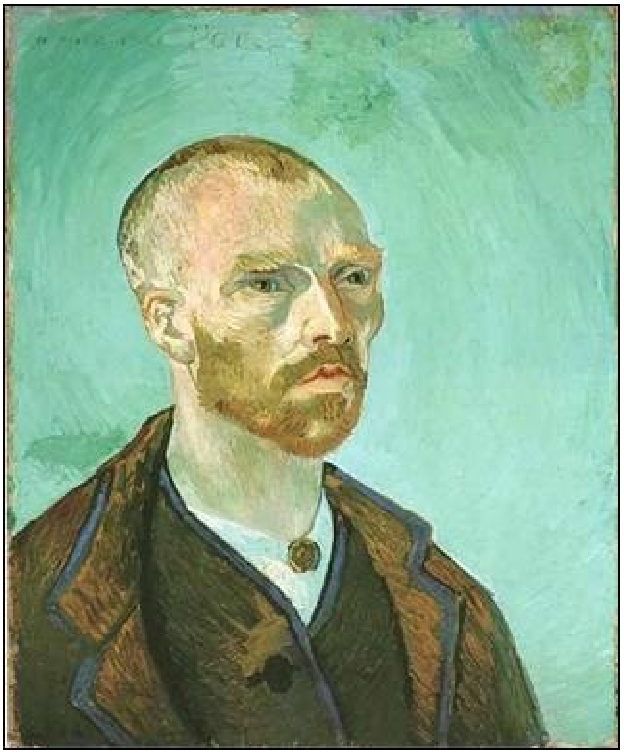
Ploughed Field
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 92.5 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



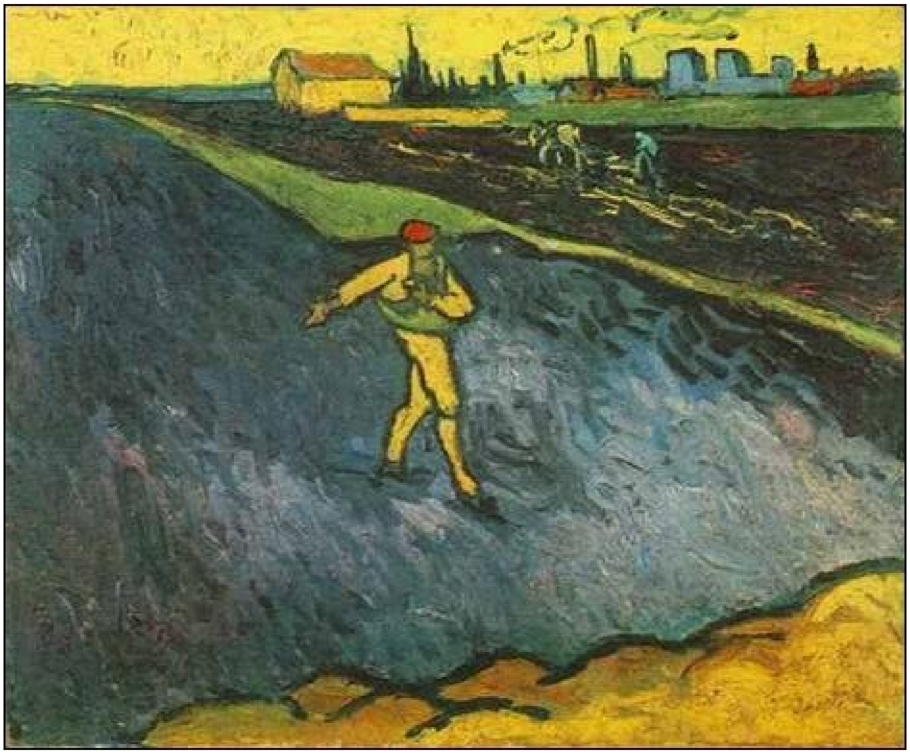
Portrait of Eugene Boch
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 45.0 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



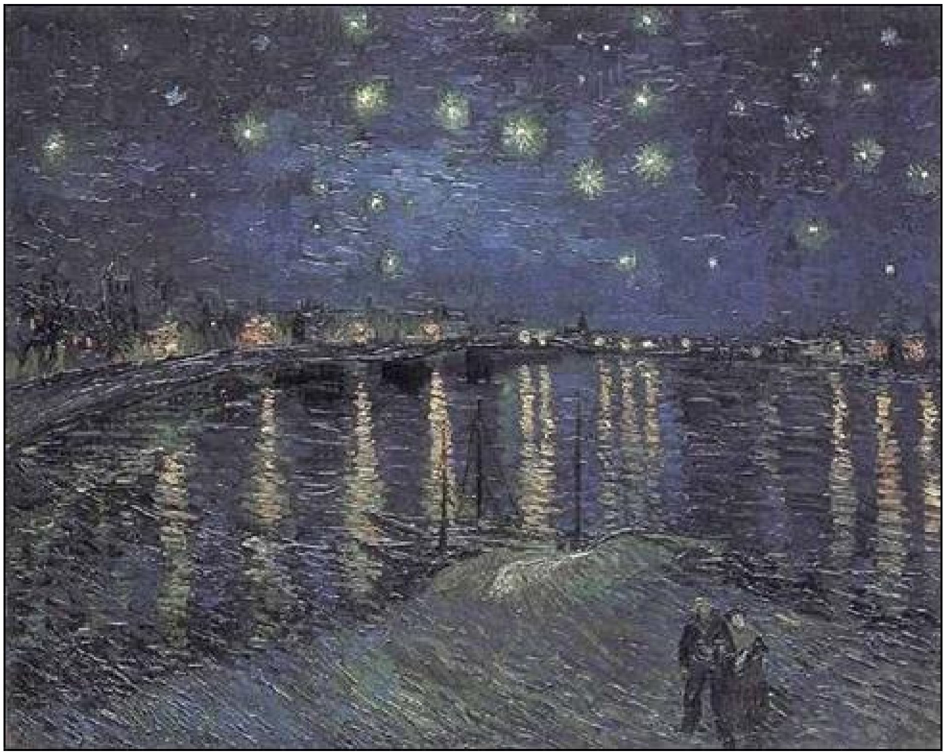
Poet's Garden, The
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 91.2 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



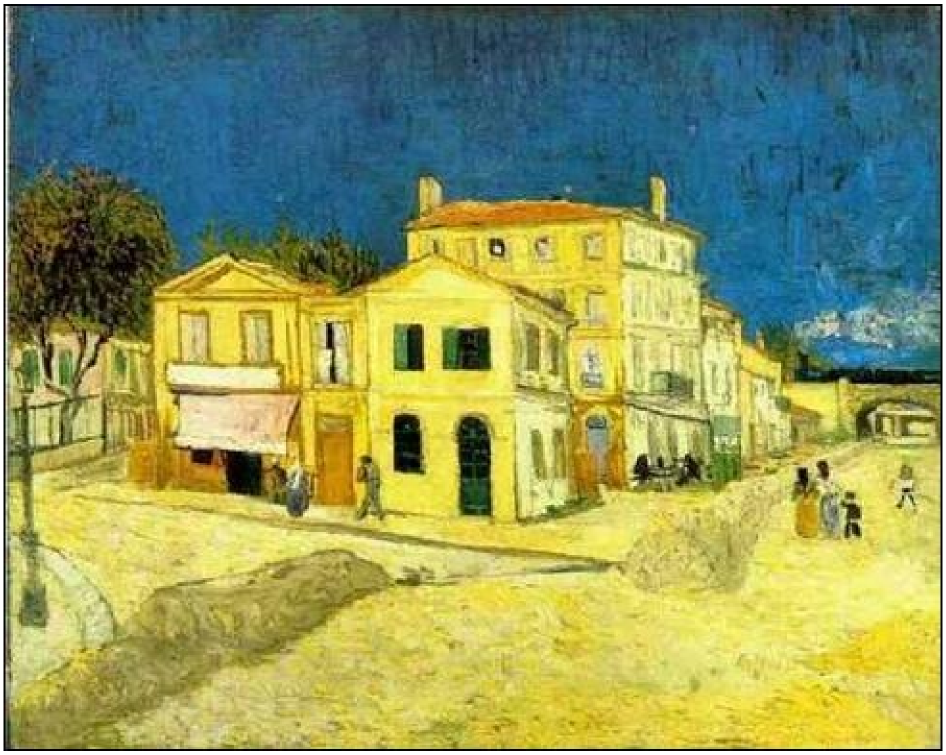
Self-Portrait (Dedicated to Gauguin)
Oil on canvas
62.0 x 52.0 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



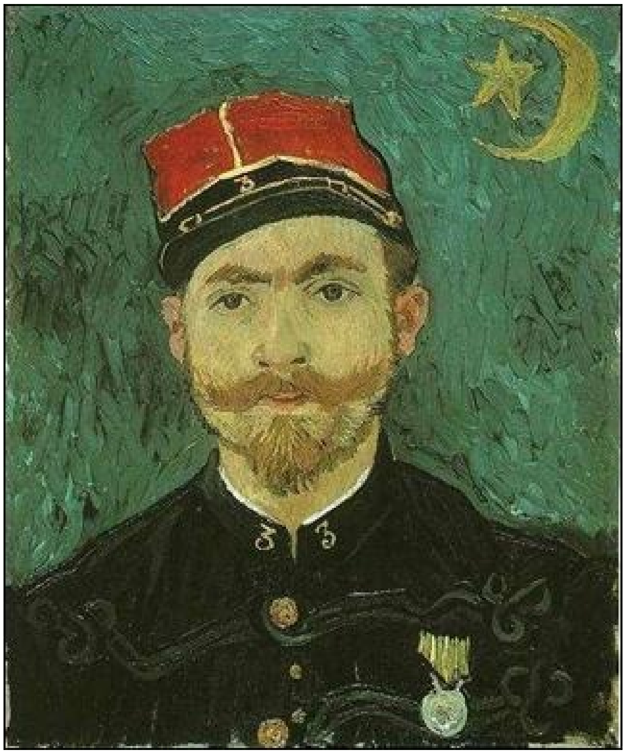
Sower: Outskirts of Arles in the Background, The
Oil on canvas
33.6 x 40.4 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



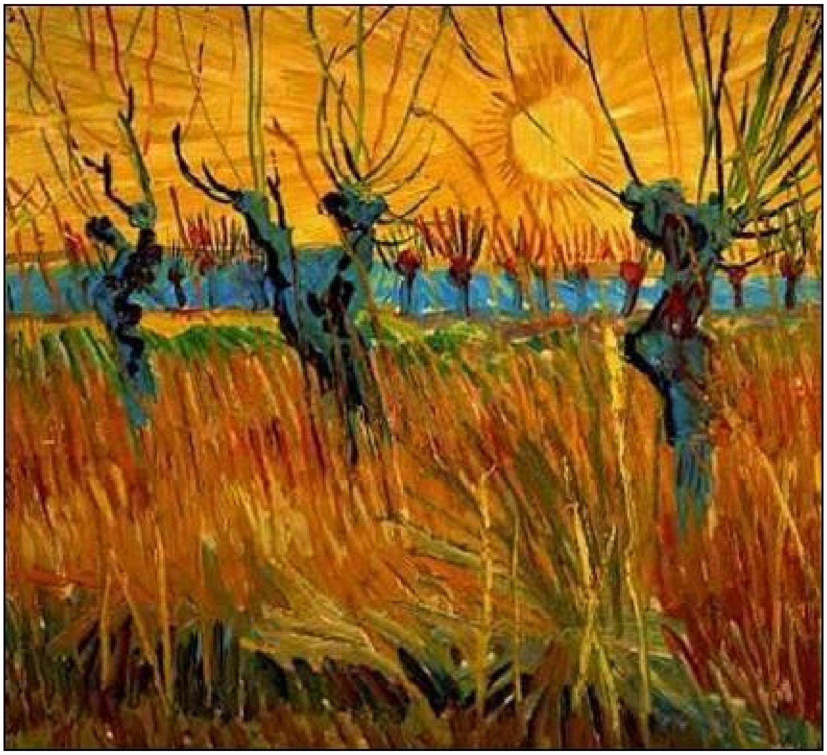
Starry Night Over the Rhone
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



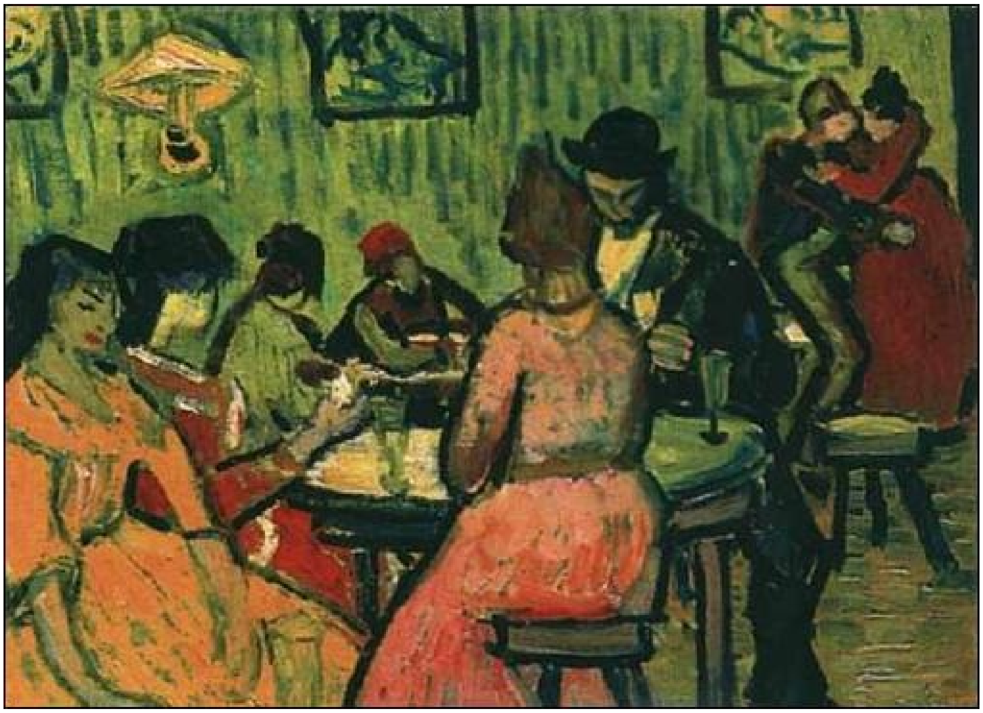
Vincent's House in Arles (The Yellow House)
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 91.5 cm.
Arles: September, 1888



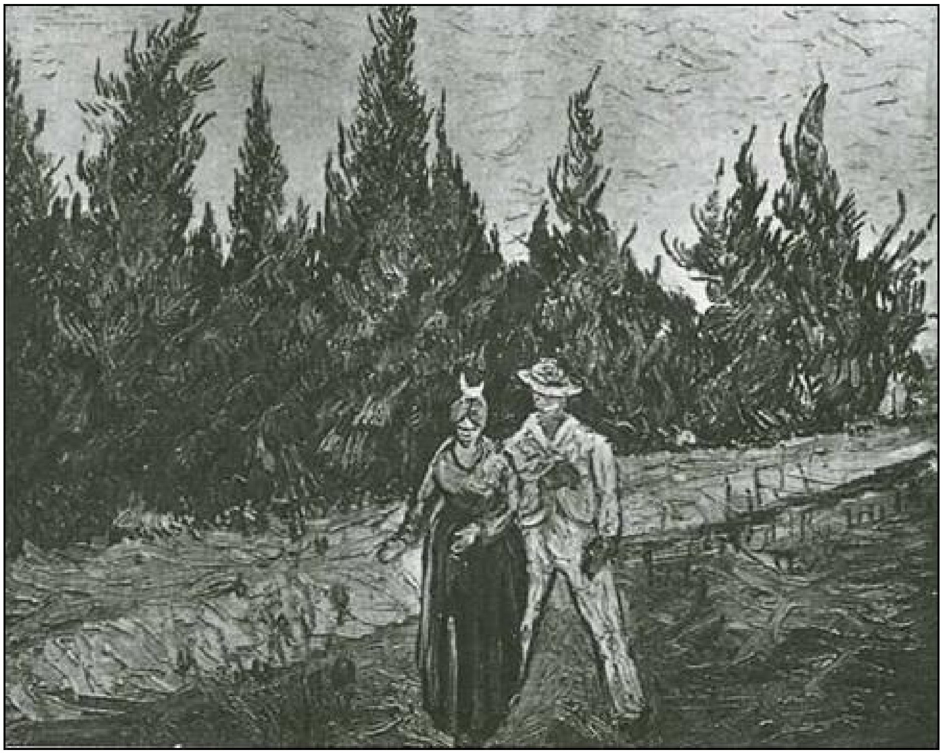
Portrait of Milliet, Second Lieutenant of the Zouaves
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 49.0 cm.
Arles: late September, 1888



Willows at Sunset
Oil on cardboard
31.5 x 34.5 cm.
Arles: Autumn, 1888

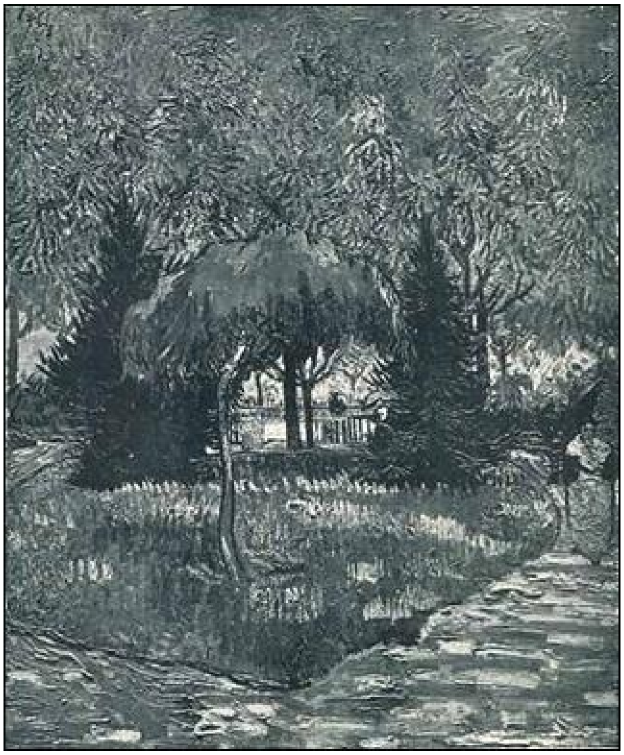


The Brothel
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888



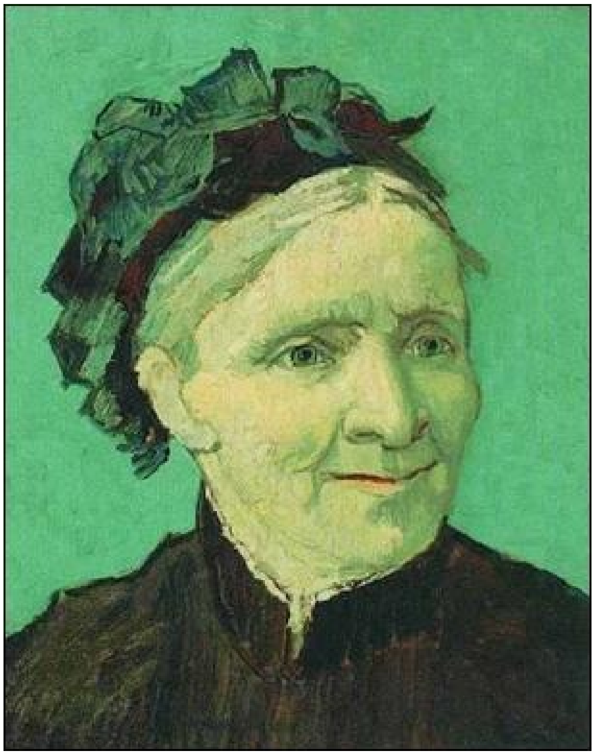
Lovers: The Poet's Garden IV, The

Oil on canvas
75.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888

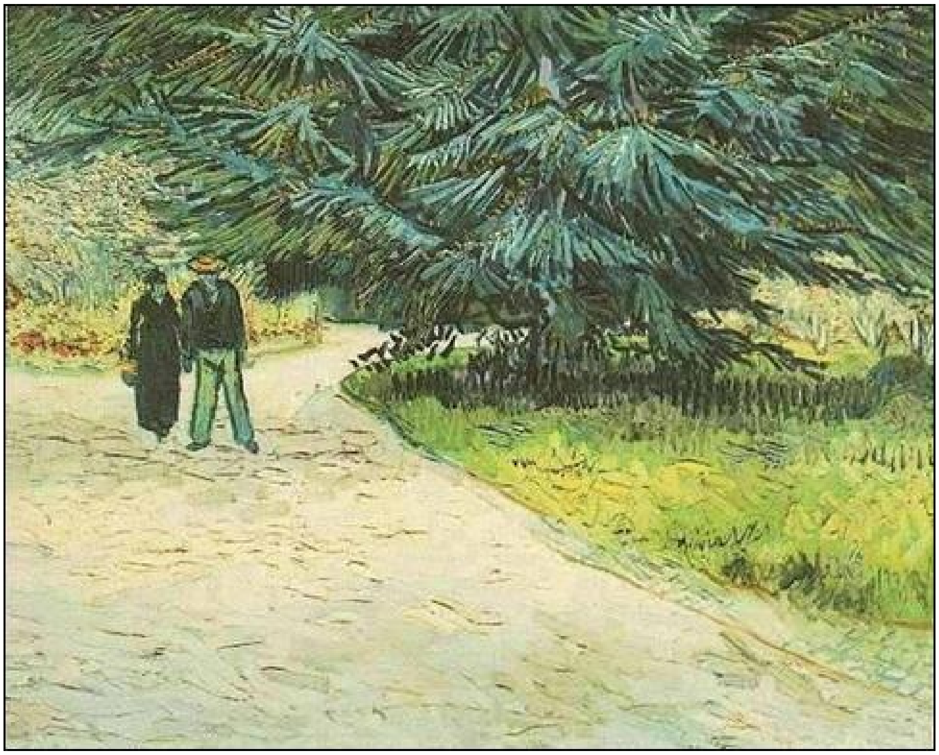


Park at Arles with the Entrance Seen through the Trees, The

Oil on canvas
74.0 x 62.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888

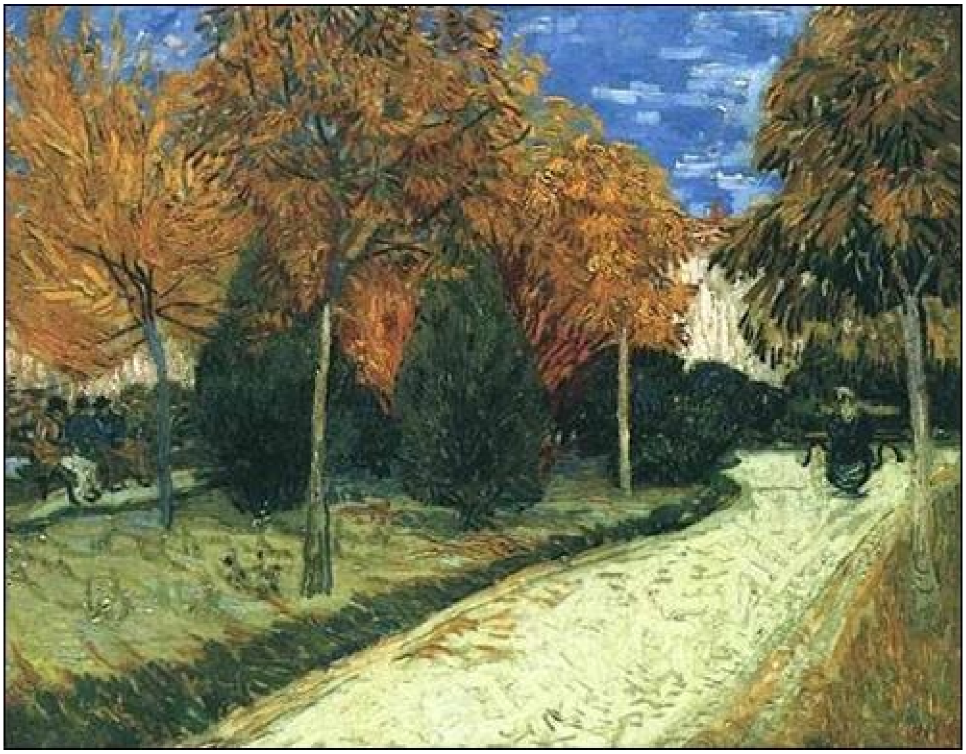


Portrait of the Artist's Mother
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 32.5 cm.
Arles: October, 1888

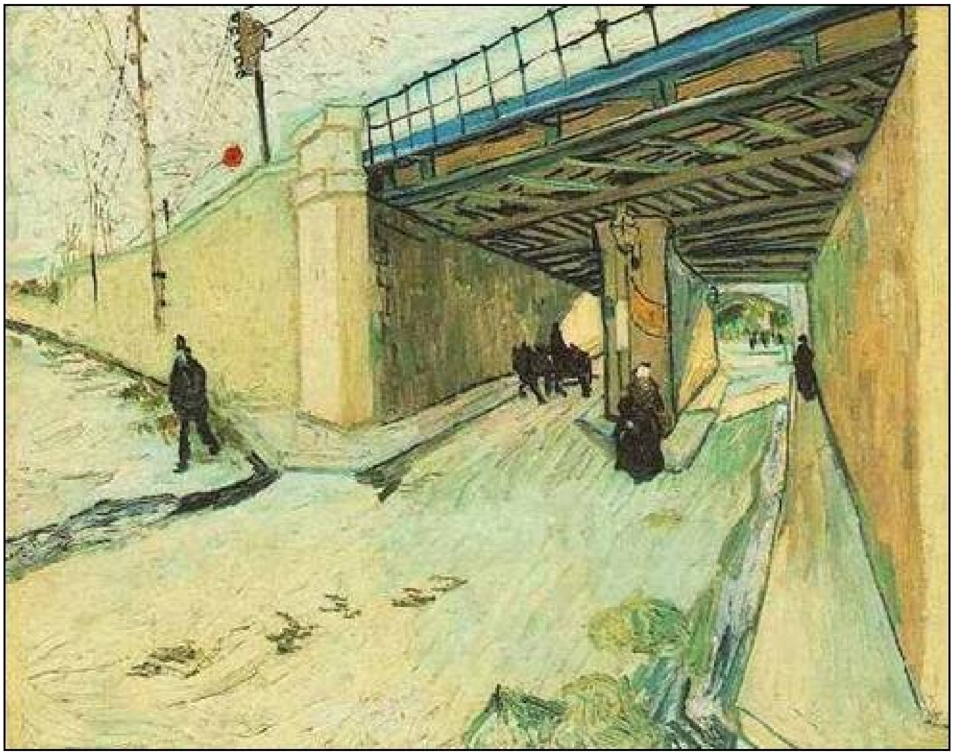


Public Garden with Couple and Blue Fir Tree: The Poet's Garden III

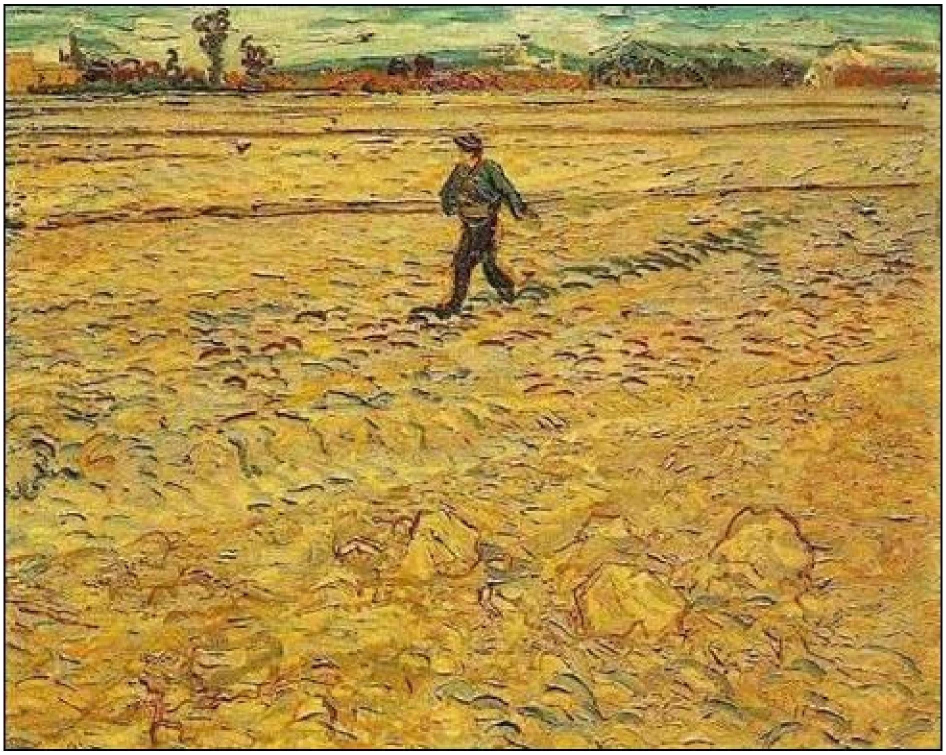
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888



Public Park at Arles, The
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 93.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888

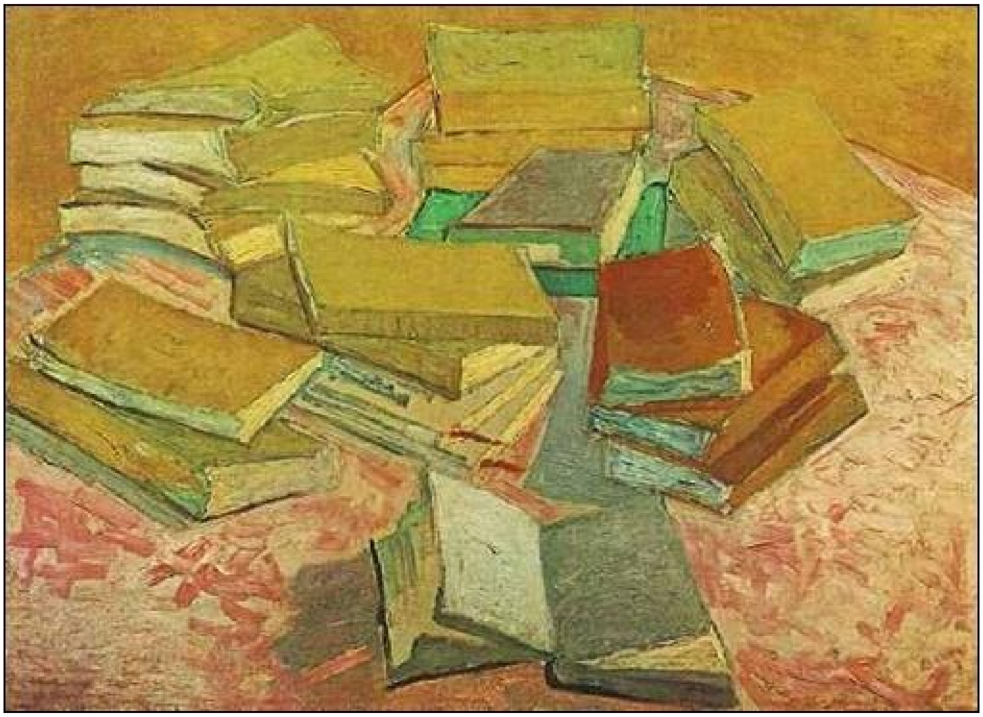


Railway Bridge over Avenue Montmajour, Arles, The
Oil on canvas
71.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888

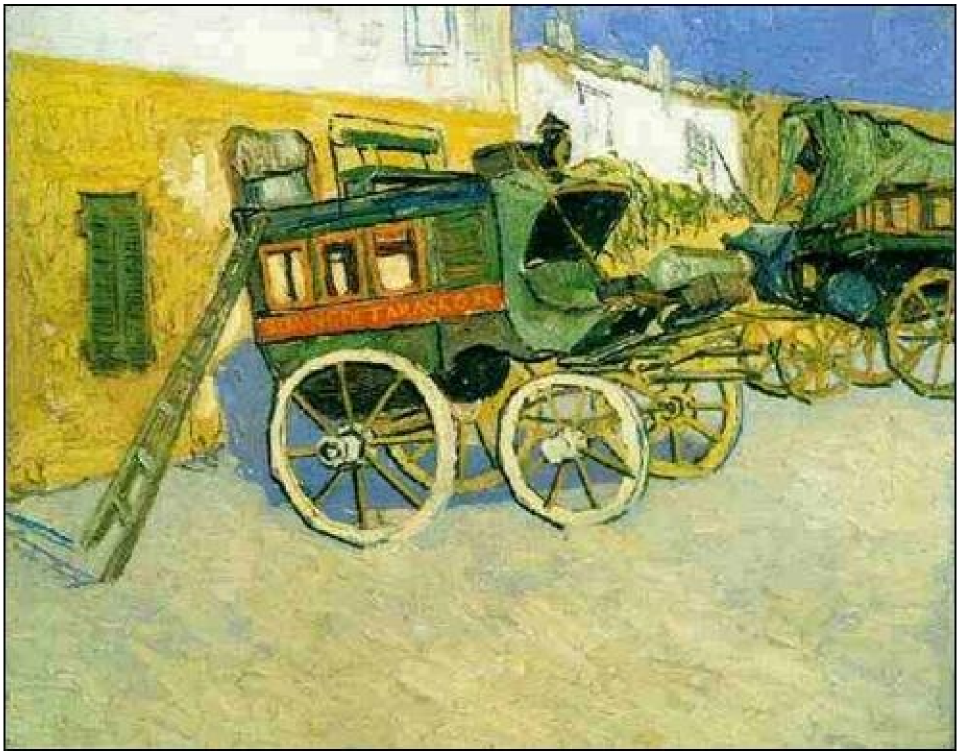


Sower, The

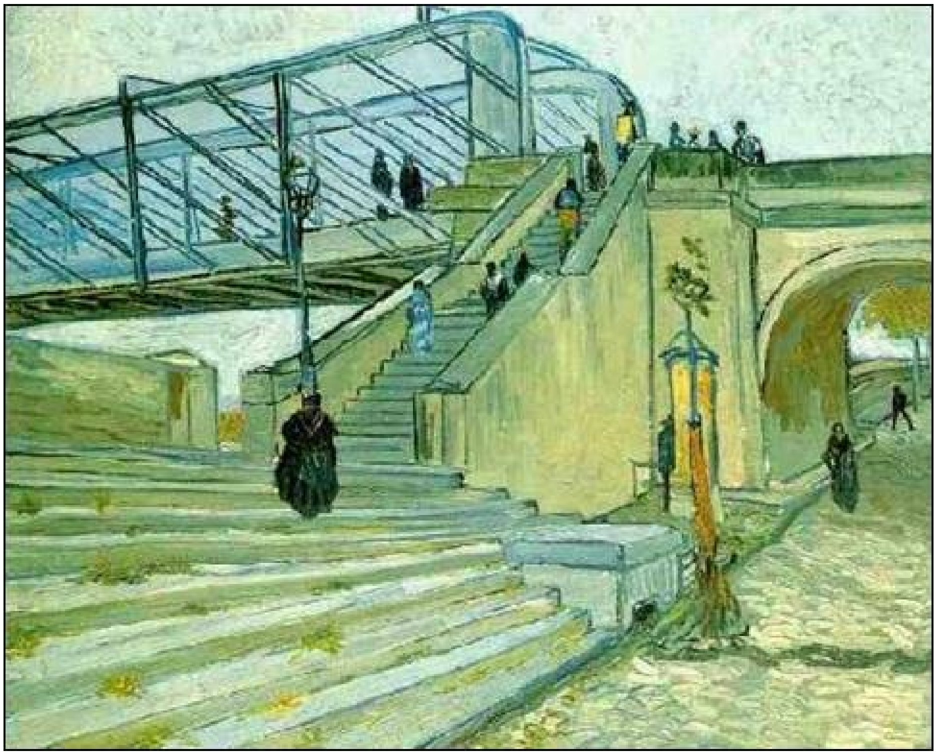
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 91.5 cm.
Arles: October, 1888



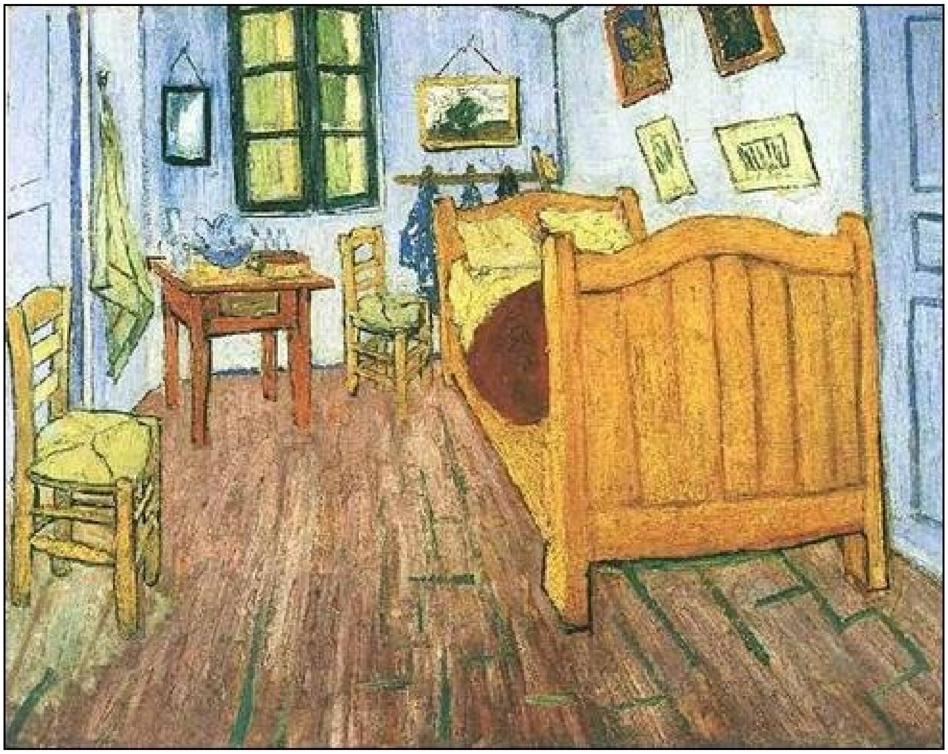
Still Life: French Novels
Oil on canvas
53.0 x 73.2 cm.
Arles: October, 1888



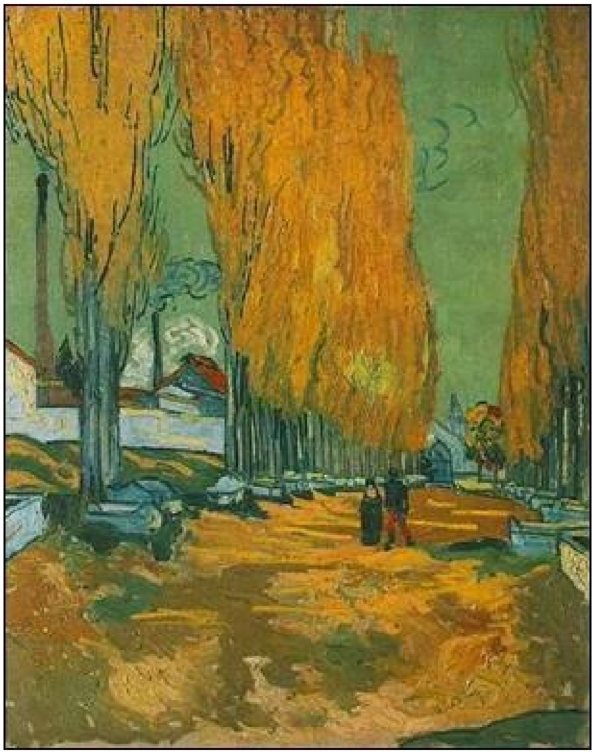
Tarascon Diligence
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888



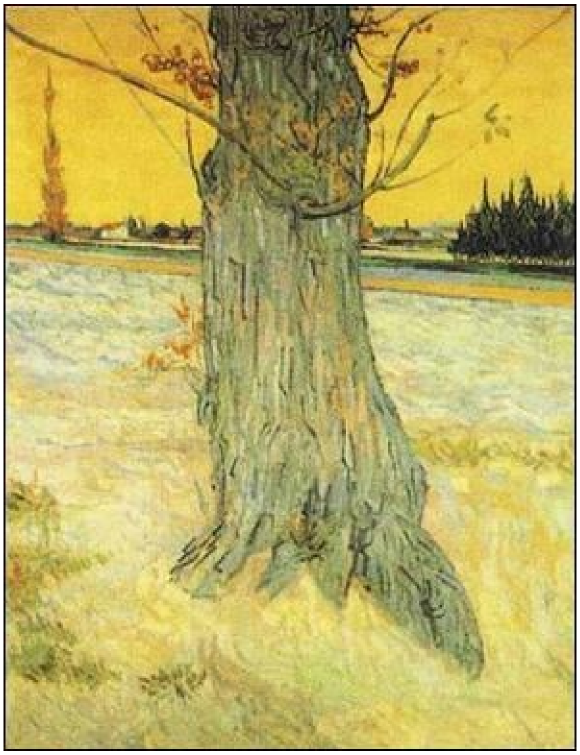
Trinquetaille Bridge, The
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 92.5 cm.
Arles: October, 1888



Vincent's Bedroom in Arles
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 90.0 cm.
Arles: October, 1888

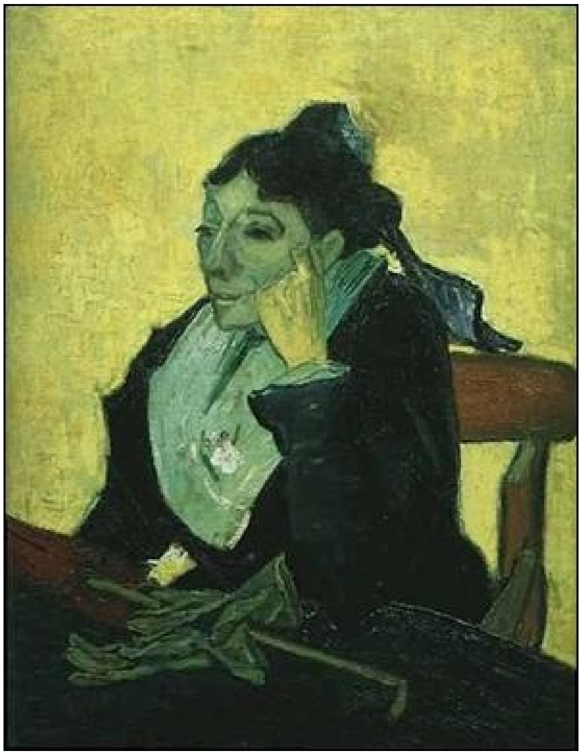


Les Alyscamps
Oil on canvas
93.0 x 72.0 cm.
Arles: late October, 1888

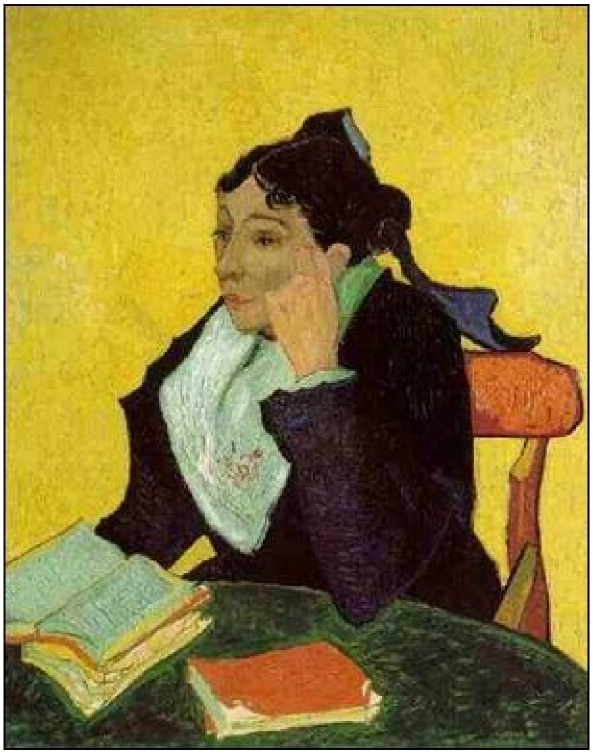


Trunk of an Old Yew Tree

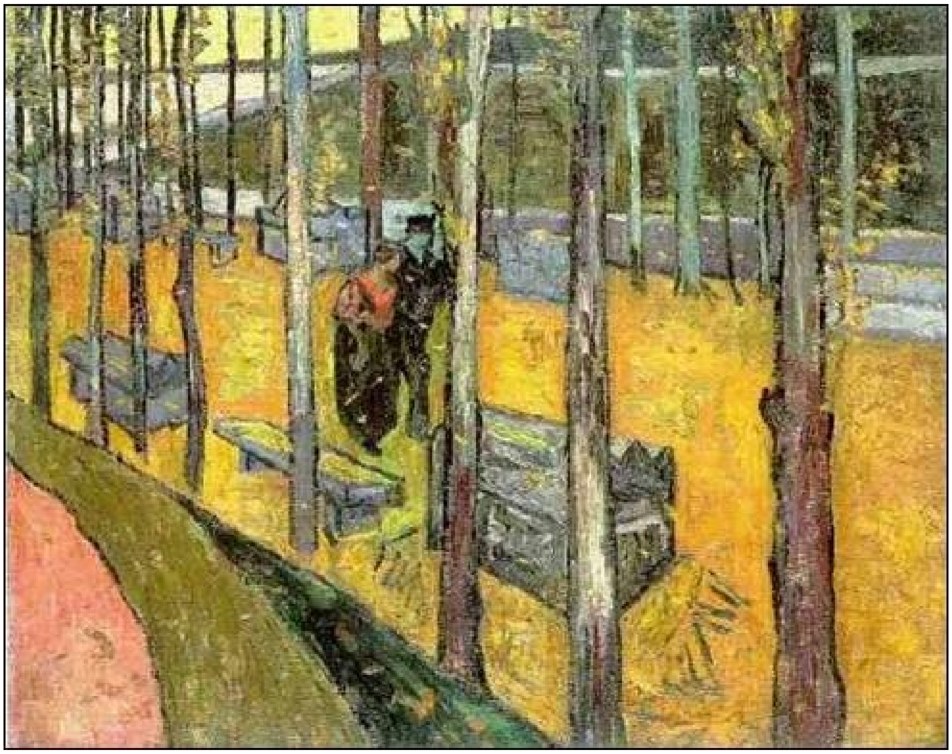
Oil on canvas
91.0 x 71.0 cm.
Arles: late October, 1888



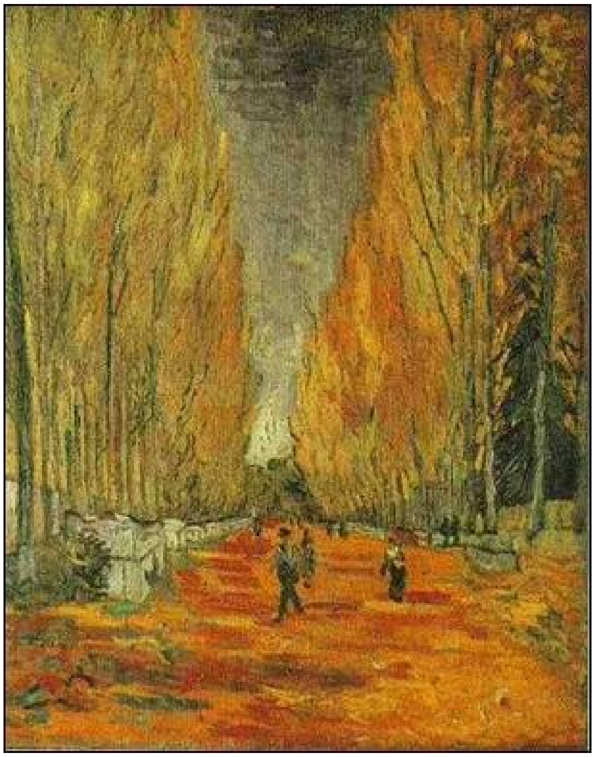
L'Arlesienne: Madame Ginoux with Gloves and Umbrella
Oil on canvas
93.0 x 74.0 cm.
Arles: early November, 1888



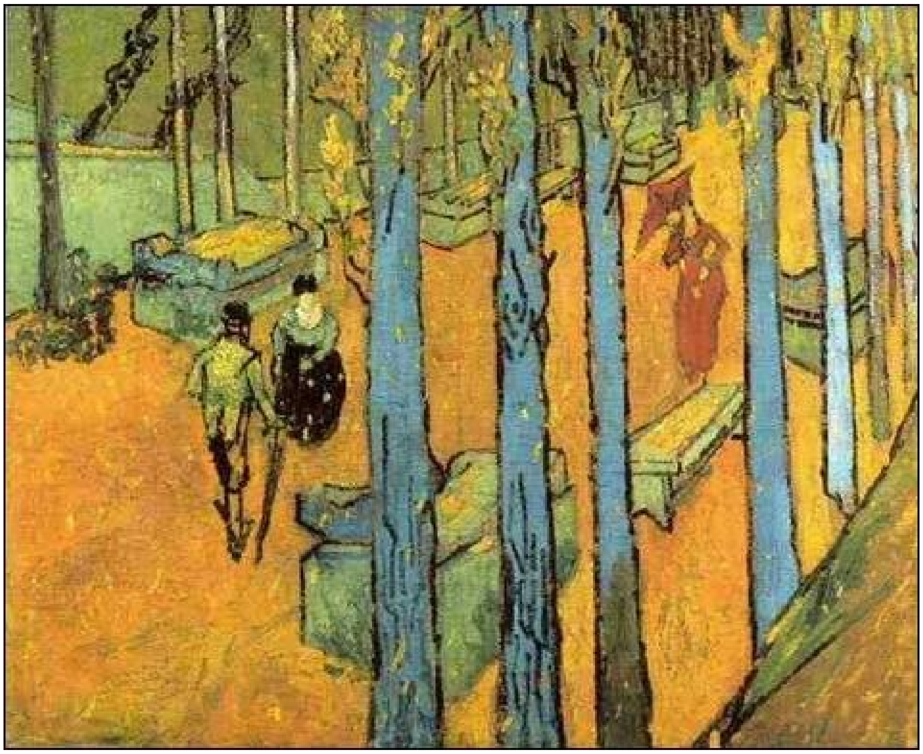
L'Arlesienne: Madame Ginoux with Books
Oil on canvas
91.4 x 73.7 cm.
Arles: November, 1888 (or May, 1889?)



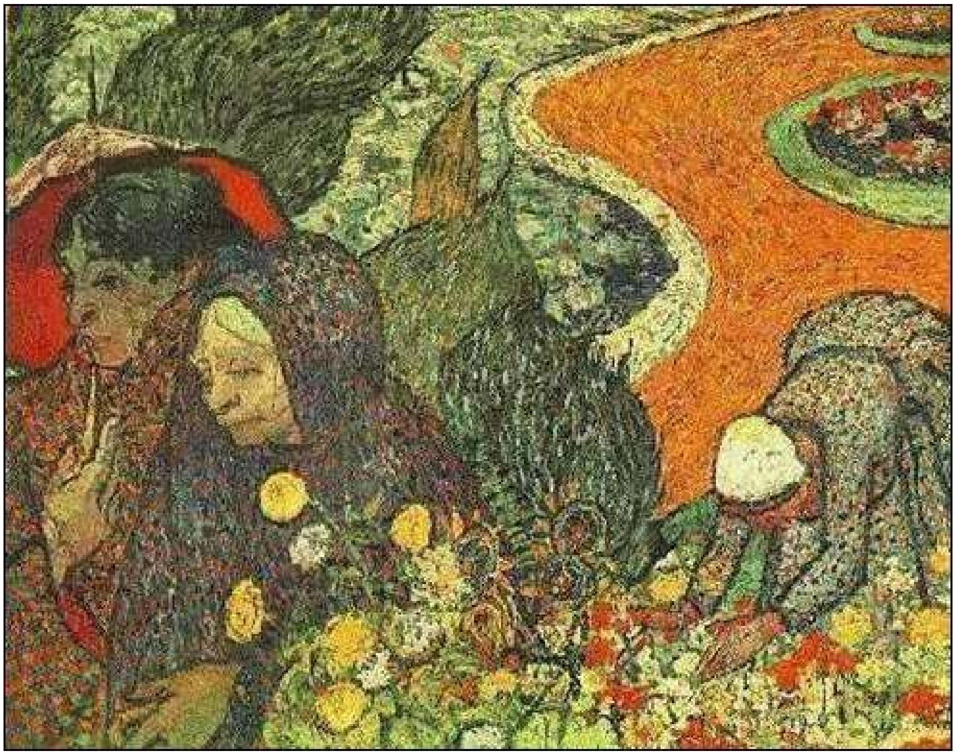
Les Alyscamps
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 91.0 cm.
Arles: November, 1888



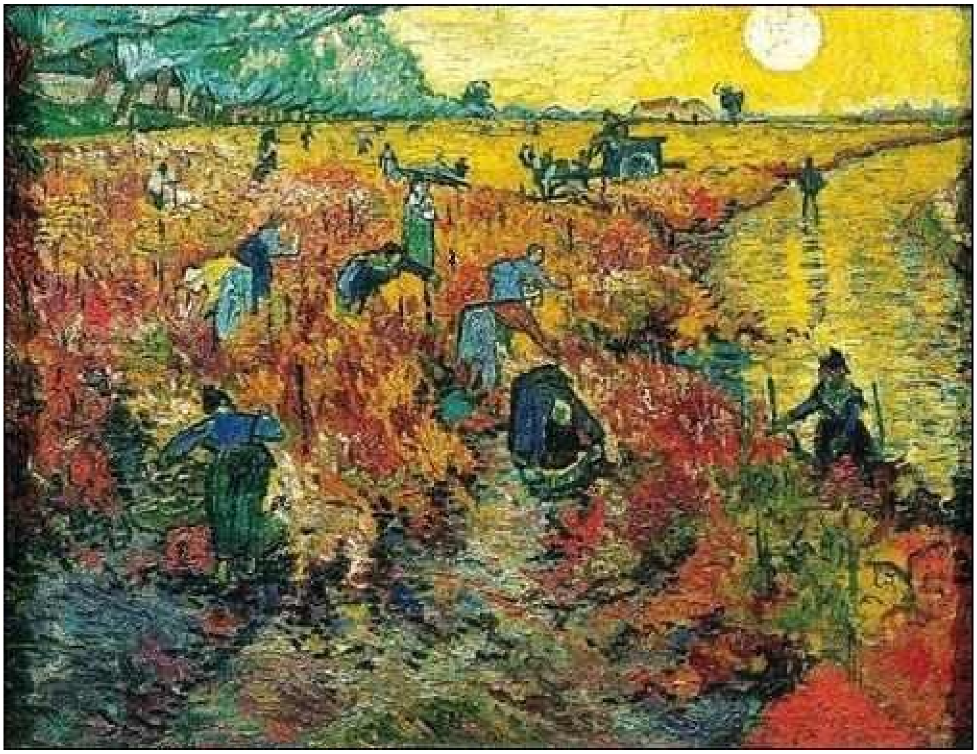
Les Alyscamps
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.5 cm.
Arles: November, 1888



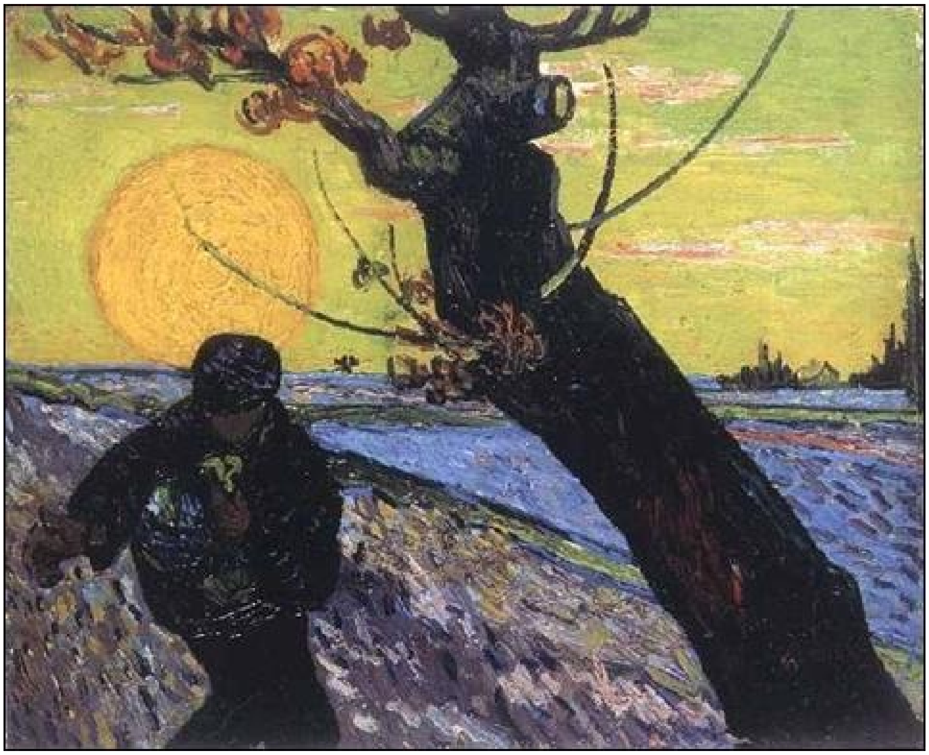
Les Alyscamps: Falling Autumn Leaves
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: November, 1888



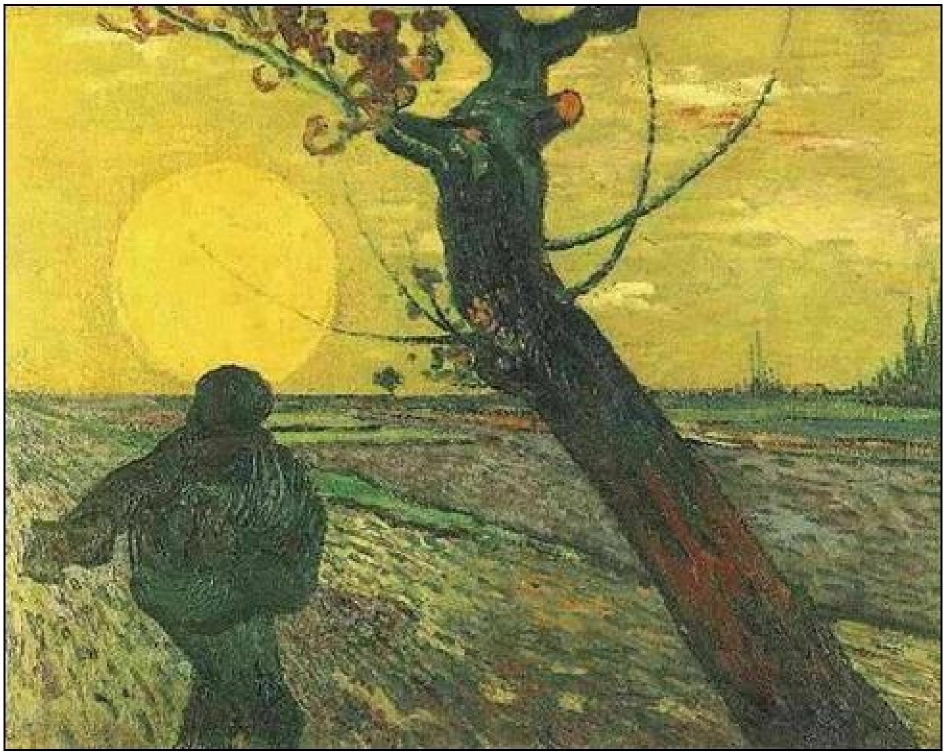
Memory of the Garden at Etten
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 92.5 cm.
Arles: November, 1888



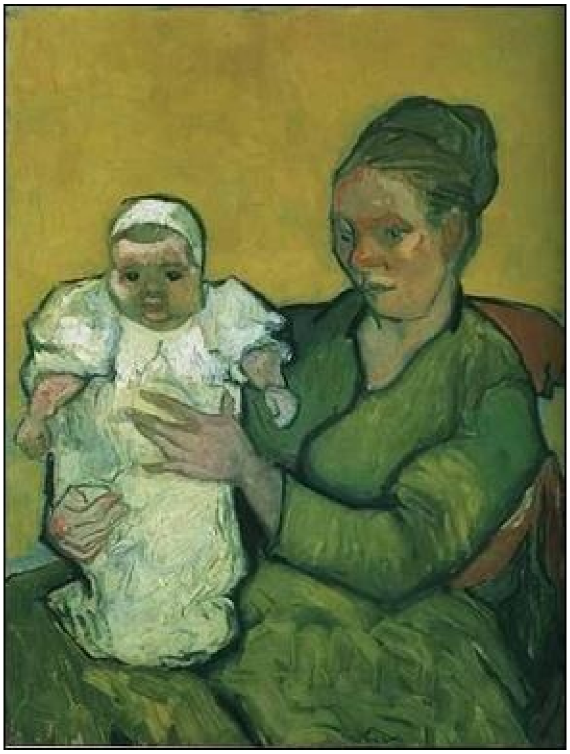
The Red Vineyard
Oil on canvas
75.0 x 93.0 cm.
Arles: November, 1888



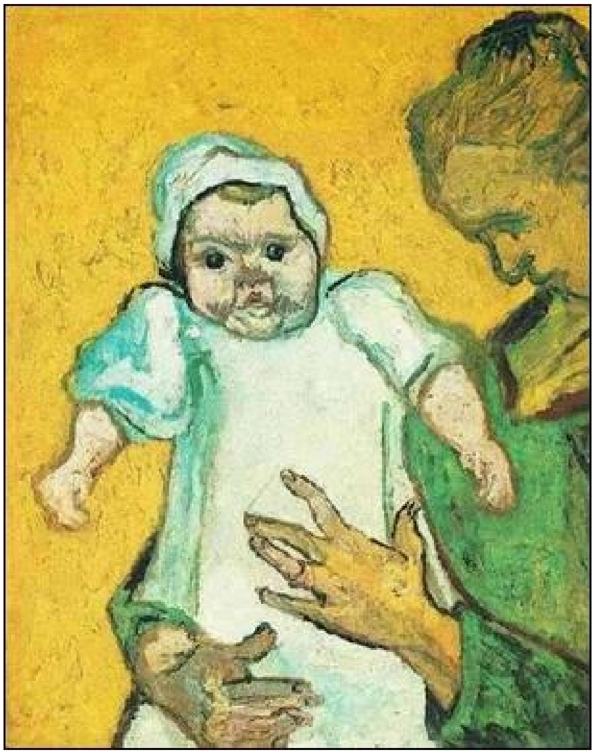
Sower, The
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 40.0 cm.
Arles: November, 1888



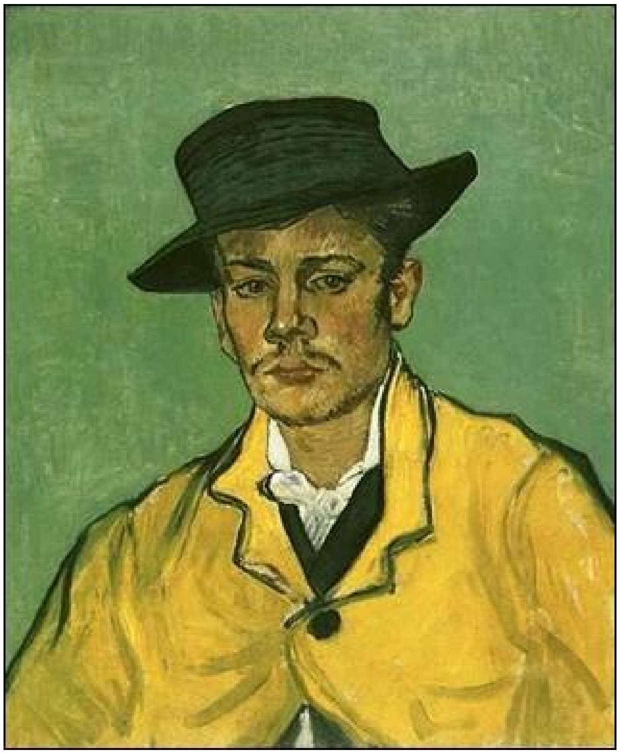
Sower, The
Oil on burlap on canvas
73.5 x 93.0 cm.
Arles: November, 1888



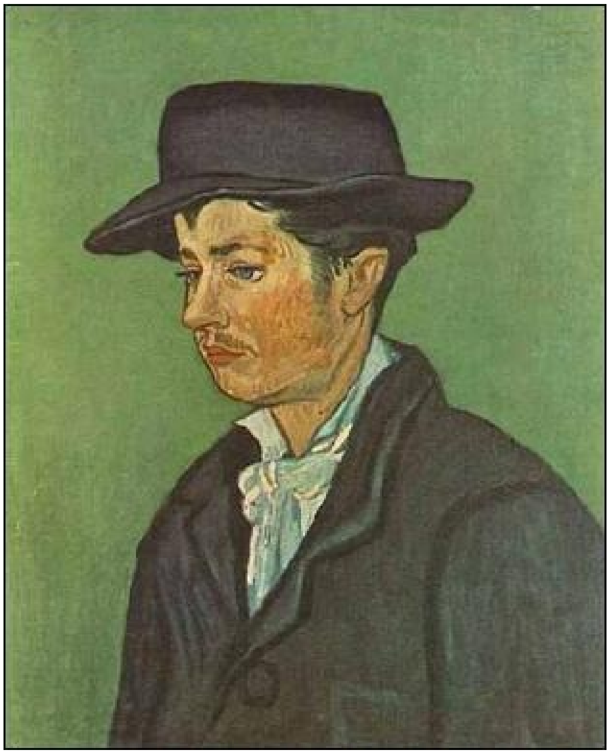
Mother Roulin with Her Baby
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.5 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



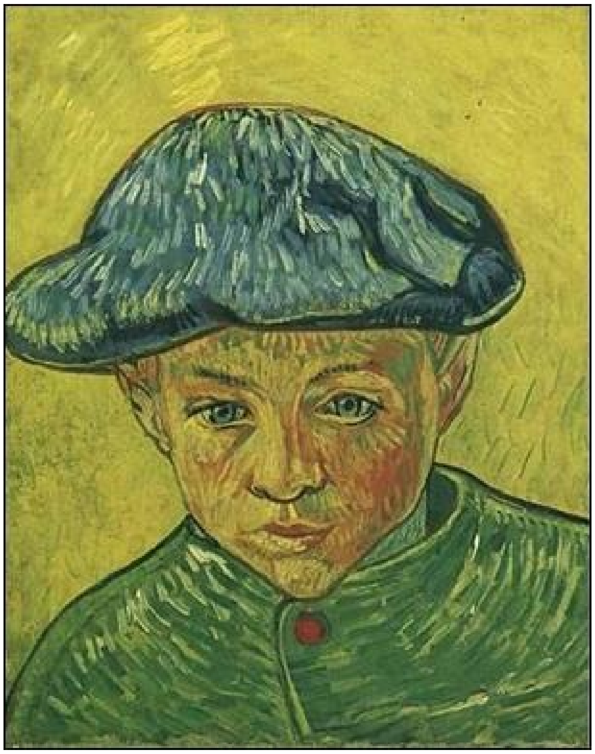
Mother Roulin with Her Baby
Oil on canvas
63.5 x 51.0 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



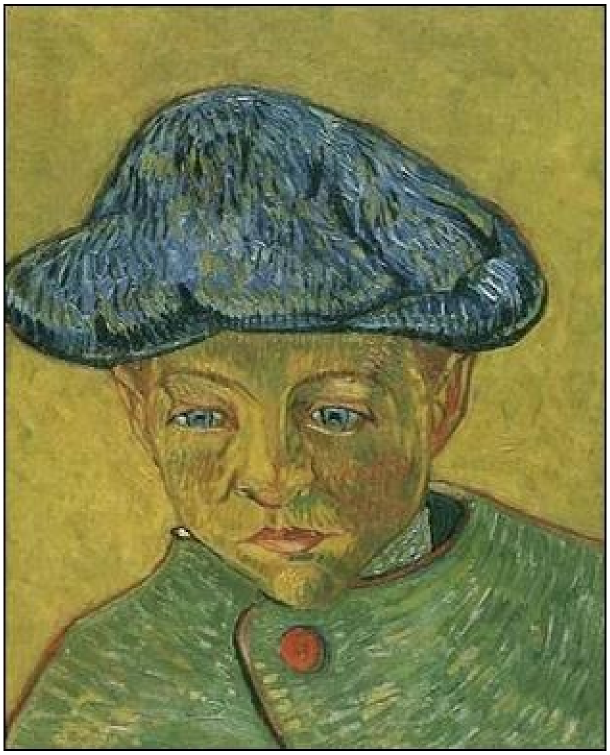
Portrait of Armand Roulin
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.1 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



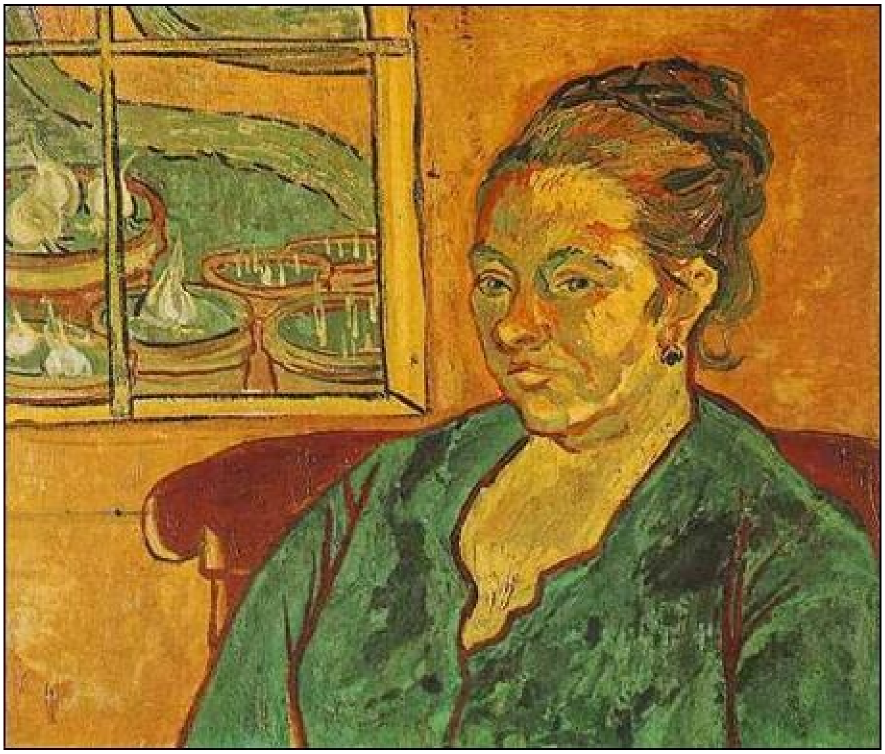
Portrait of Armand Roulin
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



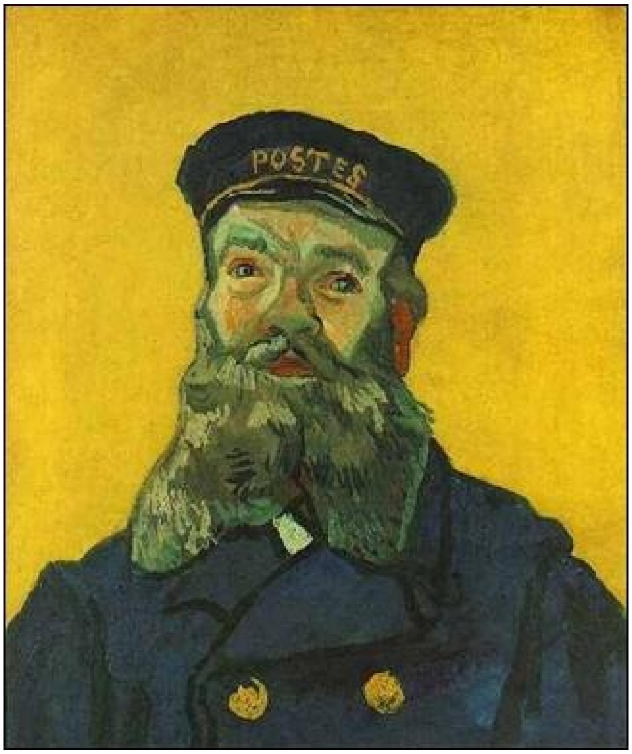
Portrait of Camille Roulin
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 32.5 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



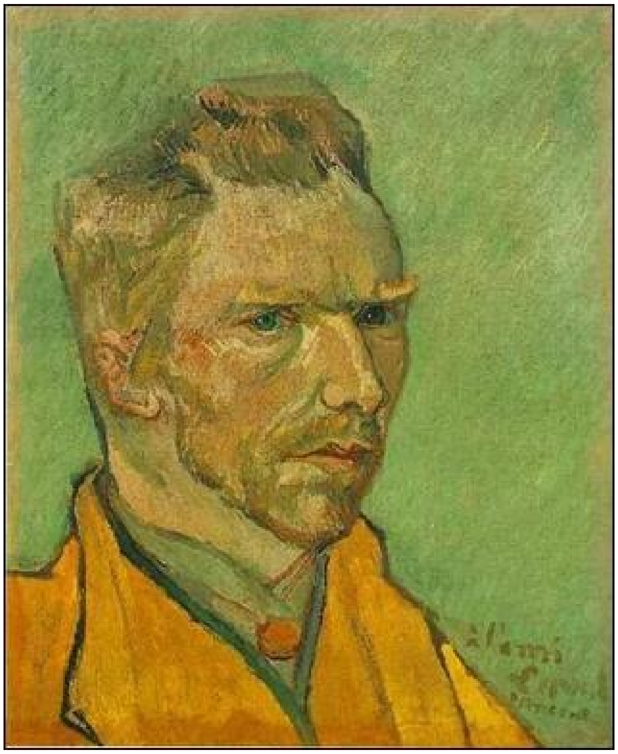
Portrait of Camille Roulin
Oil on canvas
43.0 x 35.0 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



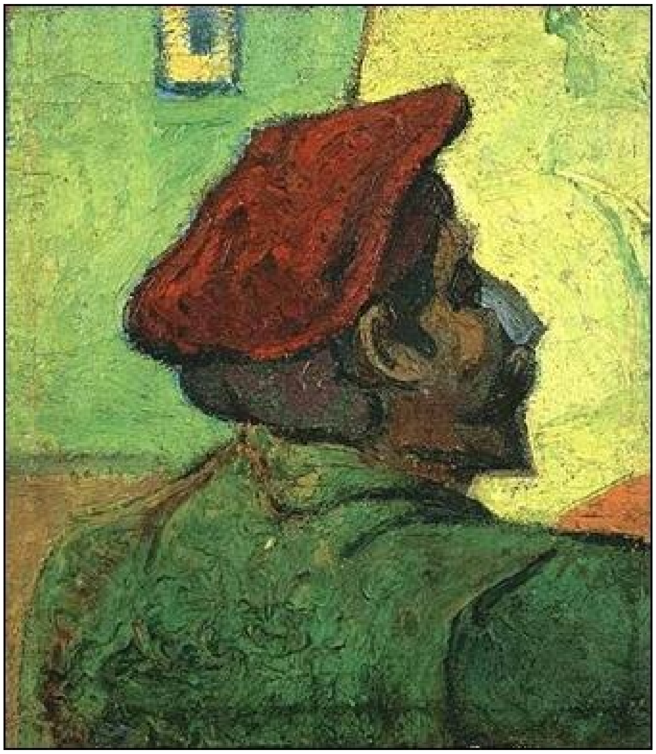
Portrait of Madame Augustine Roulin
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



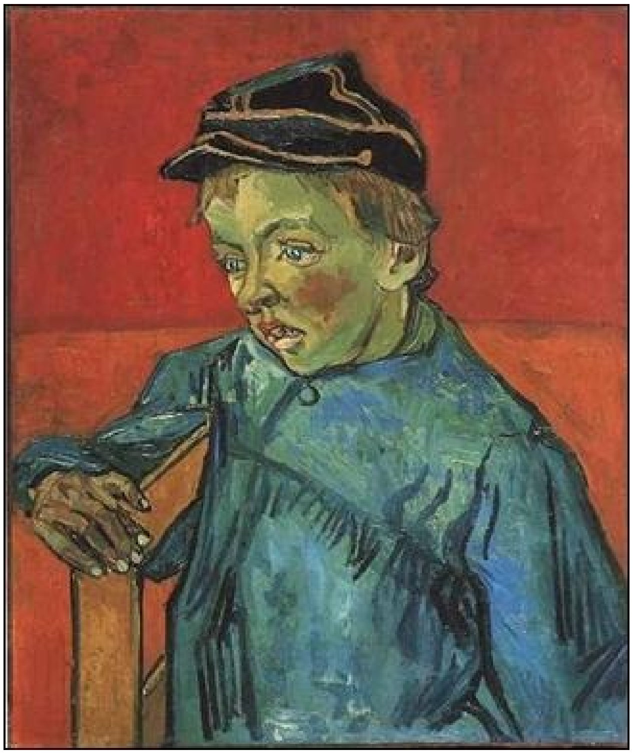
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



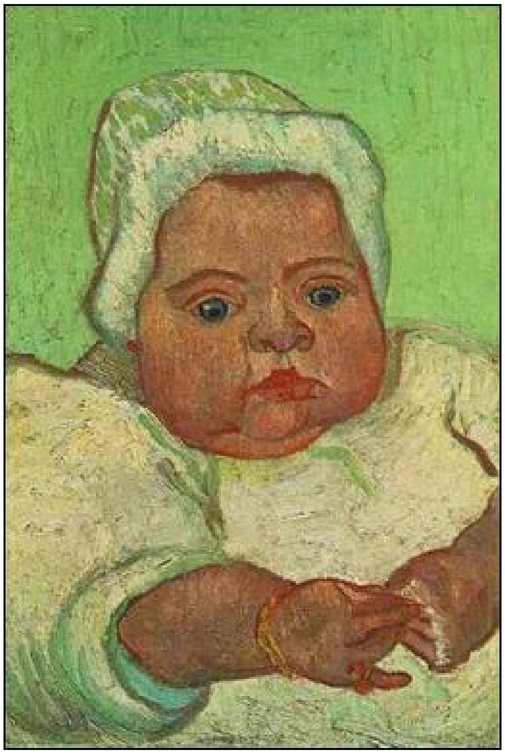
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 38.0 cm.
Arles: November-December, 1888



Paul Gauguin (Man in a Red Beret)
Oil on jute
37.0 x 33.0 cm.
Arles: c. 1 December 1888

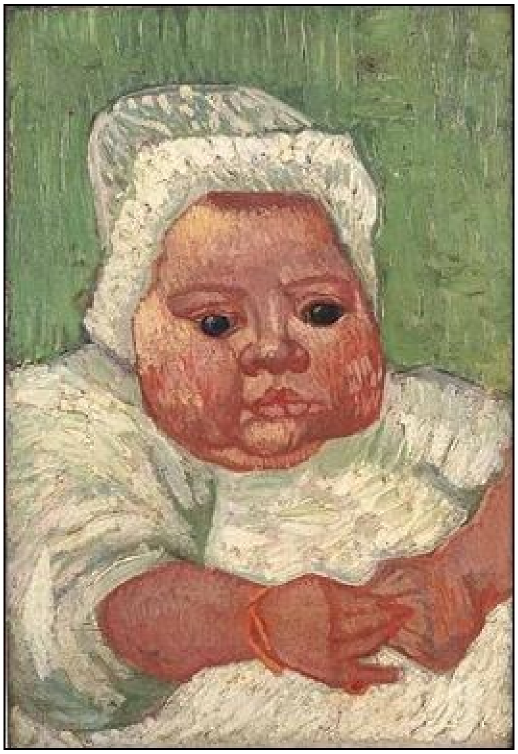


Schoolboy (Camille Roulin), The
Oil on canvas
63.5 x 54.0 cm.
Arles, early December, 1888

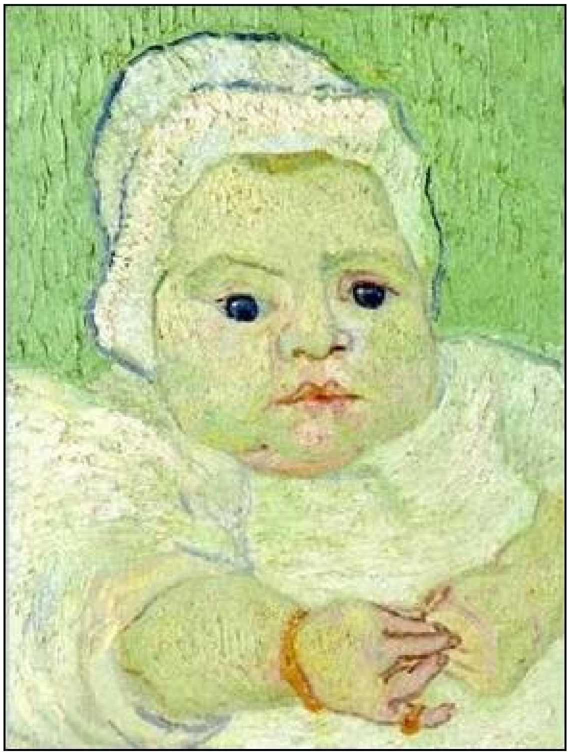


Baby Marcelle Roulin, The

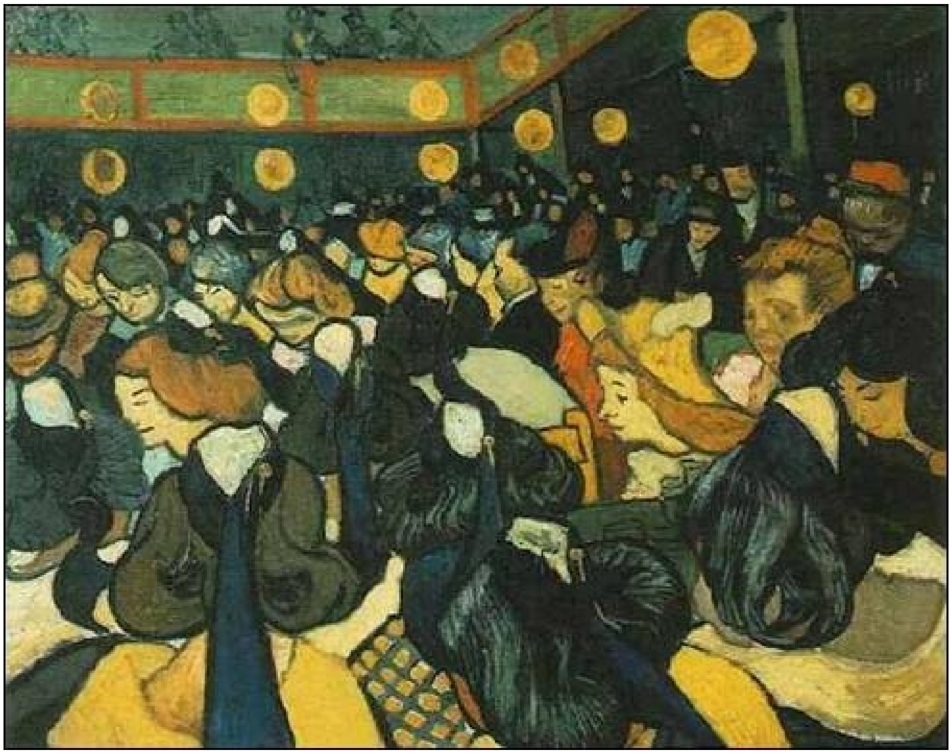
Oil on canvas
35.0 x 24.5 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



Baby Marcelle Roulin, The
Oil on canvas
34.3 x 23.5 cm.
Arles: December, 1888

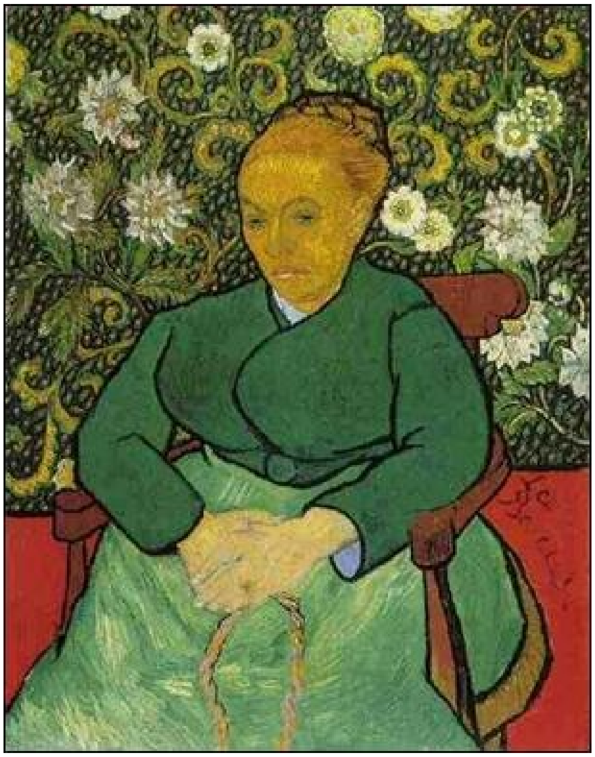


Baby Marcelle Roulin, The
Oil on canvas
35.0 x 24.0 cm.
Arles: December, 1888

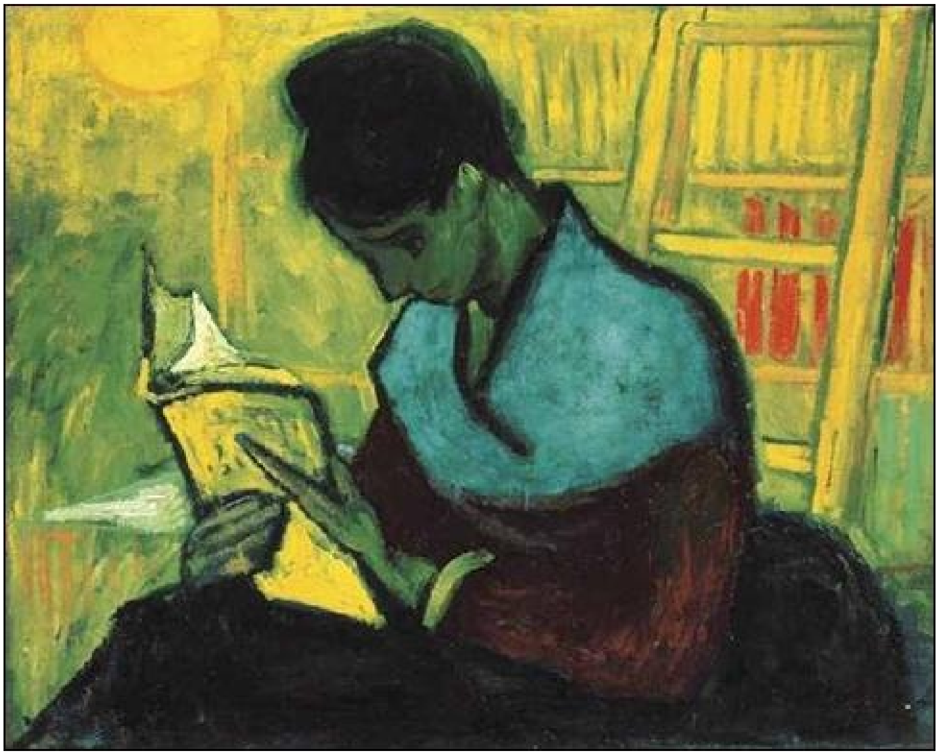


Dance Hall in Arles, The

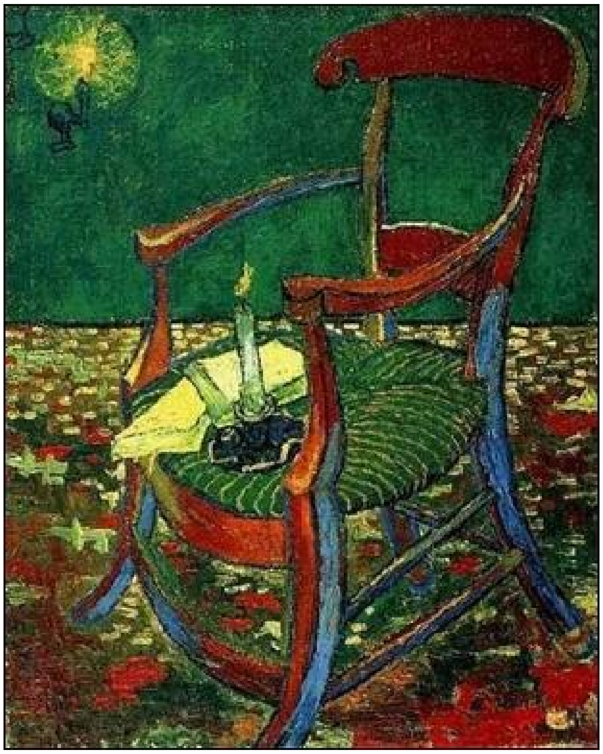
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.0 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



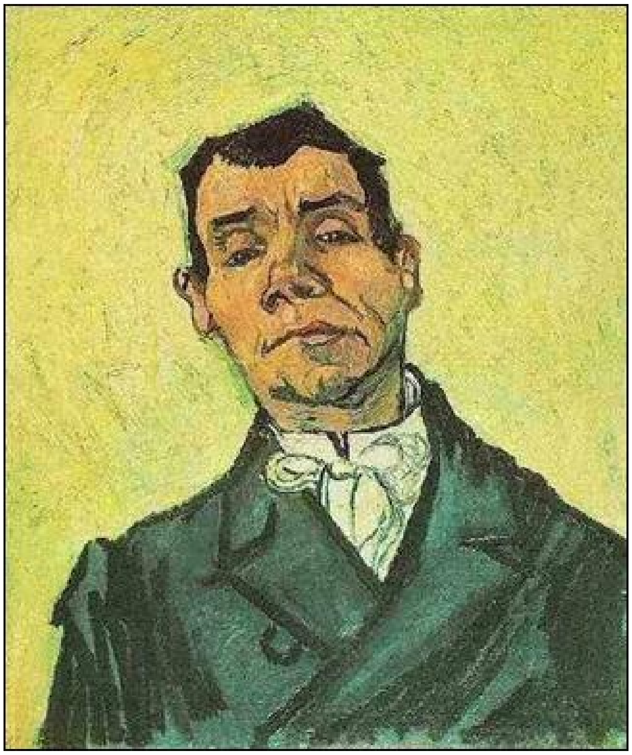
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.0 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



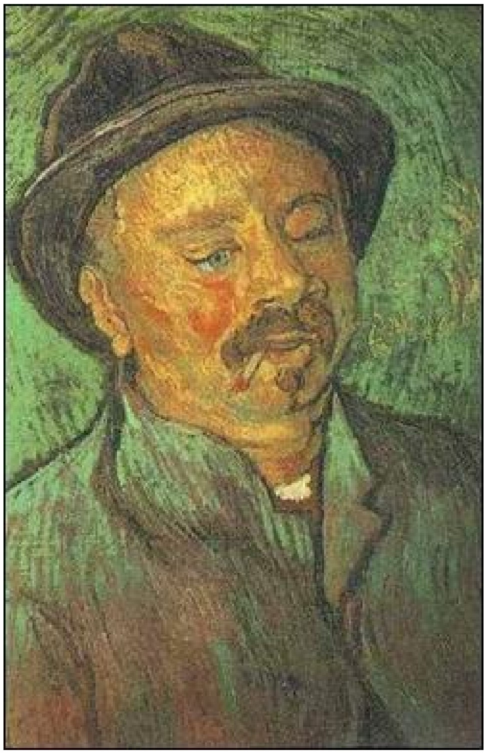
Novel Reader, The
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: c. 16 November 1888



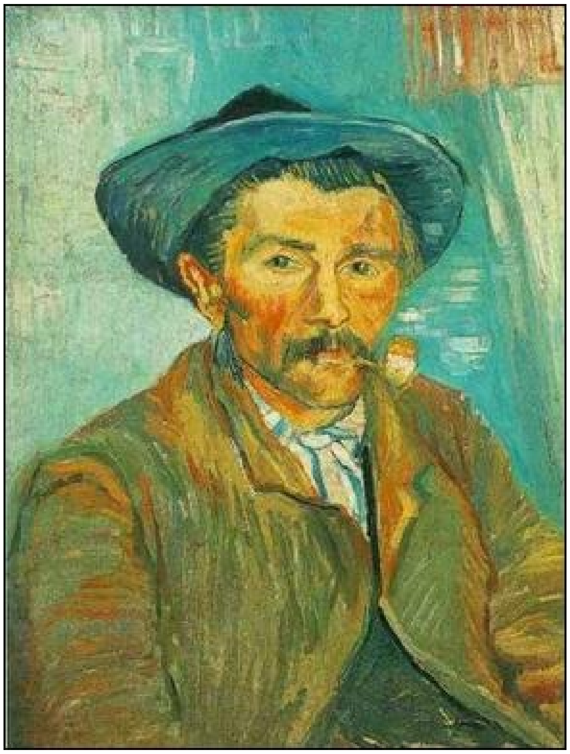
Paul Gauguin's Armchair
Oil on canvas
90.5 x 72.5 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



Portrait of Joseph-Michel Ginoux
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.5 cm.
Arles: December, 1888

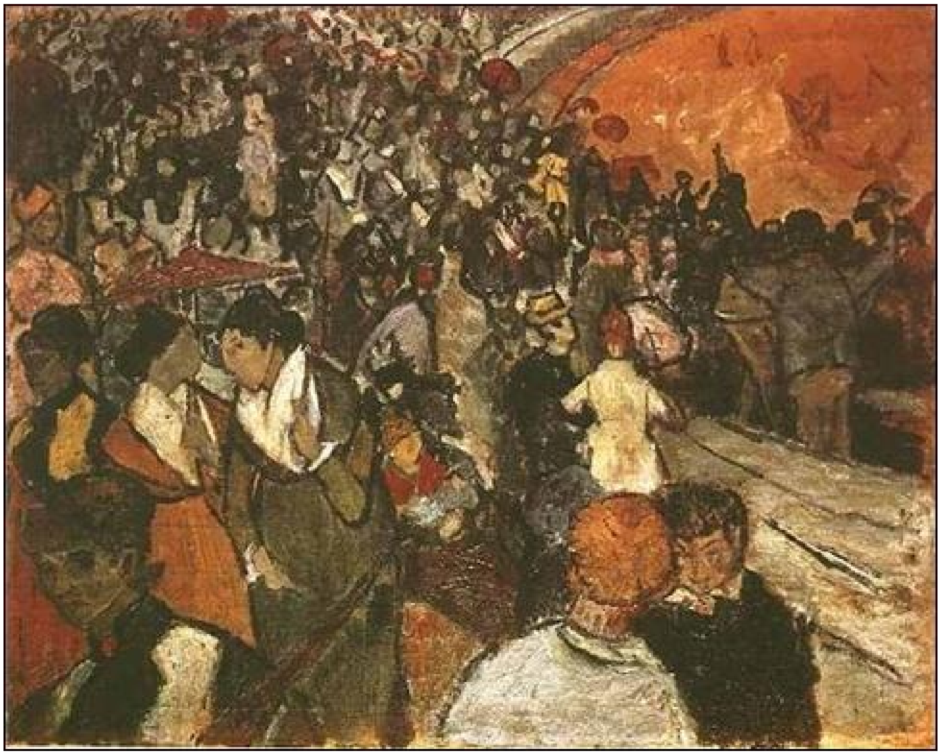


Portrait of a One-Eyed Man
Oil on canvas
56.0 x 36.5 cm.
Arles: December, 1888

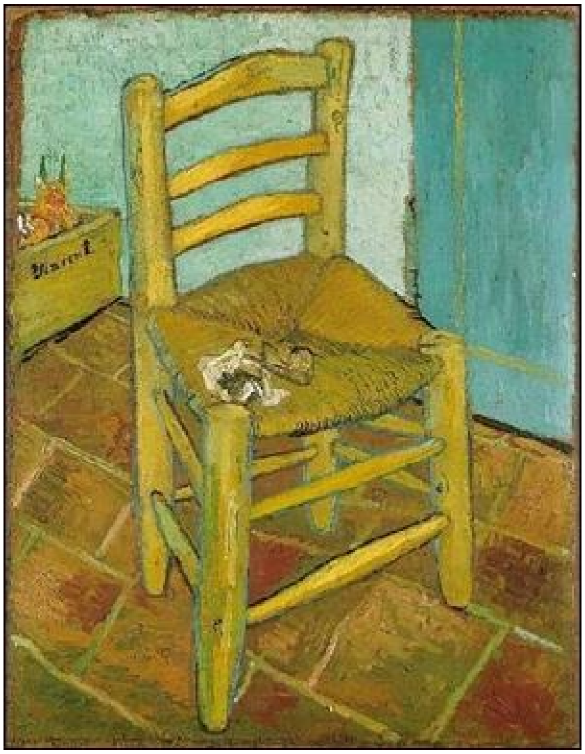


Smoker, The

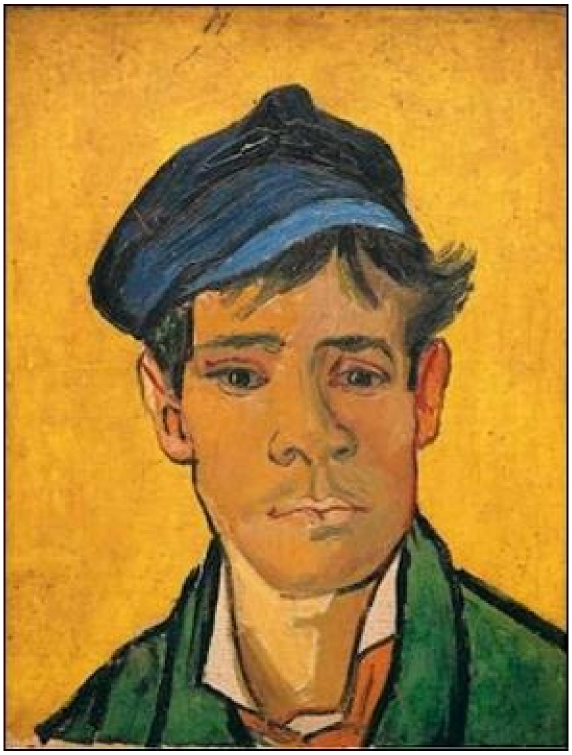
Oil on canvas
62.0 x 47.0 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



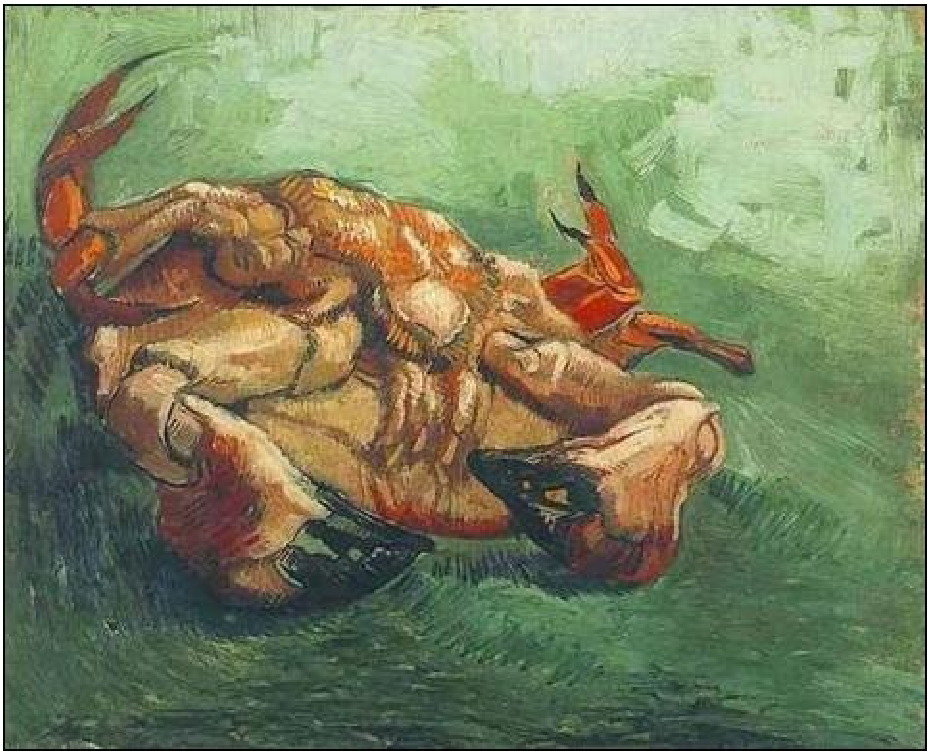
Spectators in the Arena at Arles
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



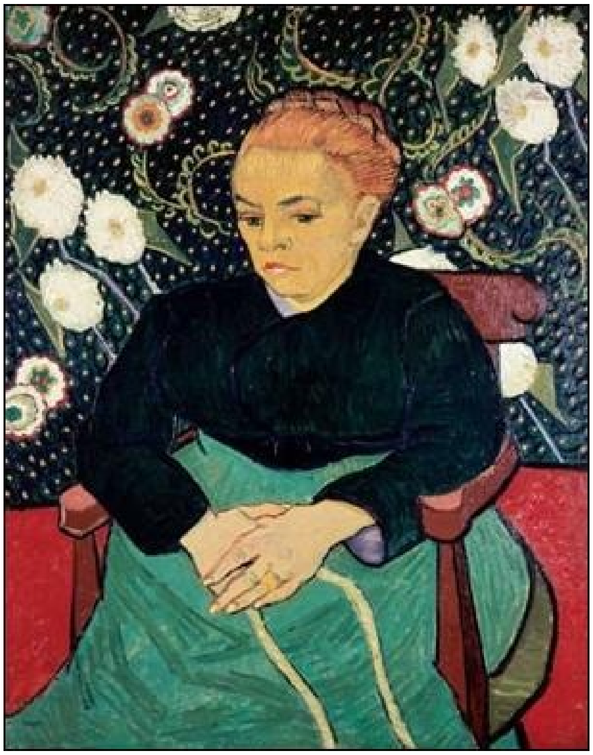
Vincent's Chair with His Pipe
Oil on canvas
93.0 x 73.5 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



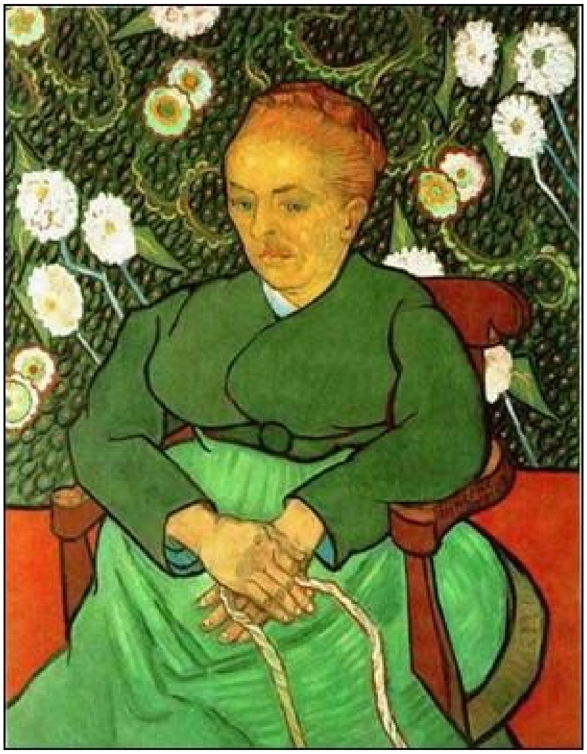
Young Man with a Cap
Oil on canvas
47.5 x 39.0 cm.
Arles: December, 1888



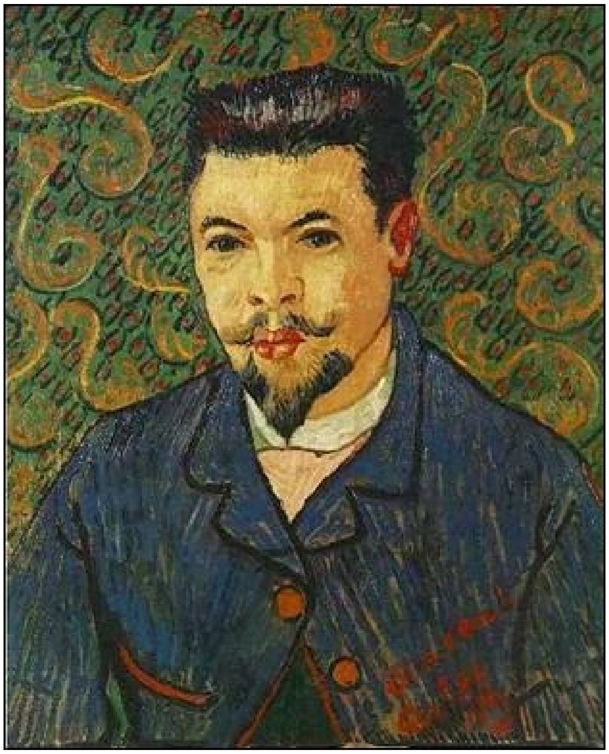
Crab on Its Back
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 46.5 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



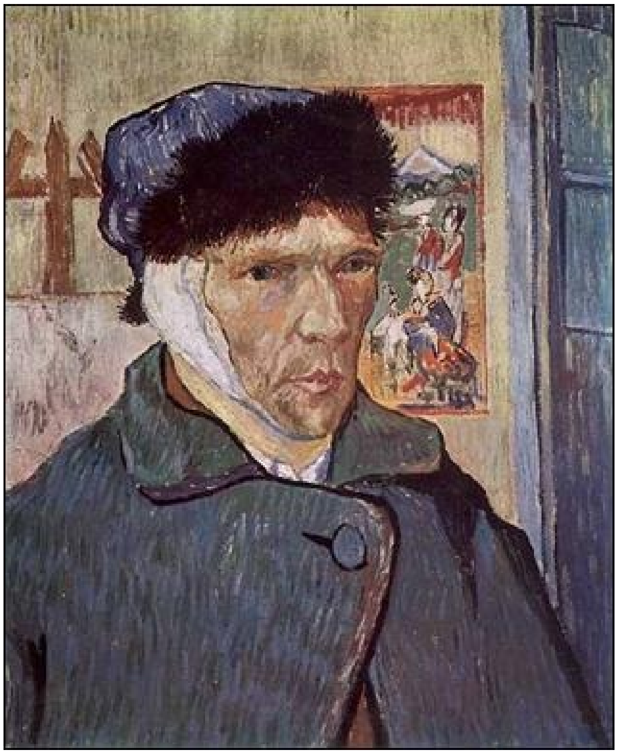
Madame Roulin Rocking the Cradle (La Berceuse)
Oil on canvas
92.7 x 73.8 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



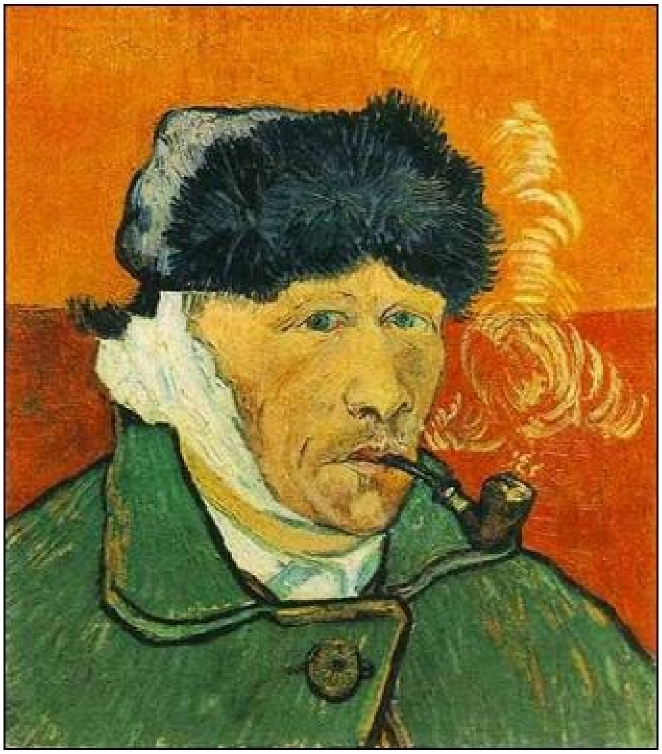
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
Oil on canvas
93.0 x 74.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



Portrait of Doctor Felix Rey
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 53.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889

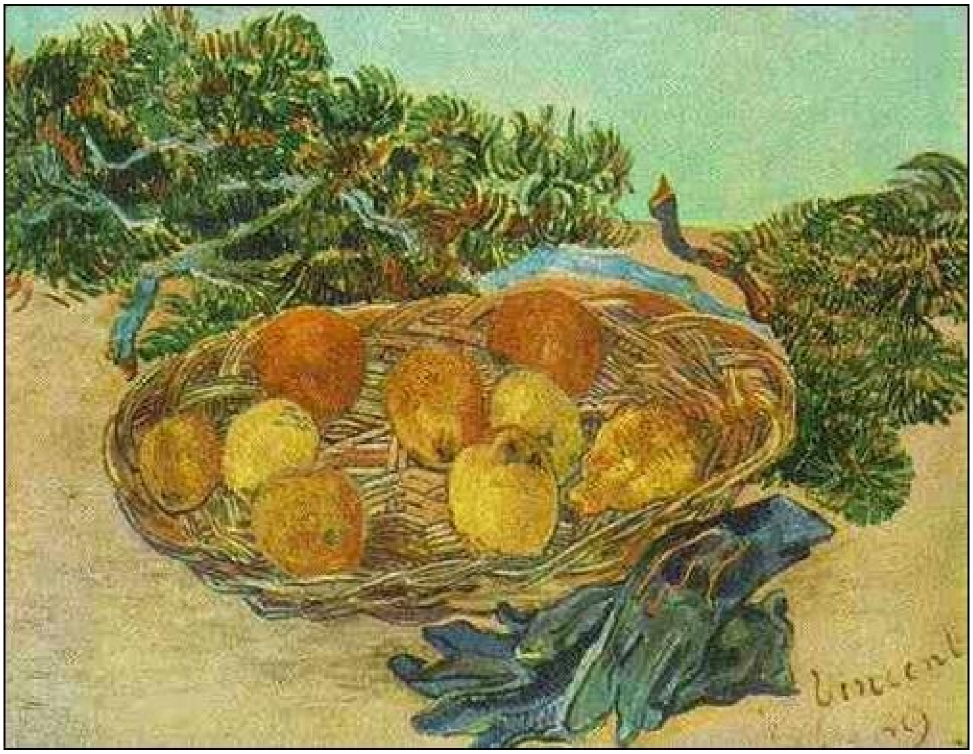


Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 49.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889

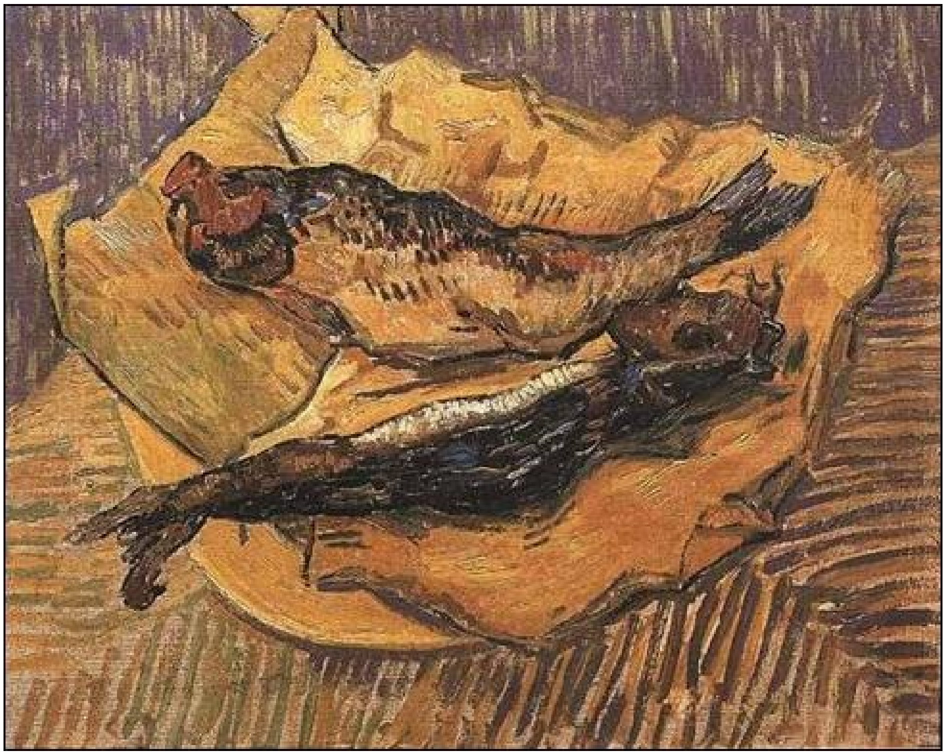


Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe

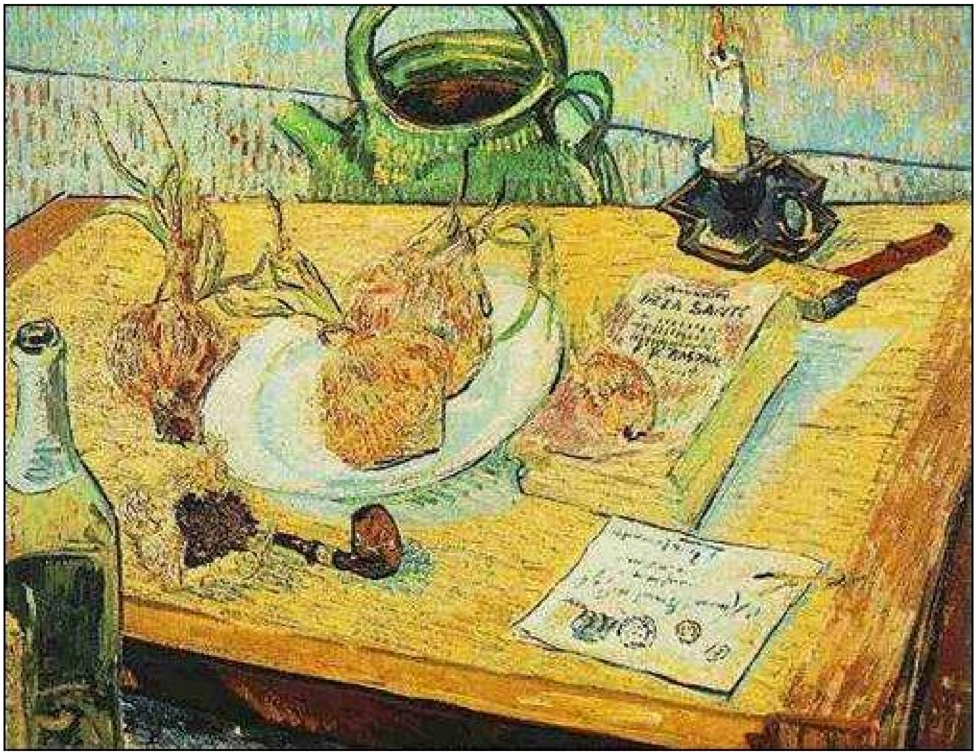
Oil on canvas
51.0 x 45.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



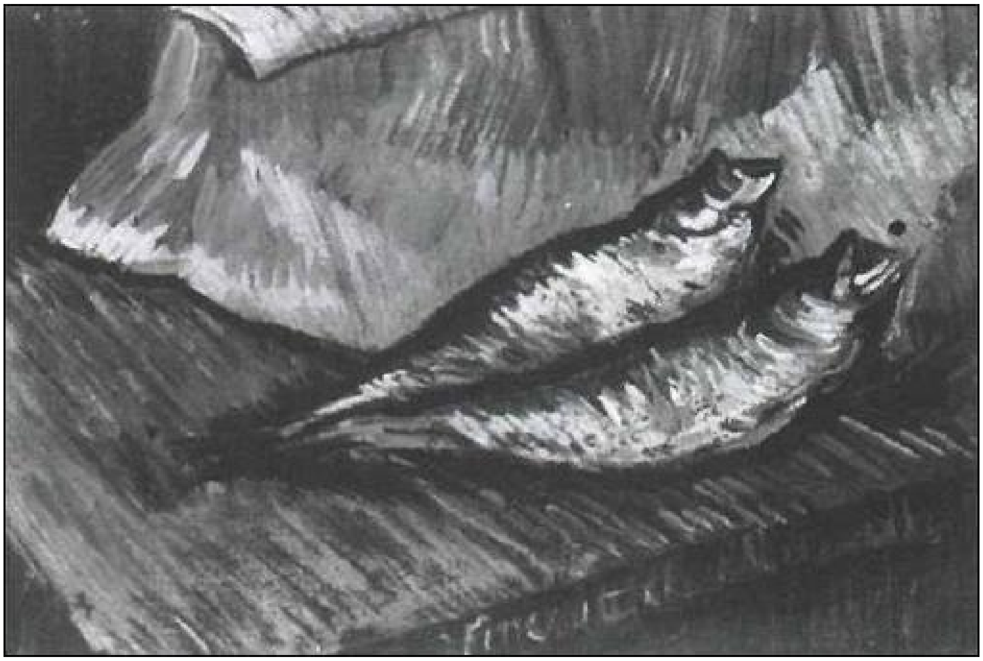
Still Life with Oranges, Lemons and Blue Gloves
Oil on canvas
47.3 x 64.3 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



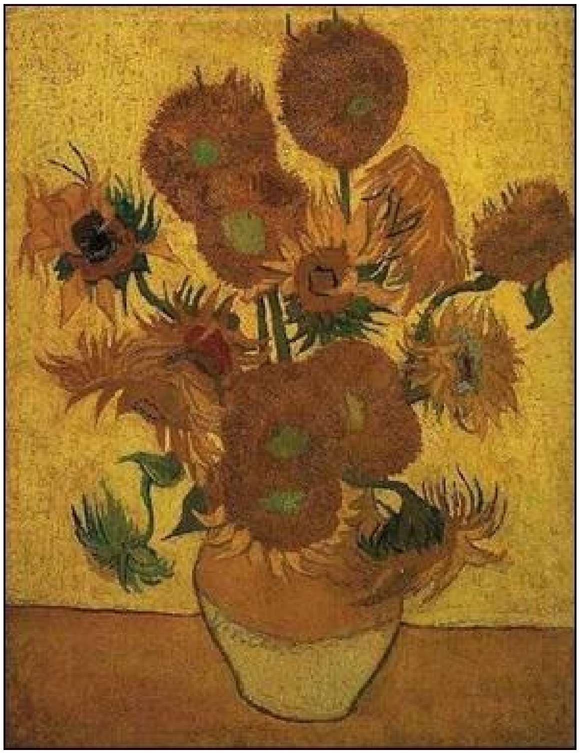
Still Life: Bloaters on a Piece of Yellow Paper
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



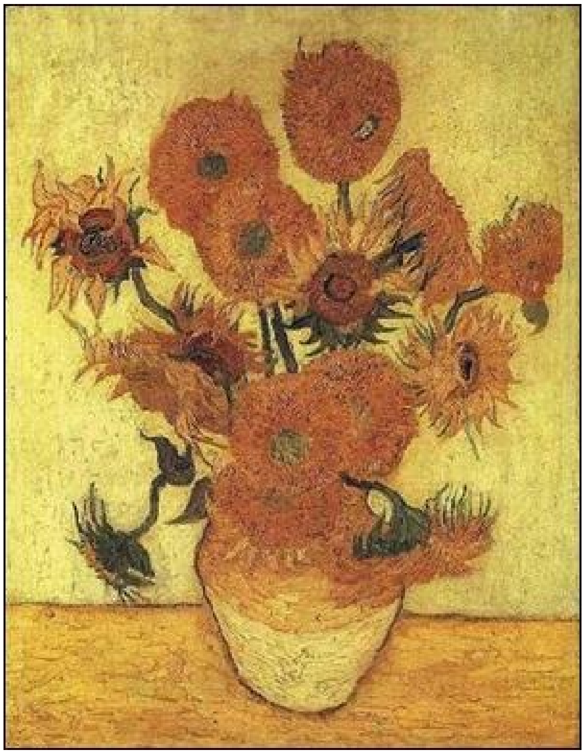
Still Life: Drawing Board, Pipe, Onions and Sealing-Wax
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 64.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



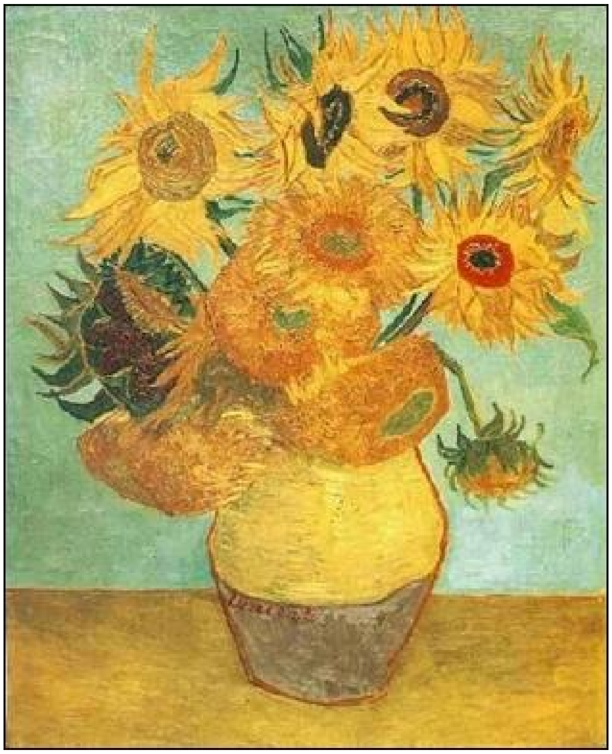
Still Life: Two Red Herrings
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 47.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



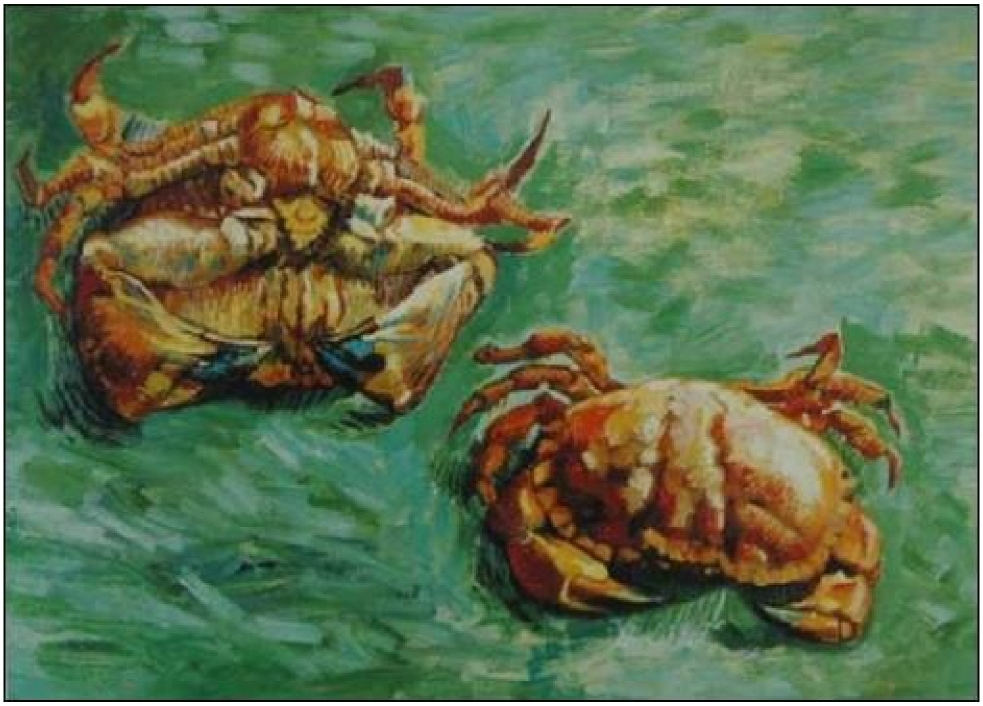
Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
95.0 x 73.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



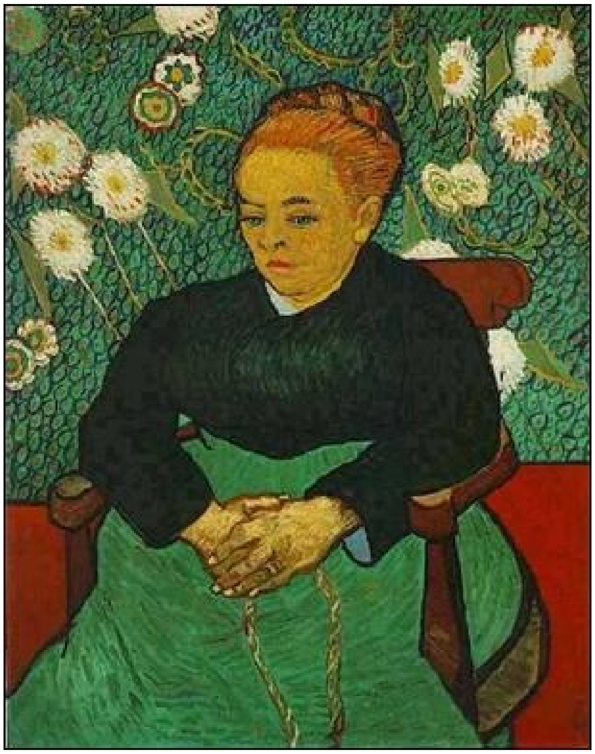
Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
100.5 x 76.5 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



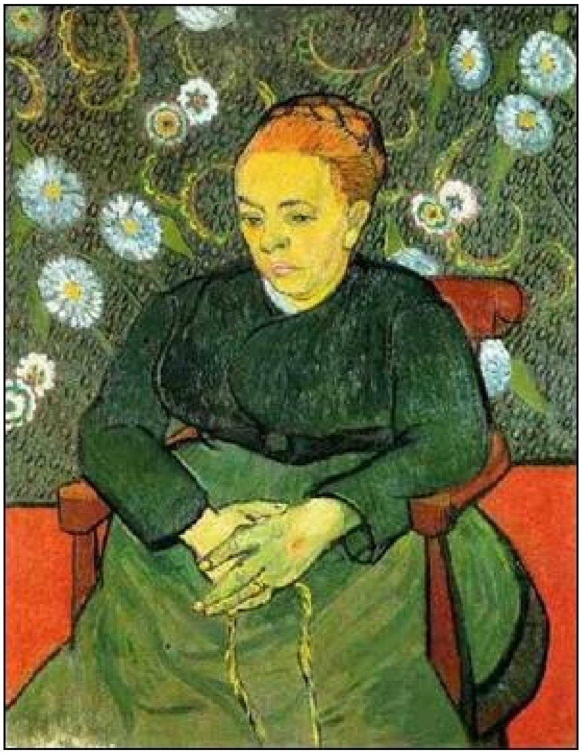
Still Life: Vase with Twelve Sunflowers
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 72.5 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



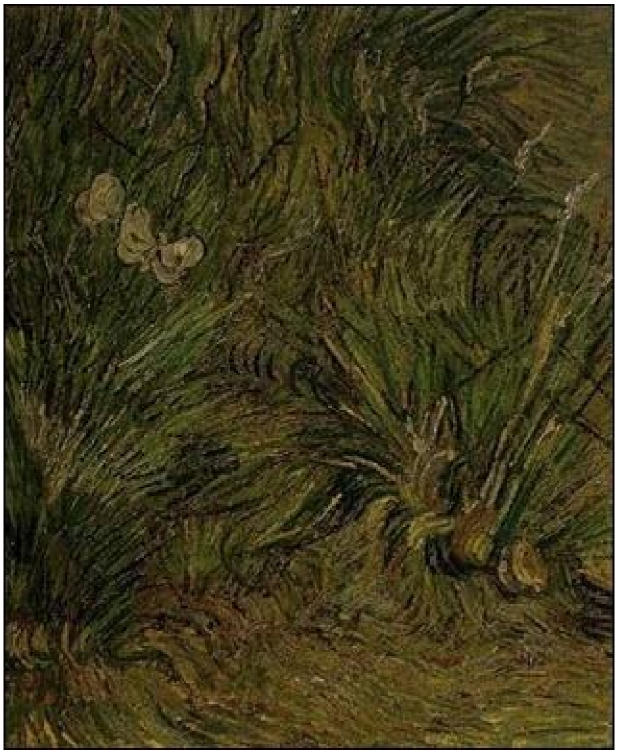
Two Crabs
Oil on canvas
47.0 x 61.0 cm.
Arles: January, 1889



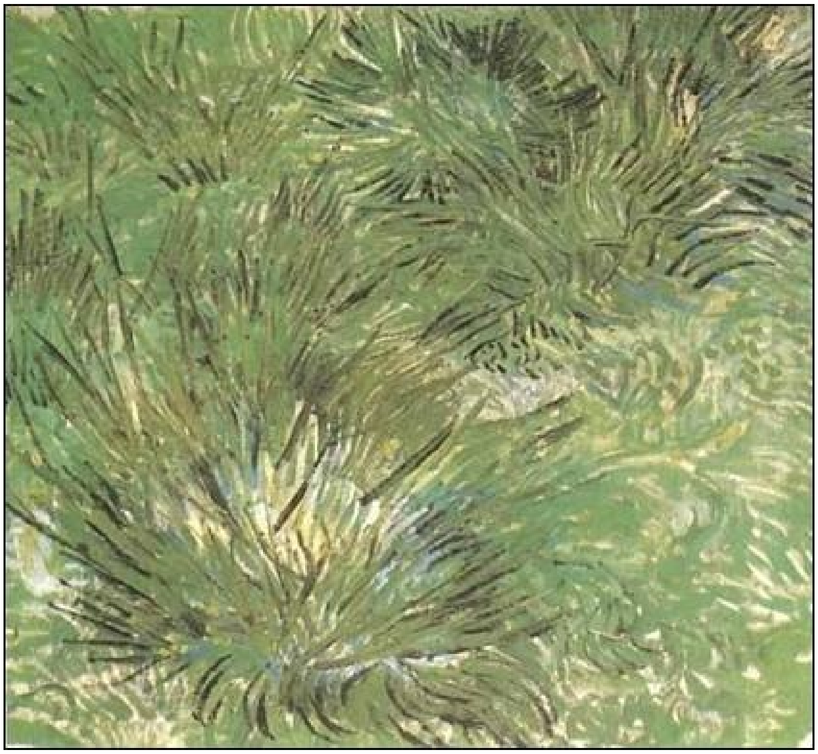
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
Oil on canvas
92.7 x 73.8 cm.
Arles: February, 1889



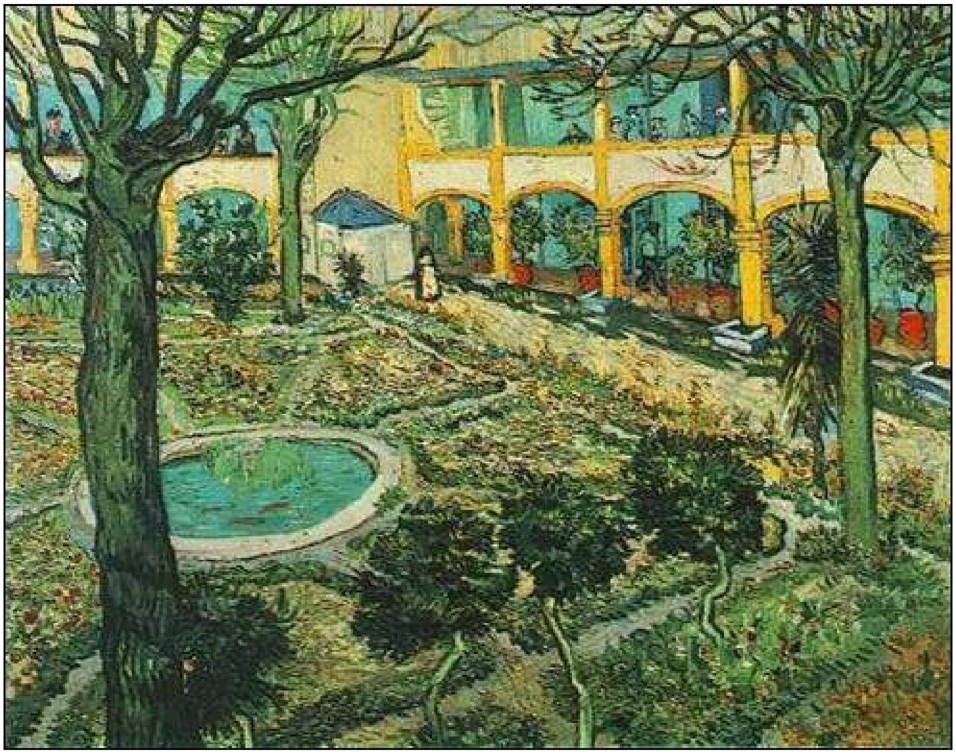
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
Oil on canvas
91.0 x 71.5 cm.
Arles: March, 1889



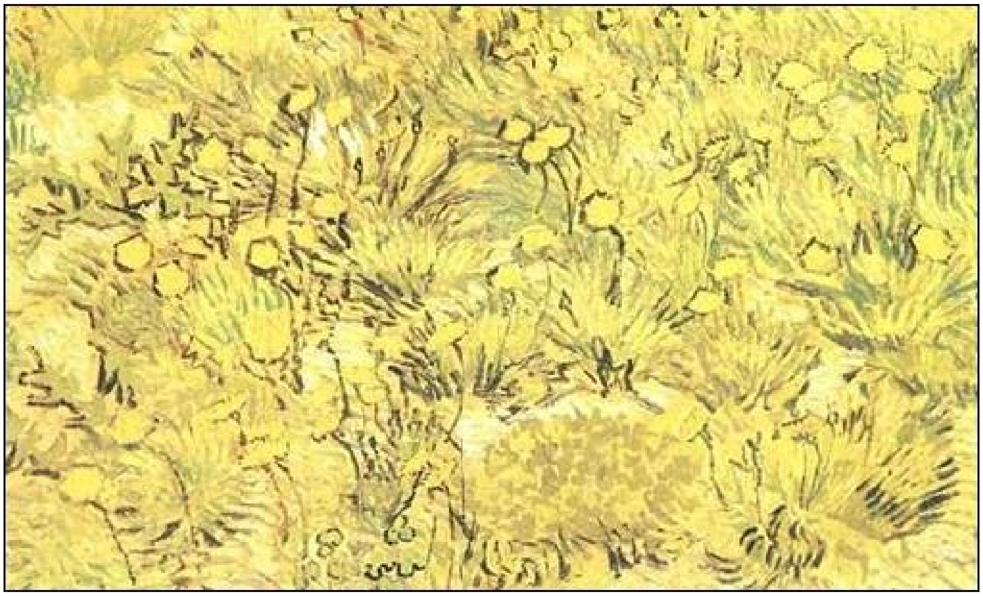
Two White Butterflies
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 45.5 cm.
Arles: Spring, 1889



Clumps of Grass
Oil on canvas
44.5 x 49.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889

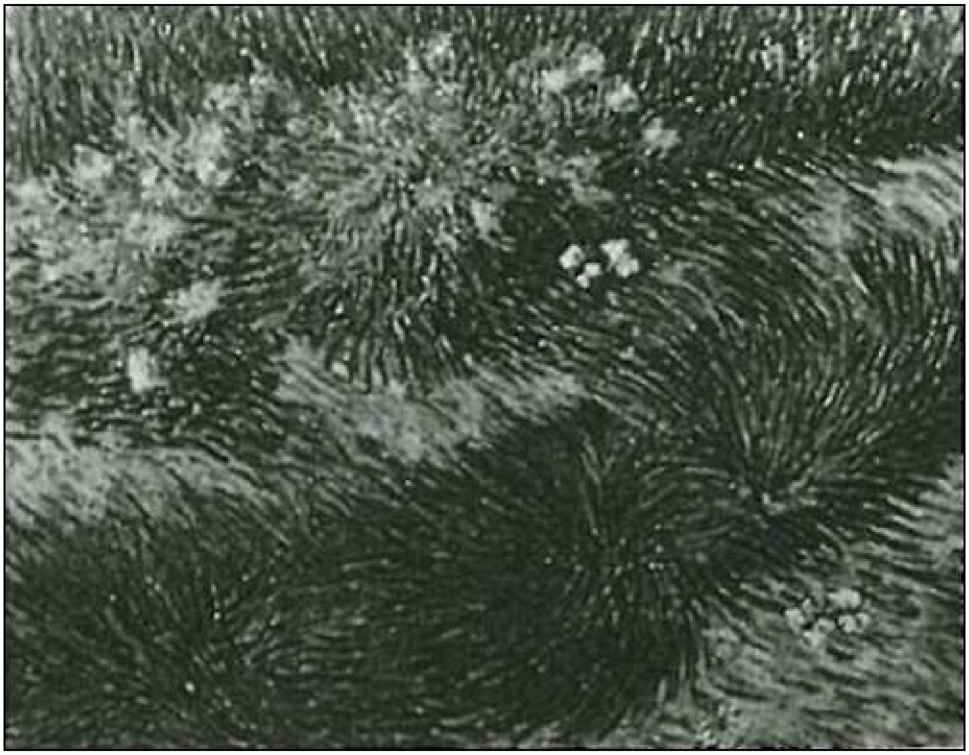


Courtyard of the Hospital at Arles, The
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889

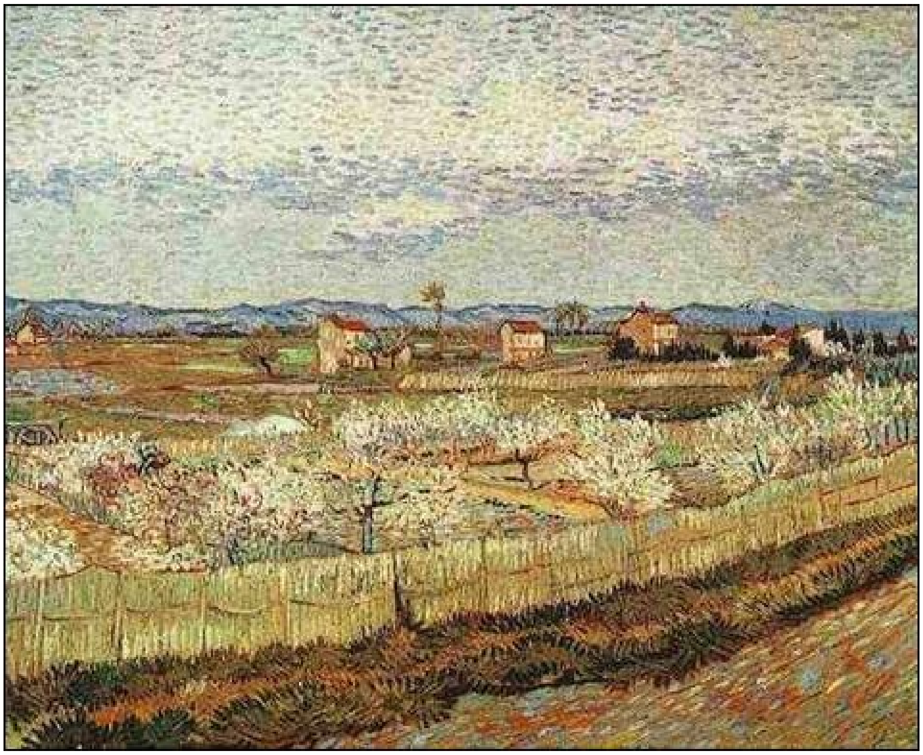


Field of Yellow Flowers, A

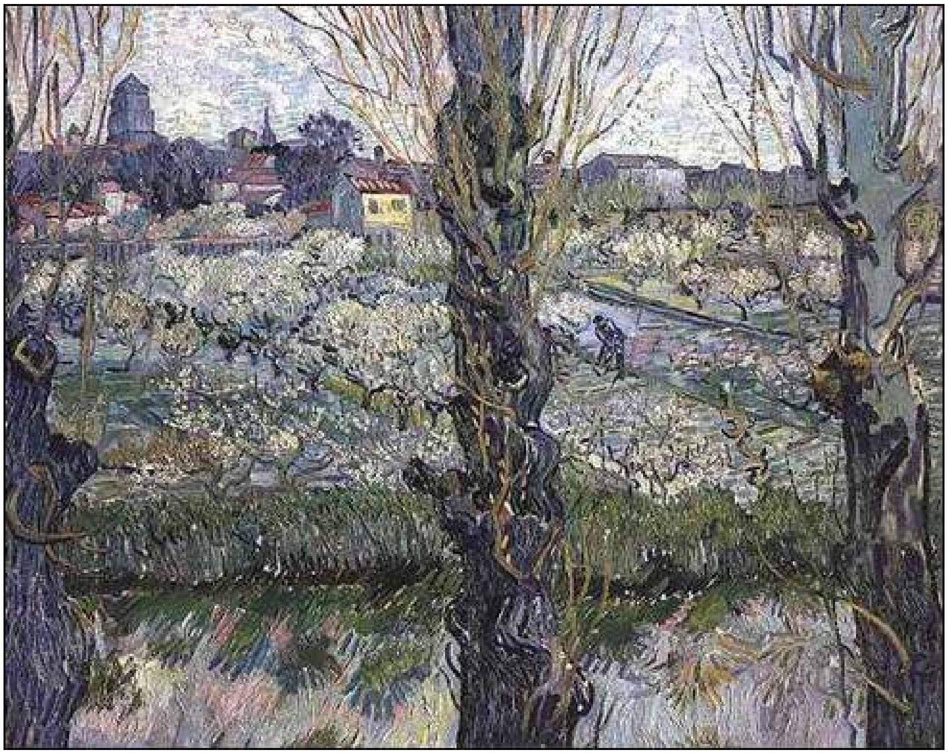
Oil on canvas on cardboard
35.0 x 57.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



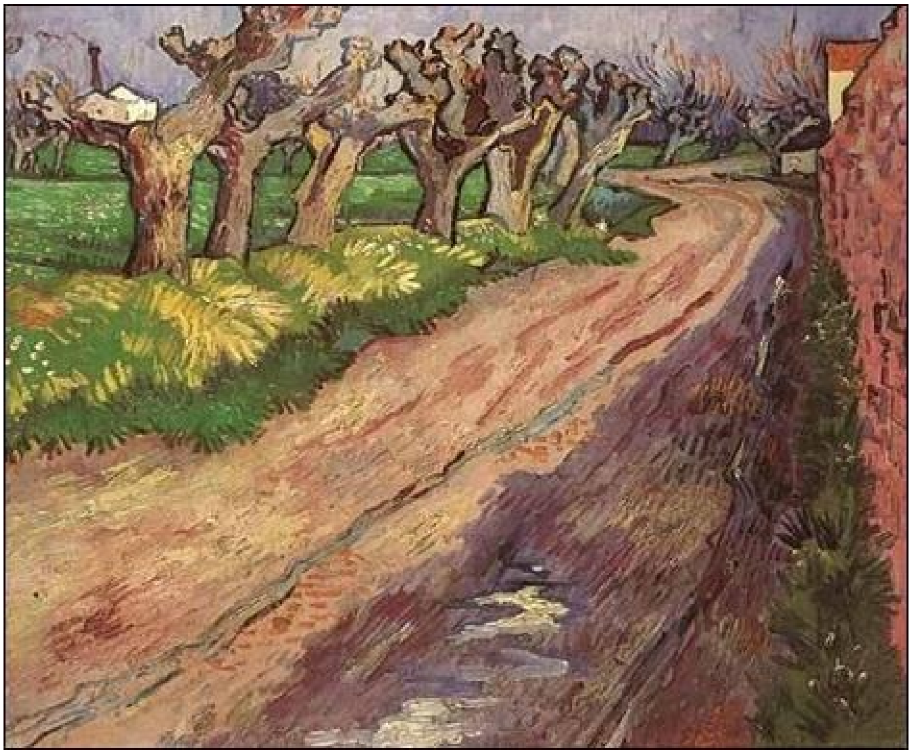
Grass and Butterflies
Oil on canvas
51.0 x 51.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



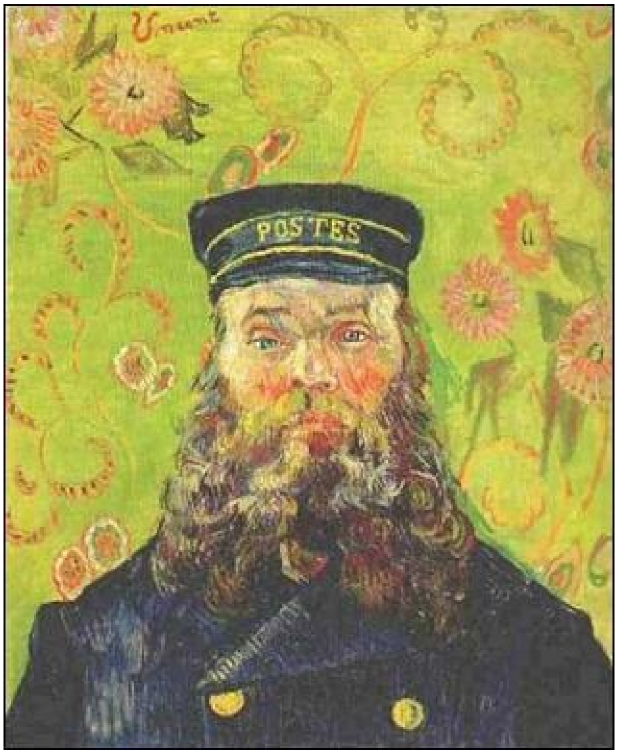
La Crau with Peach Trees in Blossom
Oil on canvas
65.5 x 81.5 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



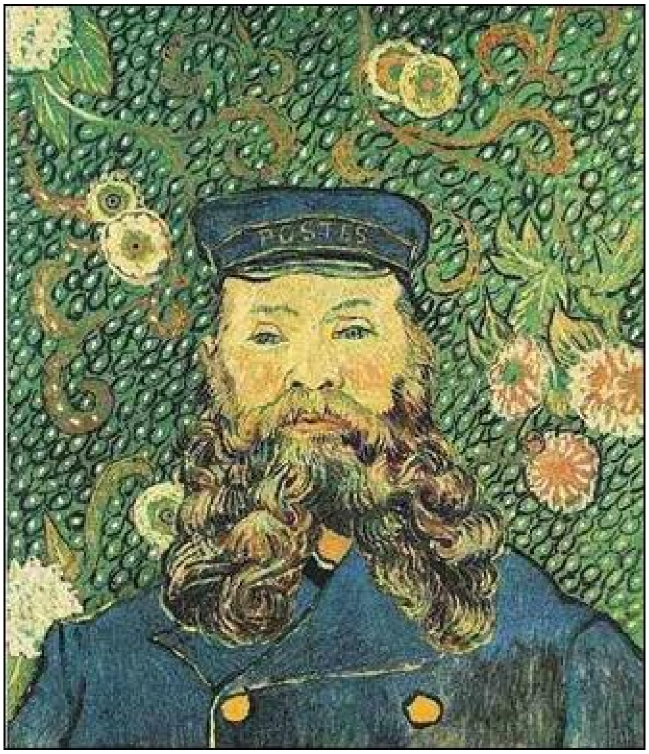
Orchard in Blossom with View of Arles
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



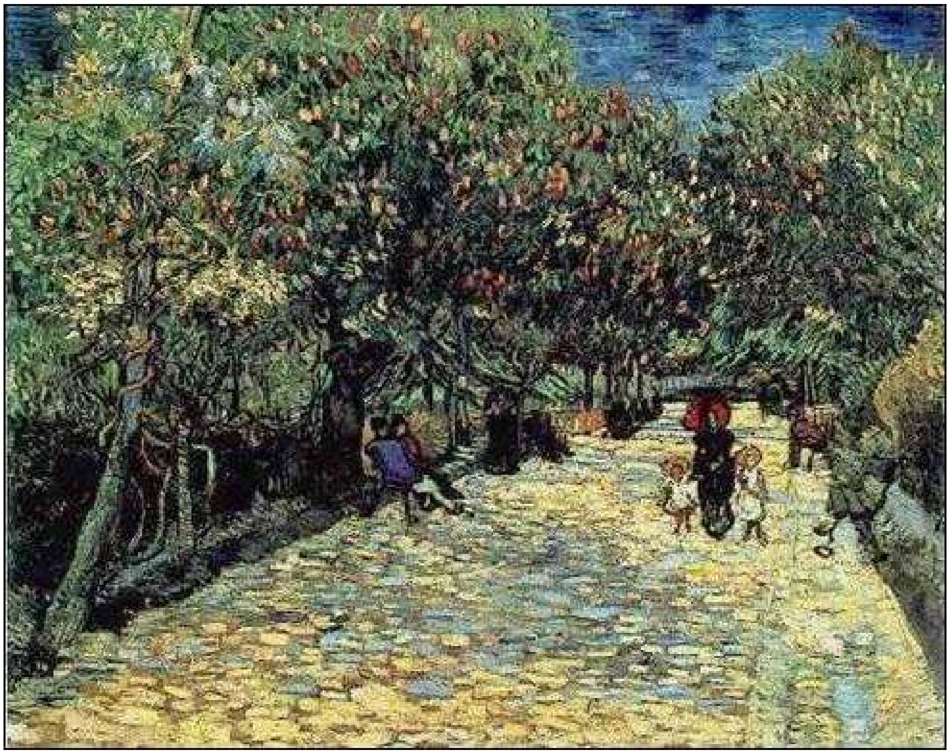
Pollard Willows
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



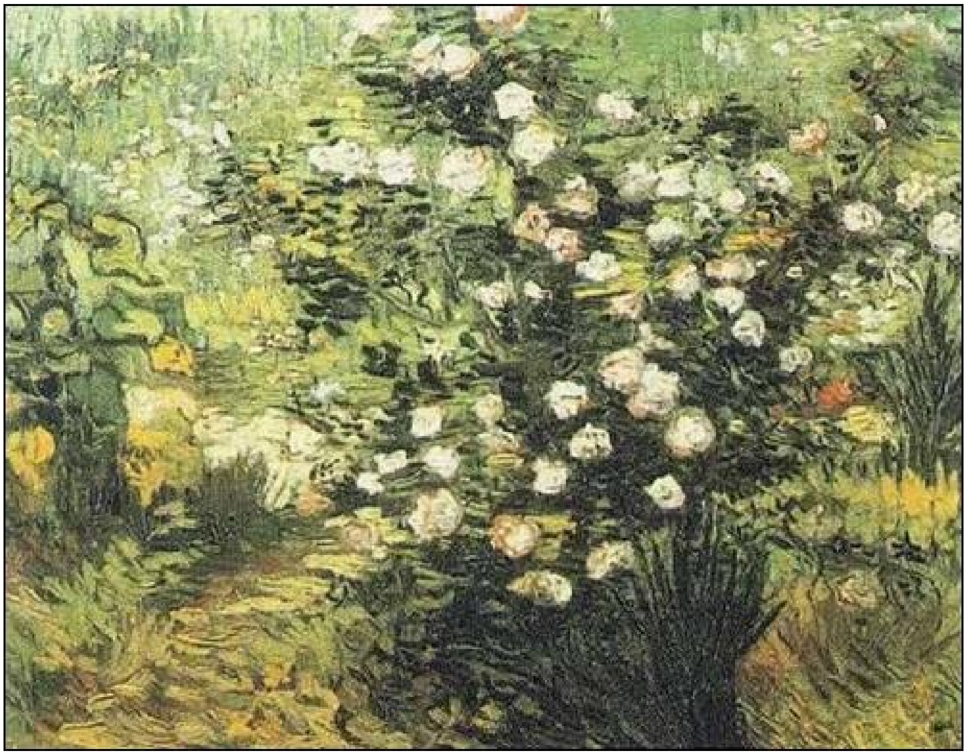
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Oil on canvas
67.5 x 56.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



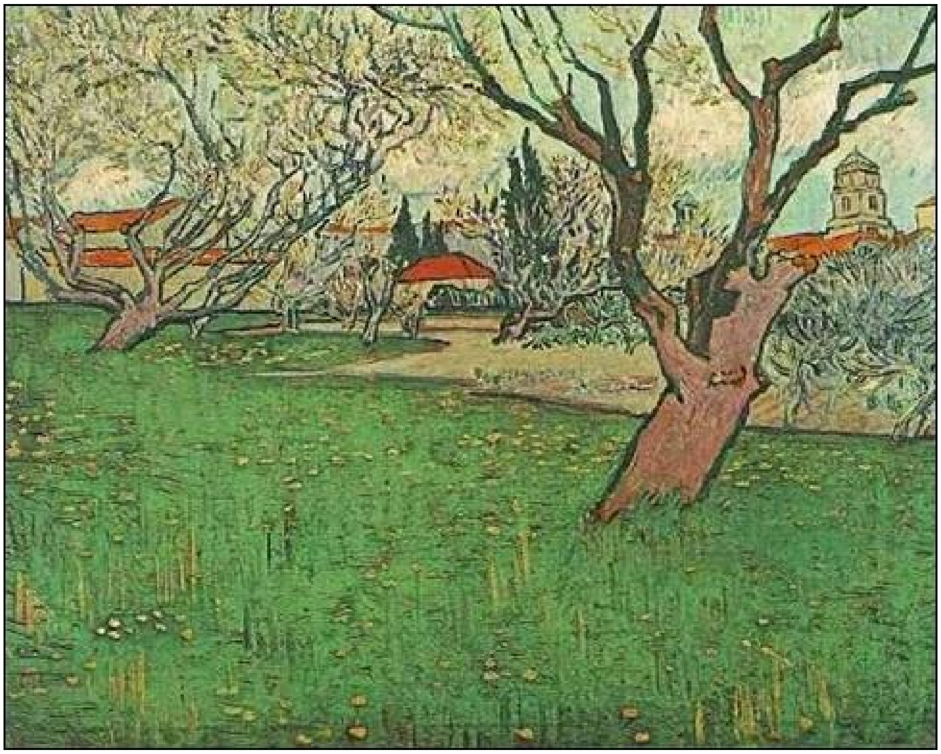
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 54.5 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



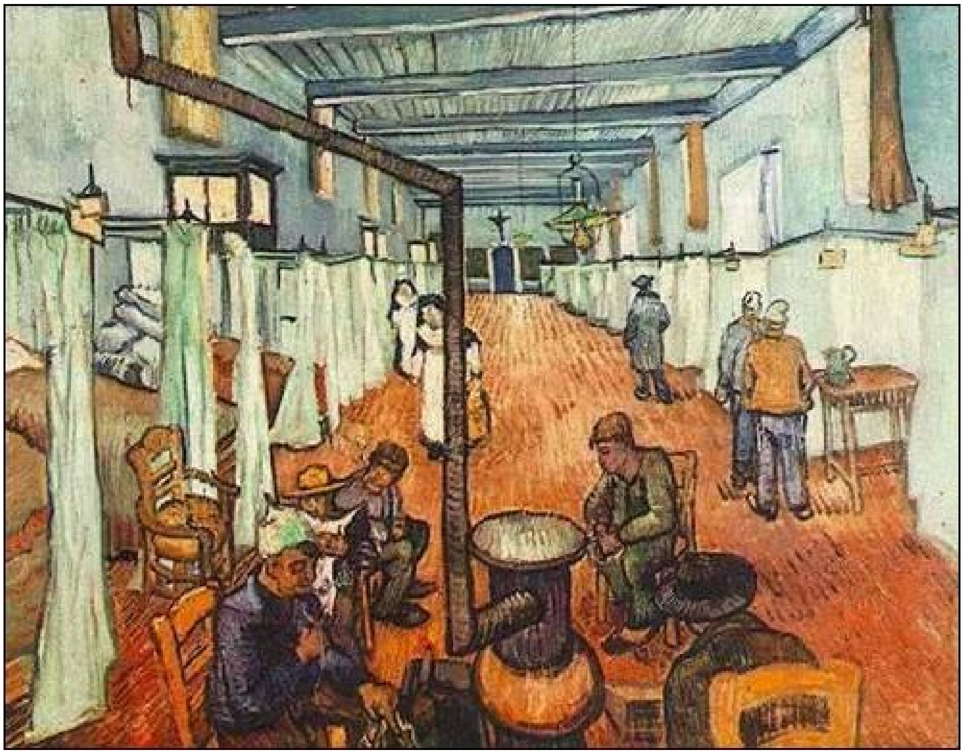
Red Chestnuts in the Public Park at Arles
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



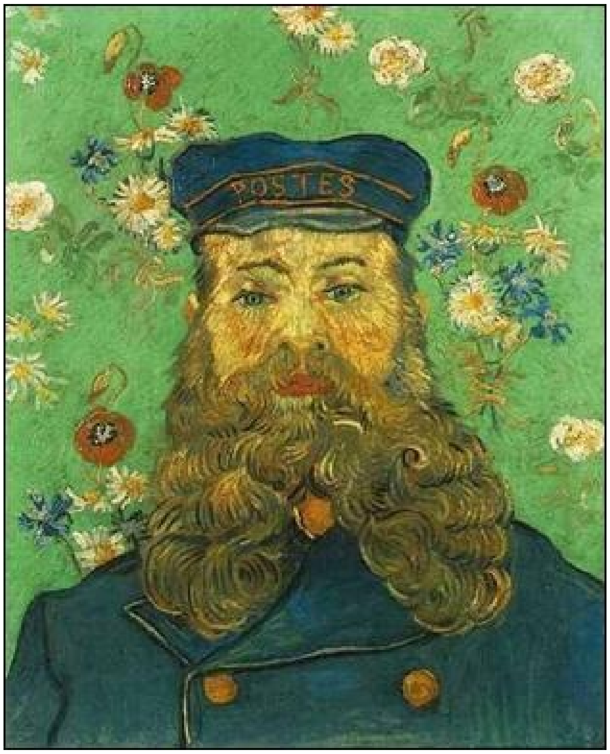
Rosebush in Blossom
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 42.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889



View of Arles with Trees in Blossom
Oil on canvas
50.5 x 65.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889

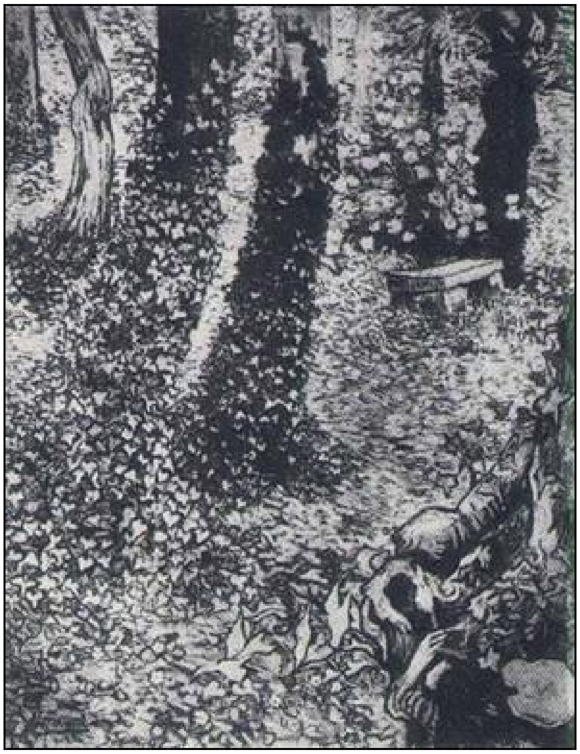


Ward in the Hospital in Arles
Oil on canvas
74.0 x 92.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889

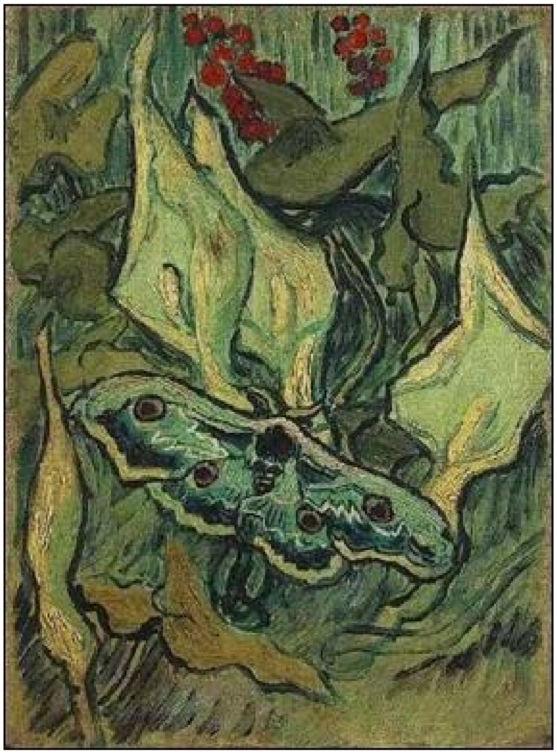


Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Arles: April, 1889

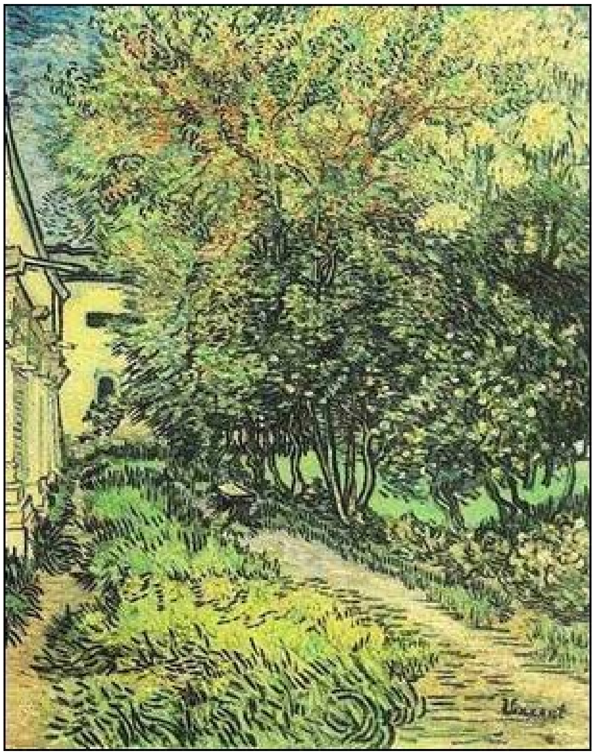
Saint-Rémy Works



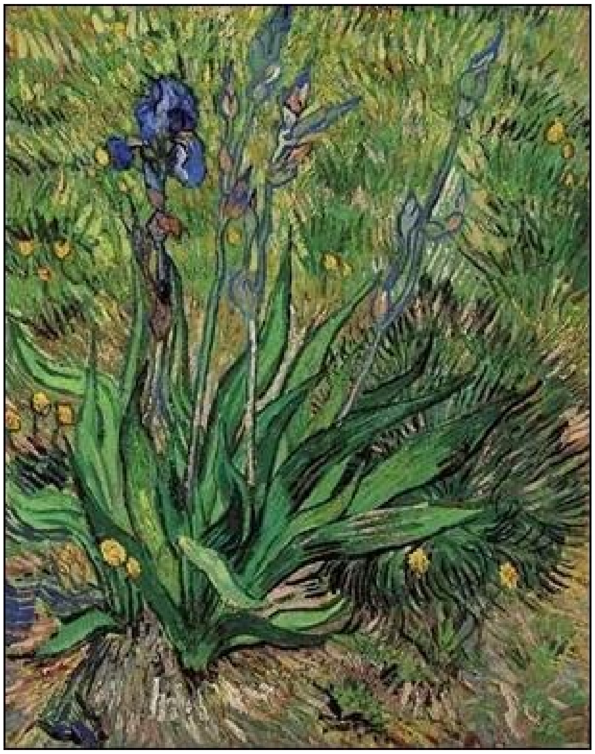
Corner in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, A
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 72.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1889



Great Peacock Moth
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 24.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1889

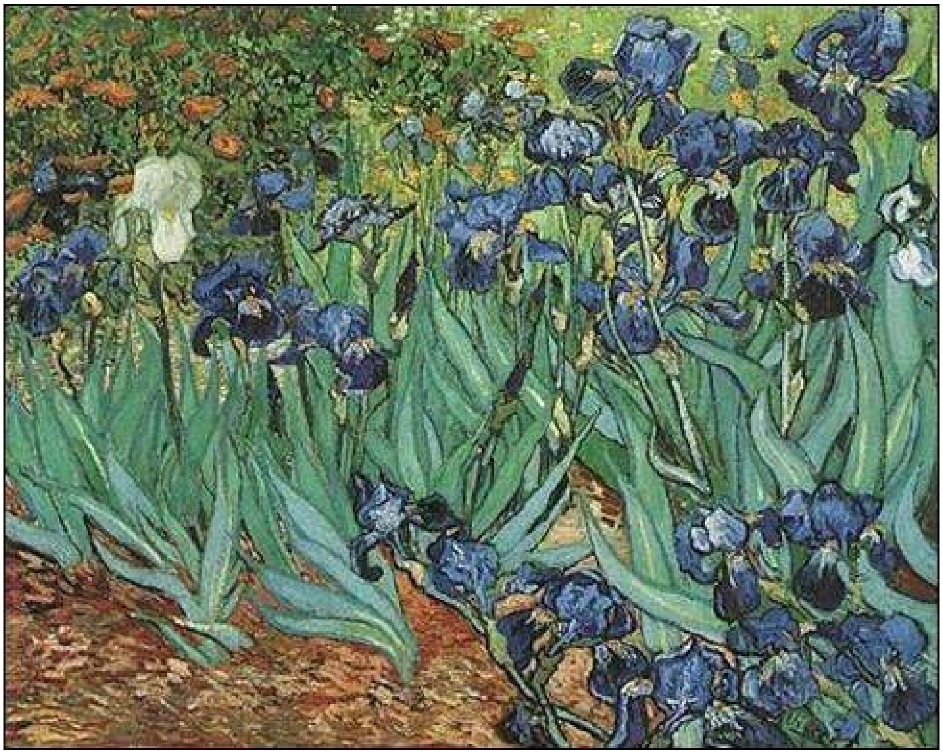


Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Oil on canvas
95.0 x 75.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1889

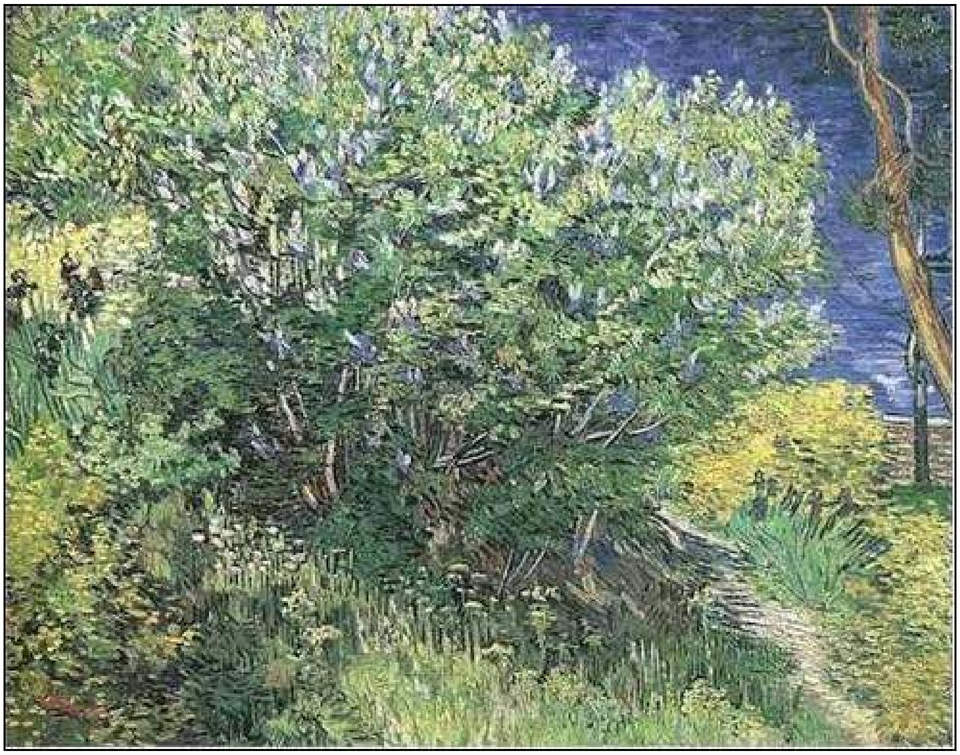


Iris, The

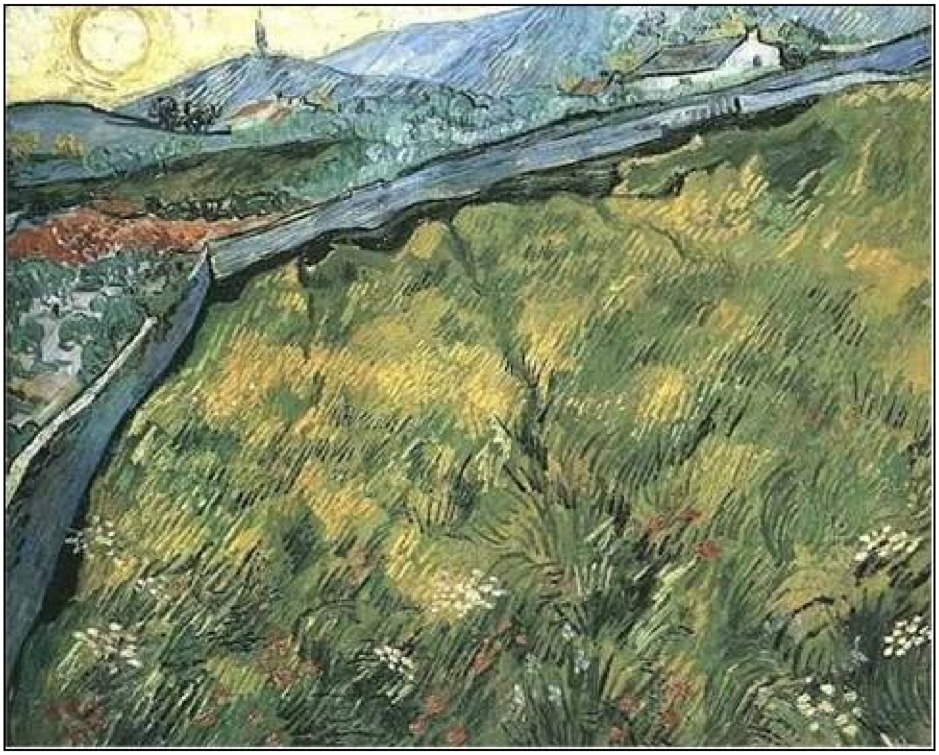
Oil on paper on canvas
62.2 x 48.3 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1889



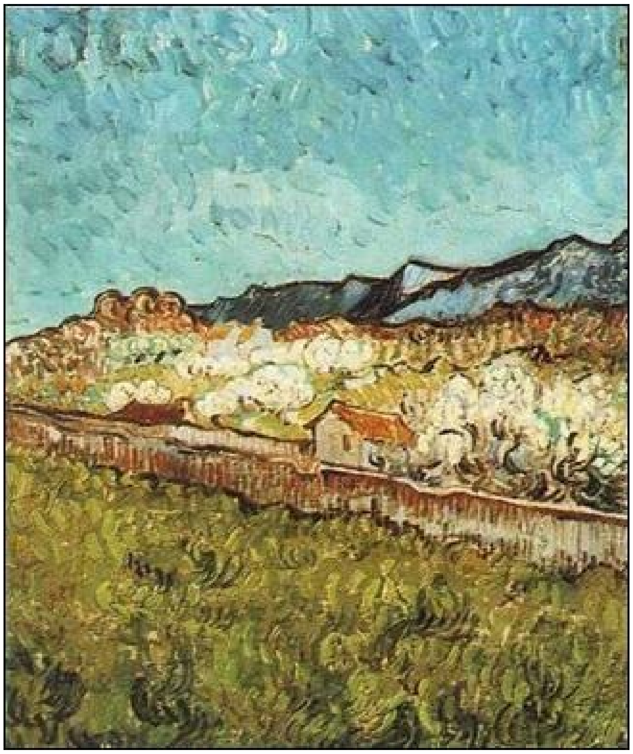
Irises
Oil on canvas
71.0 x 93.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1889



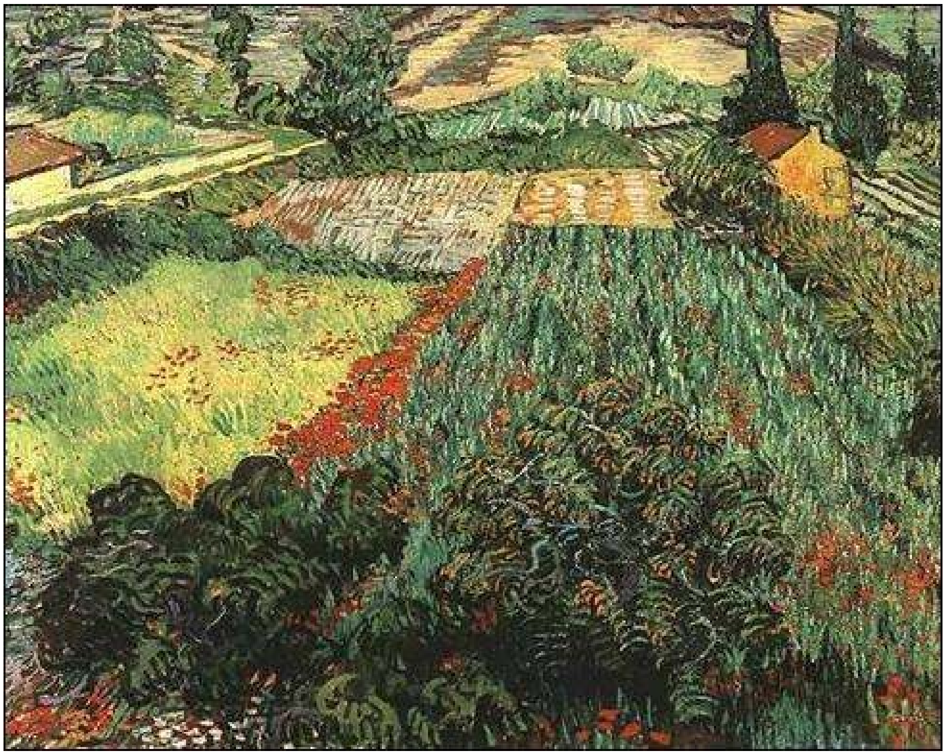
Lilacs
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1889



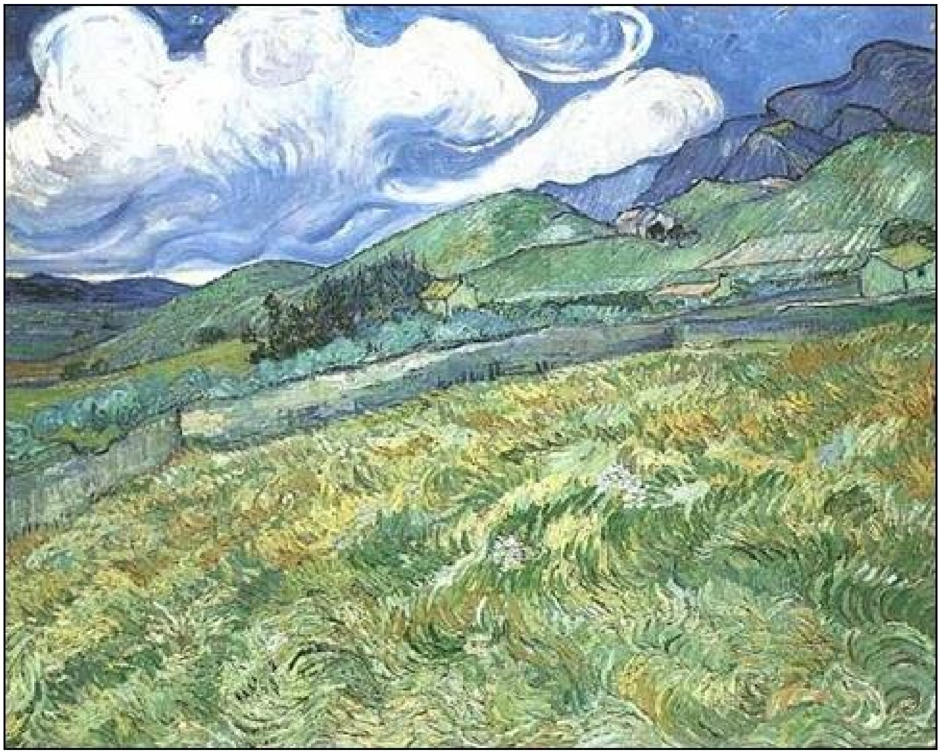
Field of Spring Wheat at Sunrise
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May-June, 1889



At the Foot of the Mountains
Oil on canvas
37.5 x 30.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early June, 1889

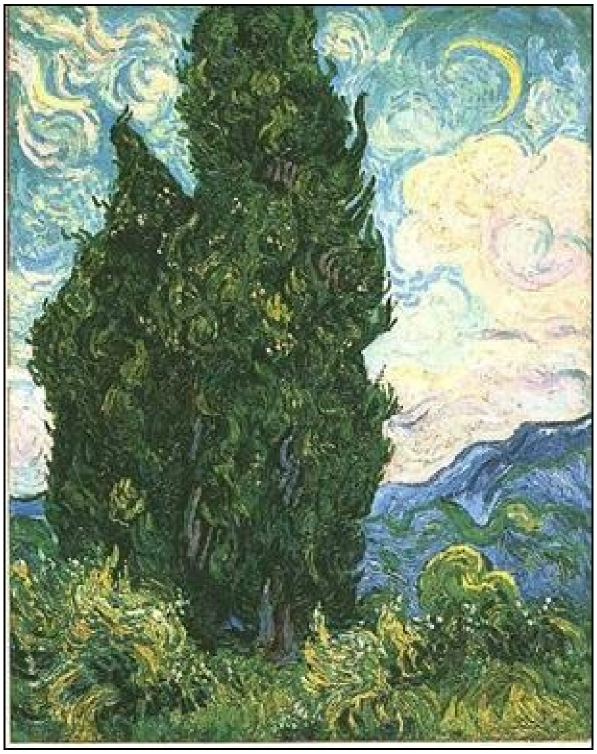


Field with Poppies
Oil on canvas
71.0 x 91.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early June, 1889

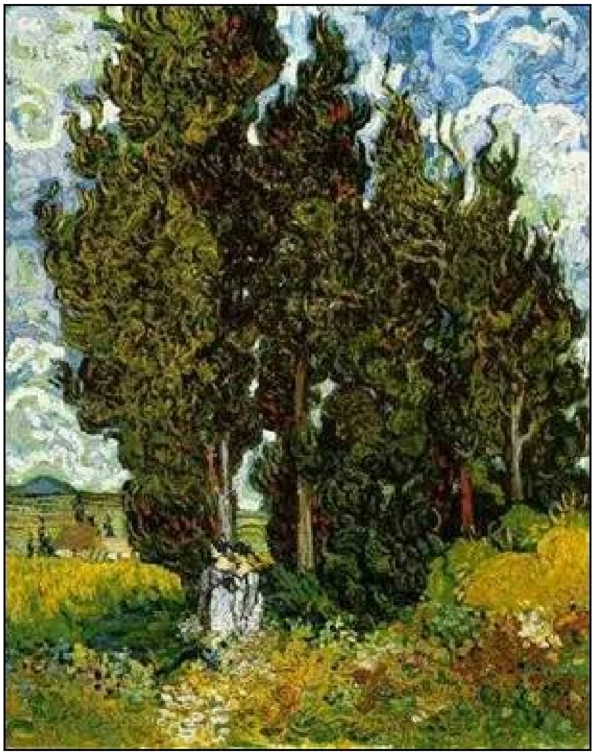


Mountainous Landscape Behind Saint-Paul Hospital

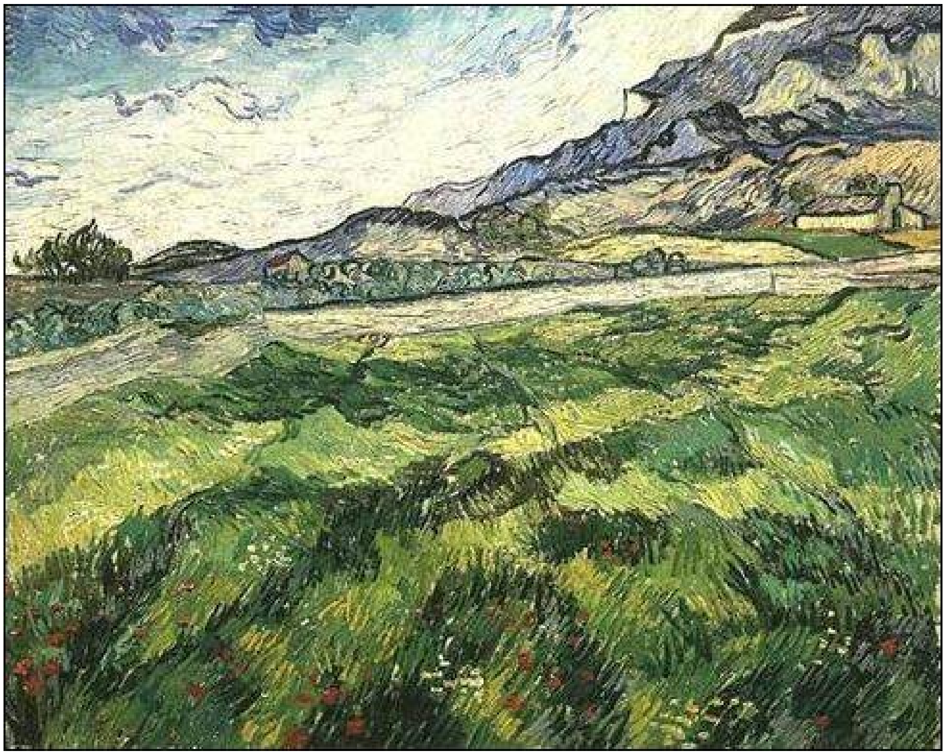
Oil on canvas
70.5 x 88.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early June, 1889



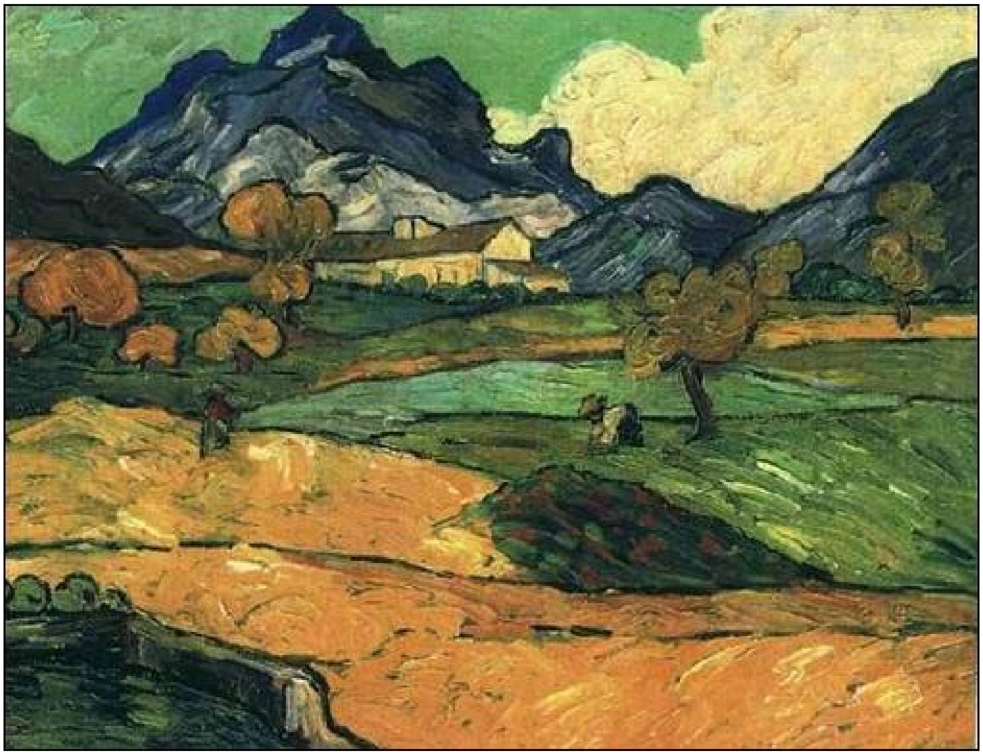
Cypresses
Oil on canvas
93.3 x 74.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889



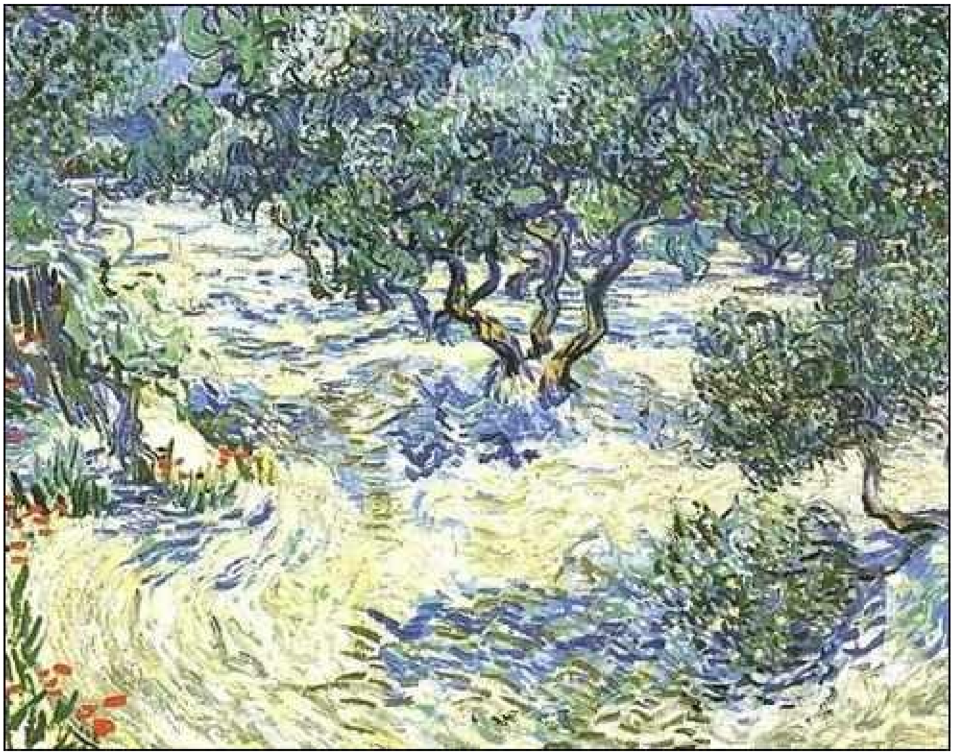
Cypresses with Two Female Figures
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889



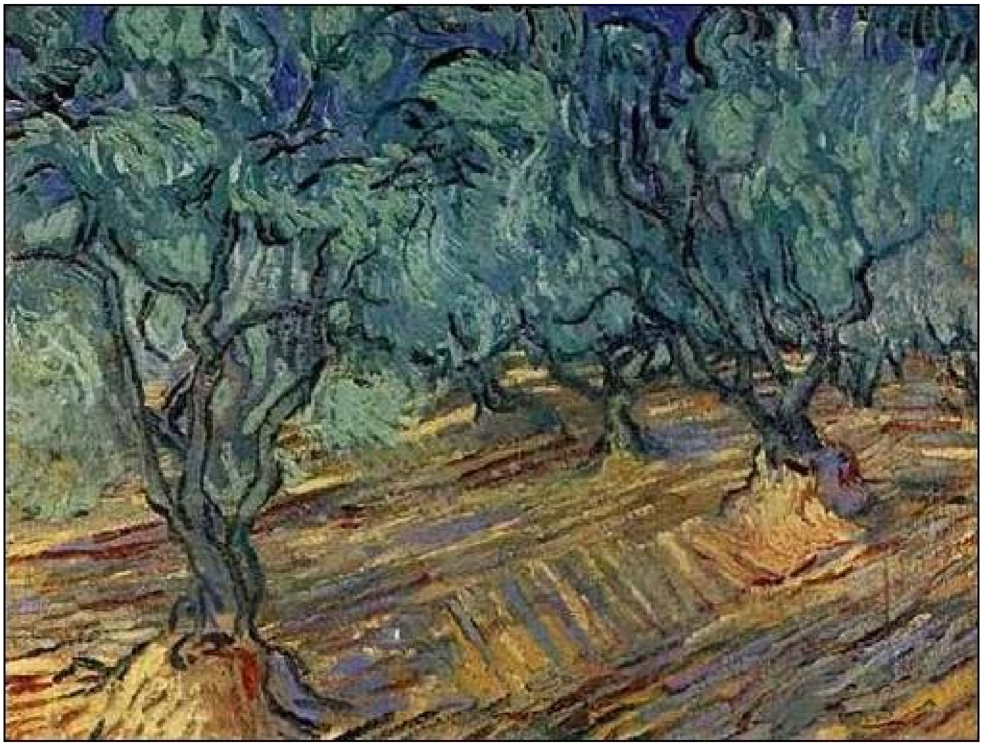
Green Wheat Field
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889



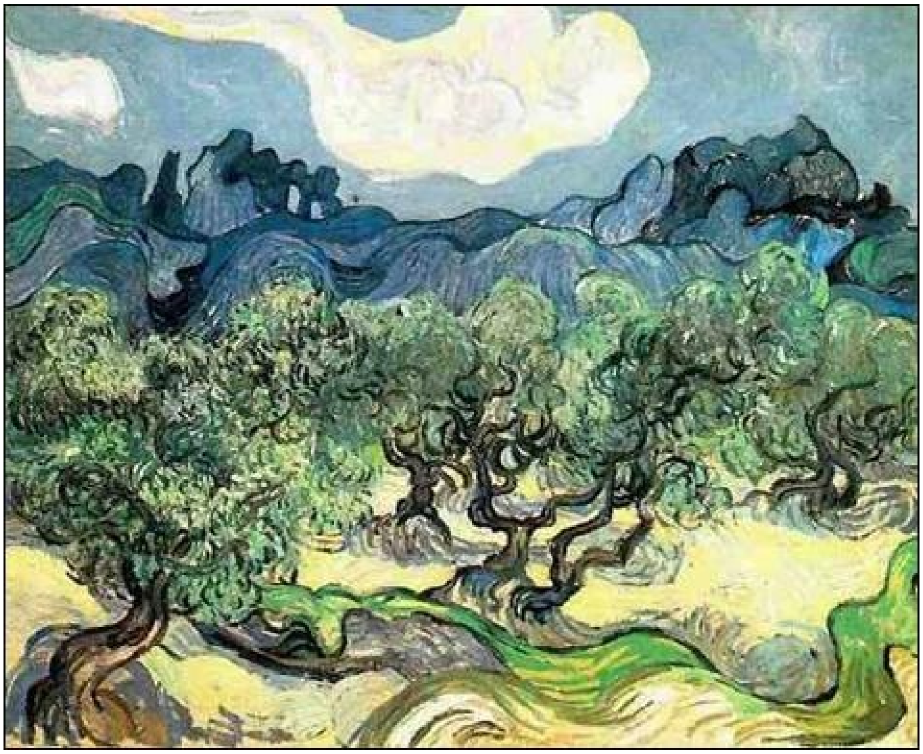
Le Mont Gaussier with the Mas de Saint-Paul
Oil on canvas
53.0 x 70.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889



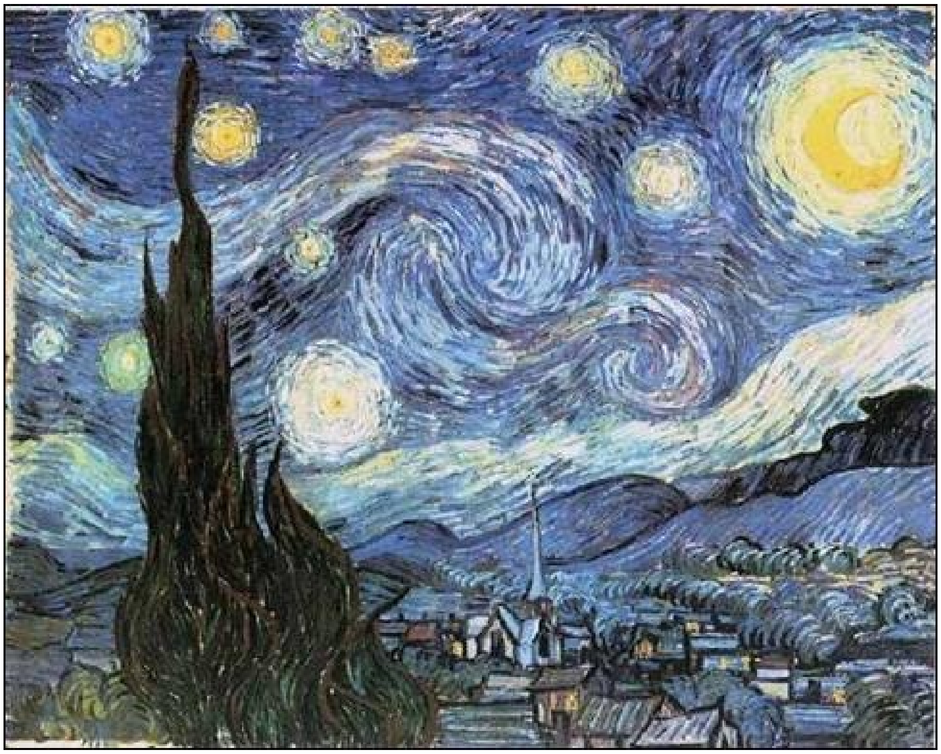
Olive Grove
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 93.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889



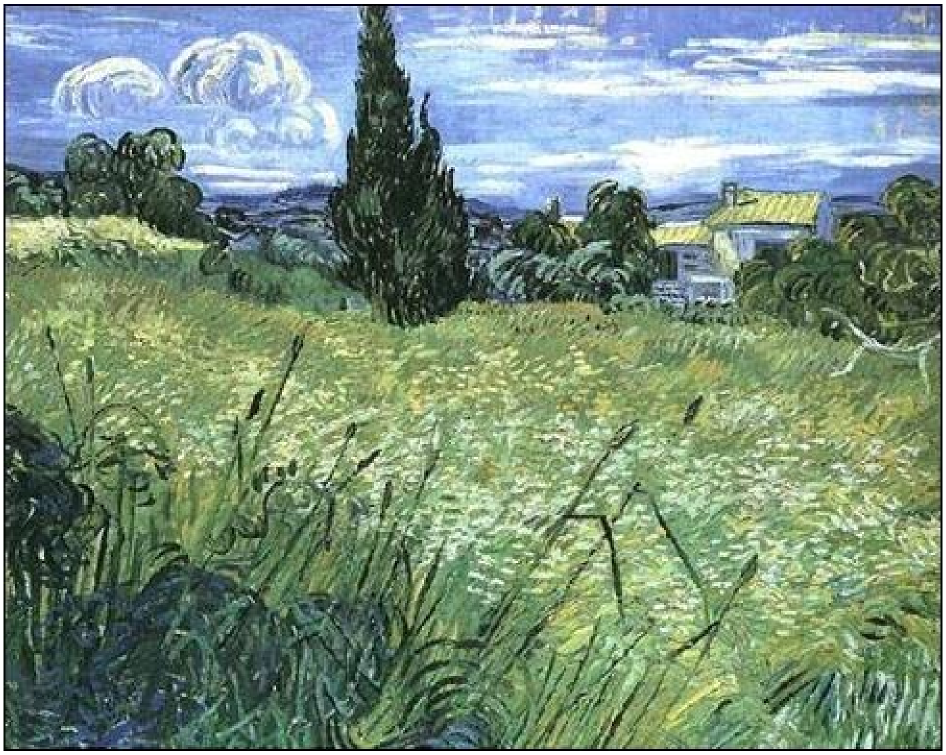
Olive Grove: Bright Blue Sky
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 59.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889



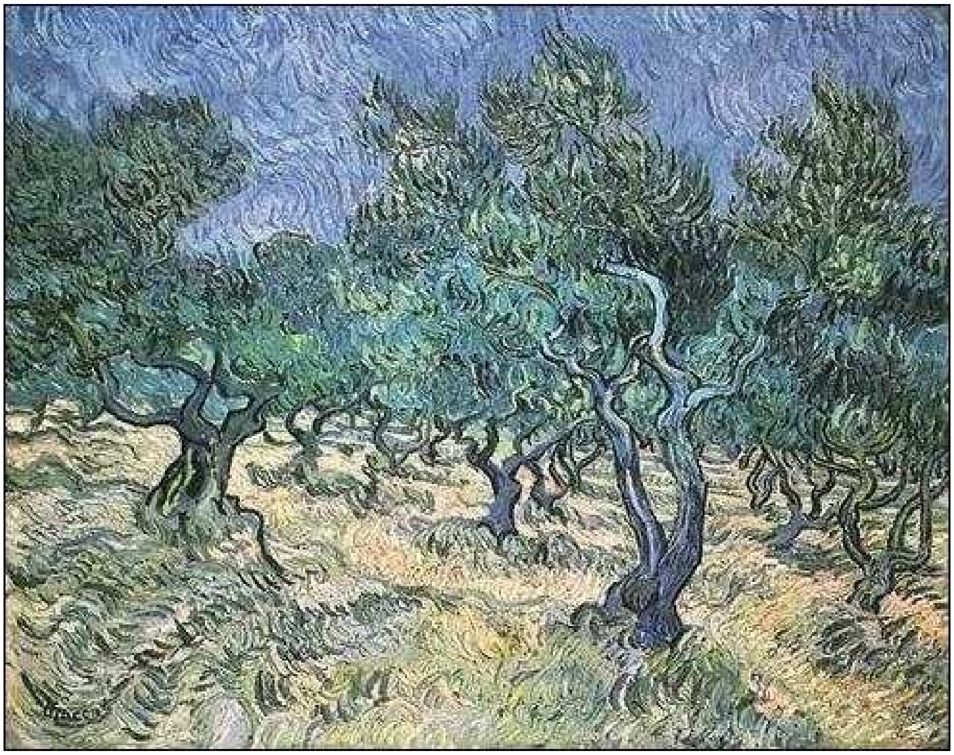
Olive Trees with the Alpilles in the Background
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889



Starry Night
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: June, 1889

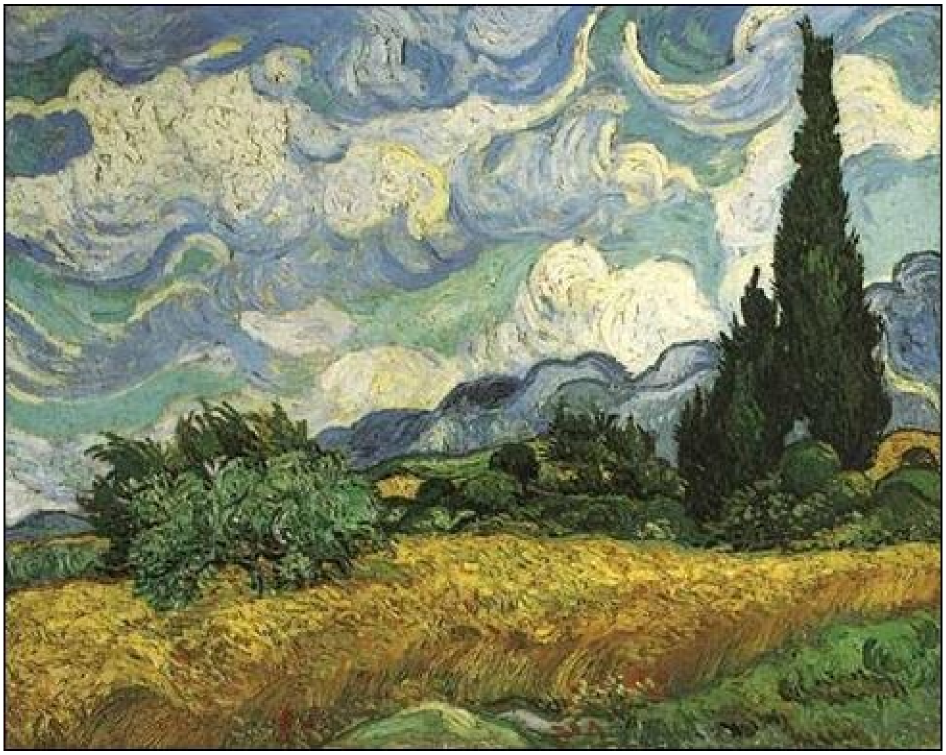


Green Wheat Field with Cypress
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 92.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: mid-June, 1889

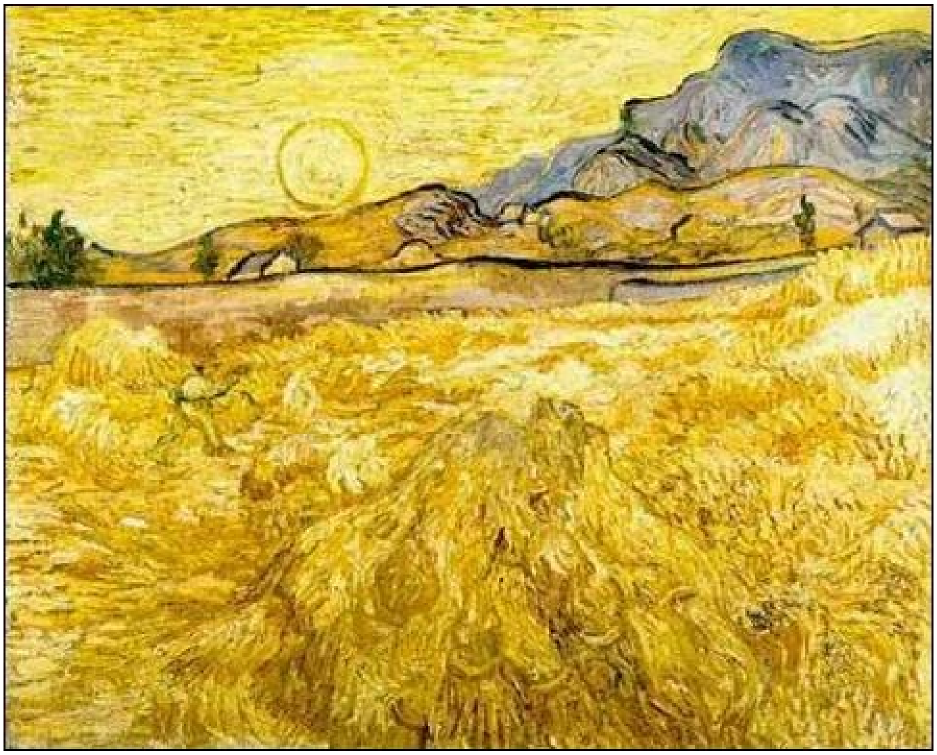


Olive Grove

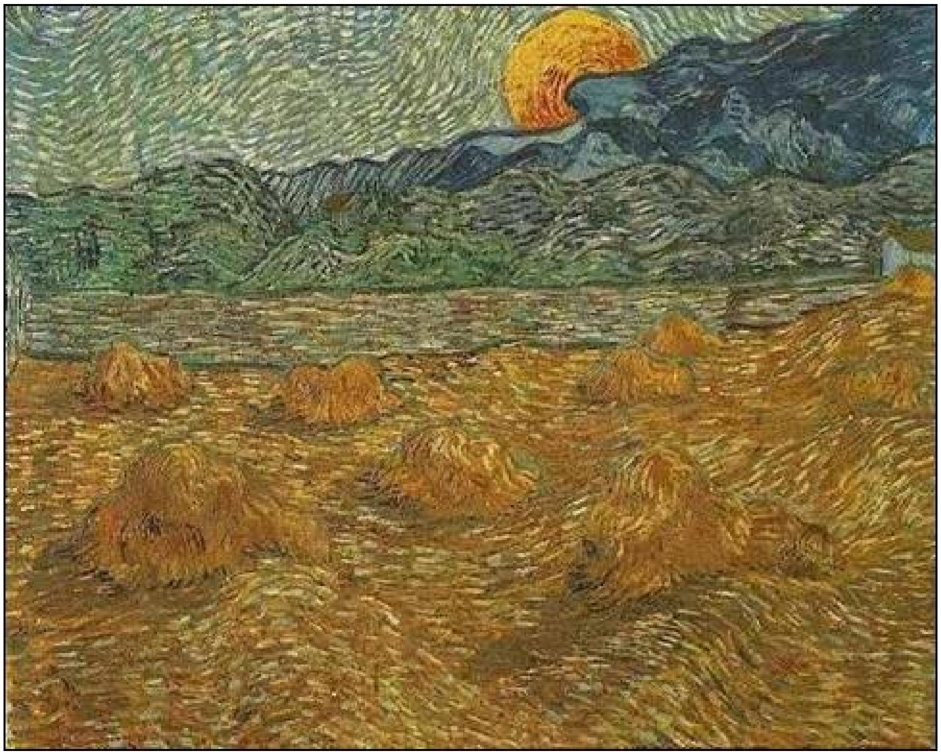
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: mid-June, 1889



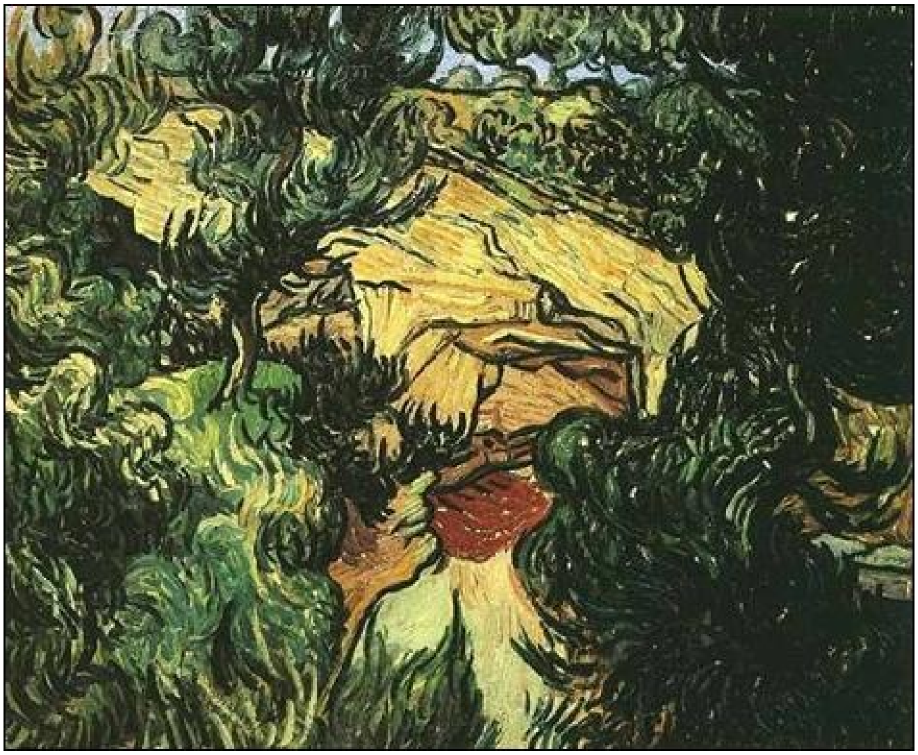
Wheat Field with Cypresses at the Haute Galline Near Eygalieres
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 93.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: late June, 1889



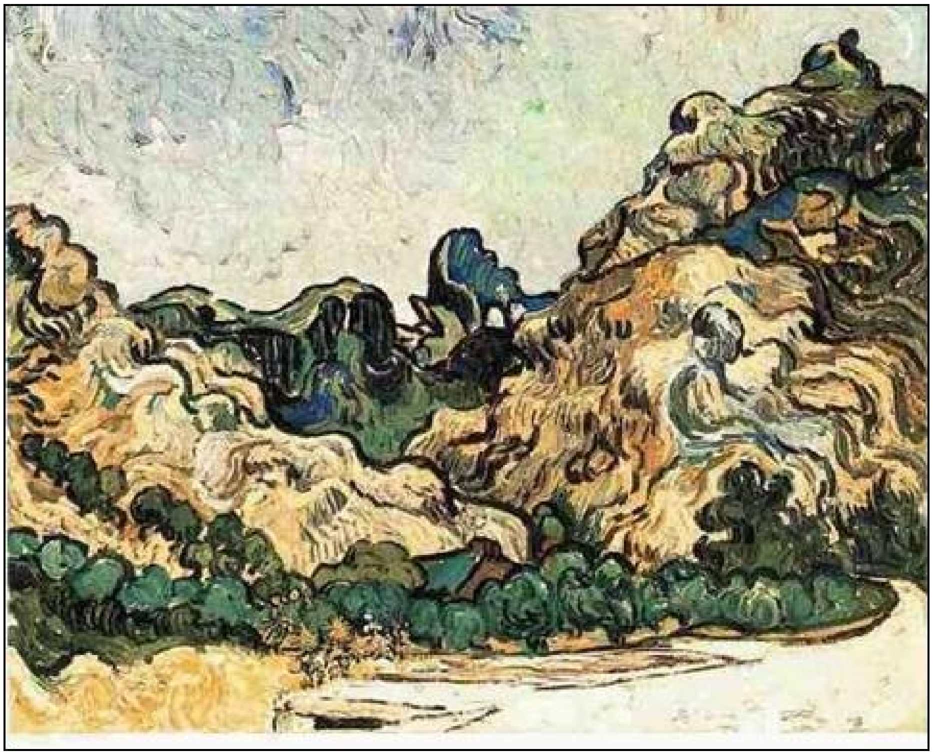
Wheat Field with Reaper and Sun
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: late June, 1889



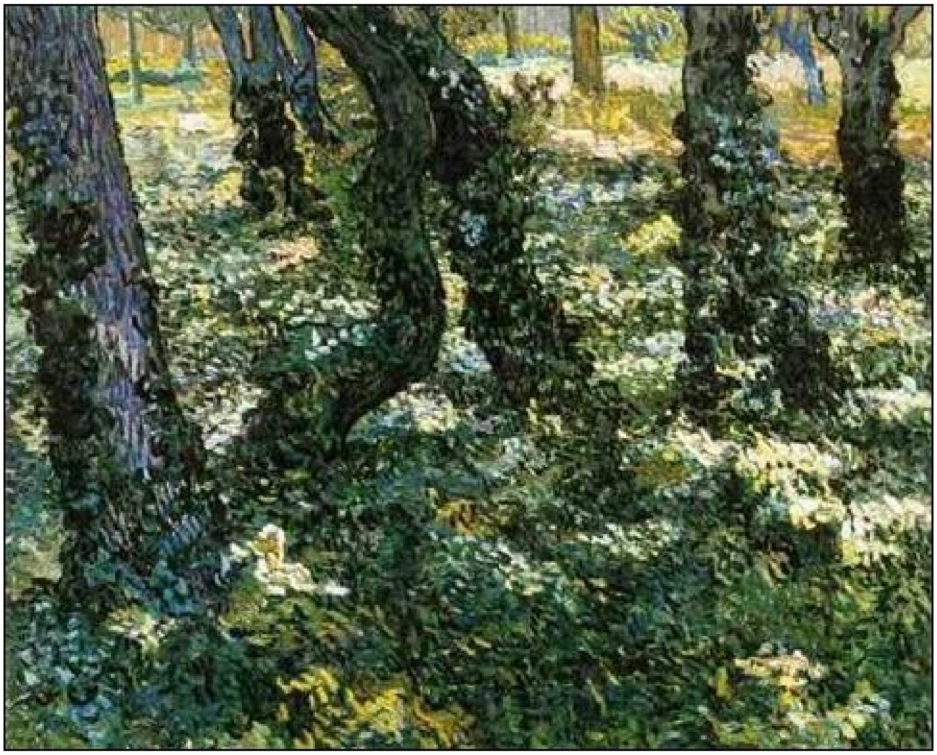
Evening Landscape with Rising Moon
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early July, 1889



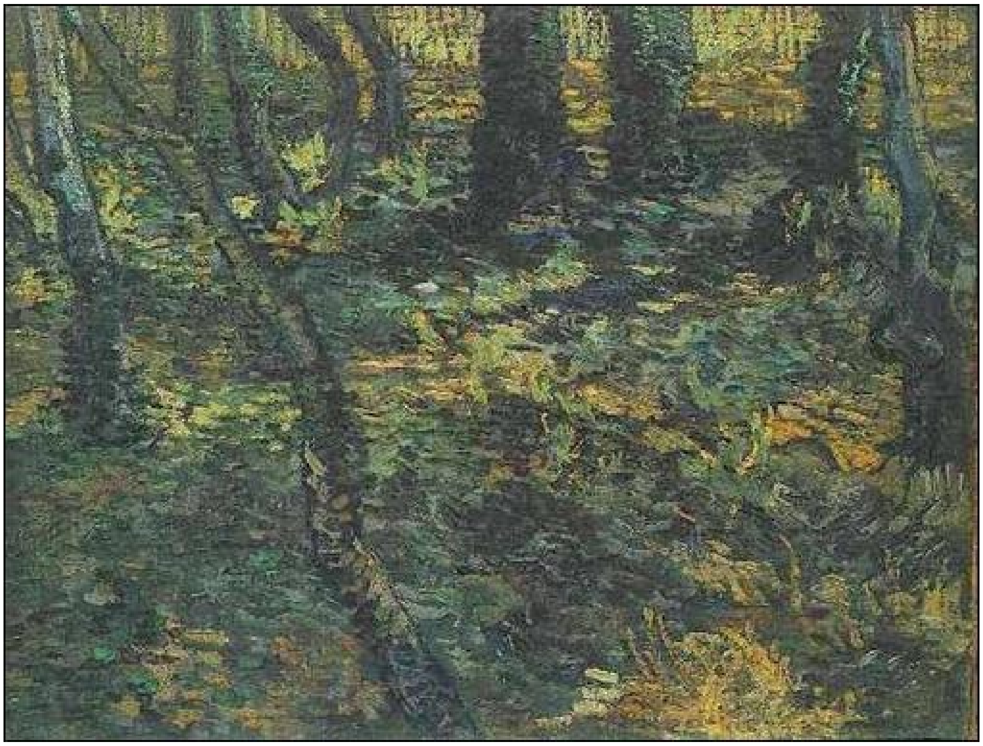
Entrance to a Quarry
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 73.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: mid-July, 1889



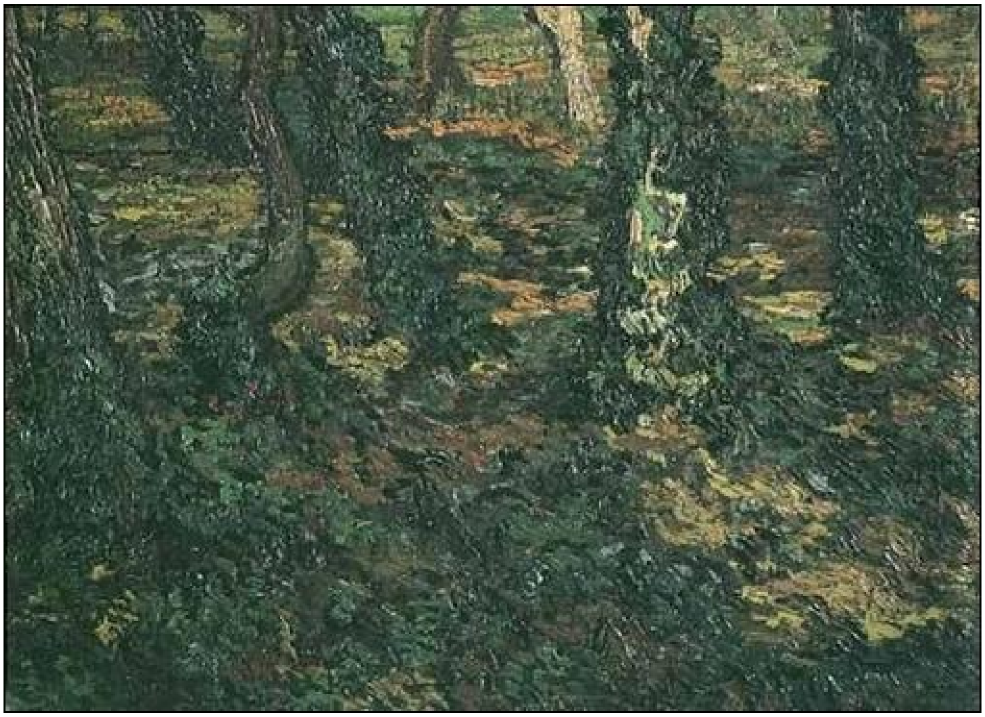
Mountains at Saint-Rémy with Dark Cottage
Oil on canvas
71.8 x 90.8 cm.
Saint-Rémy: July, 1889



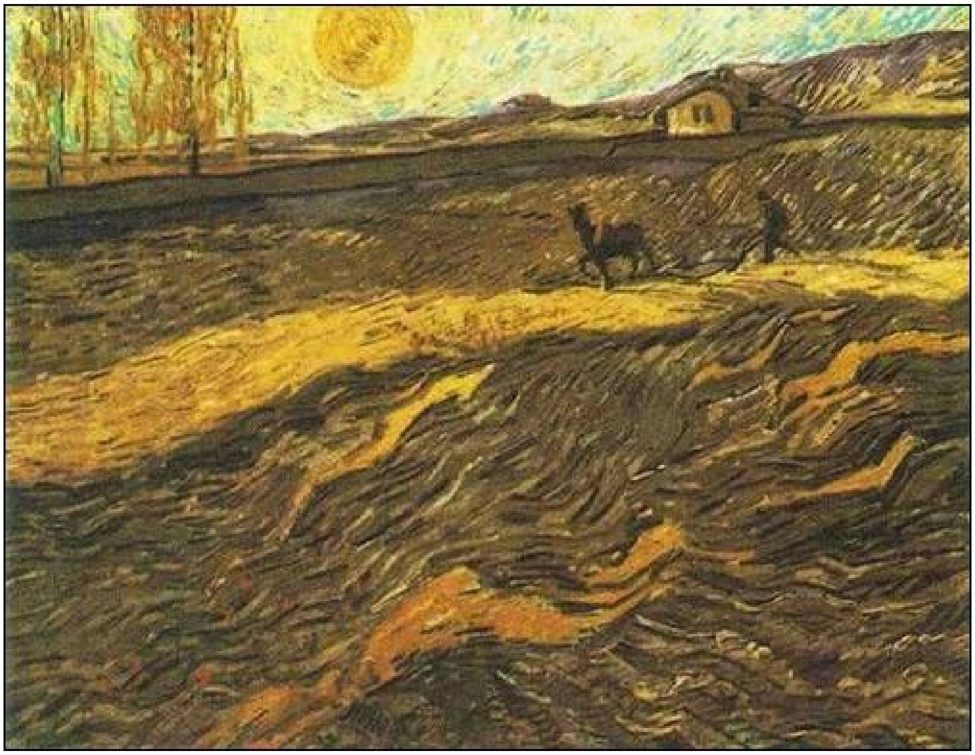
Tree Trunks with Ivy
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: July, 1889



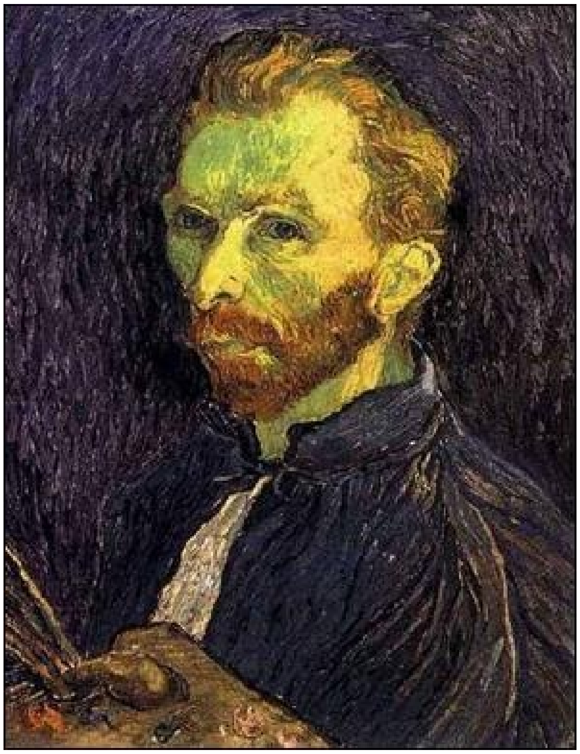
Undergrowth with Ivy
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 65.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: July, 1889



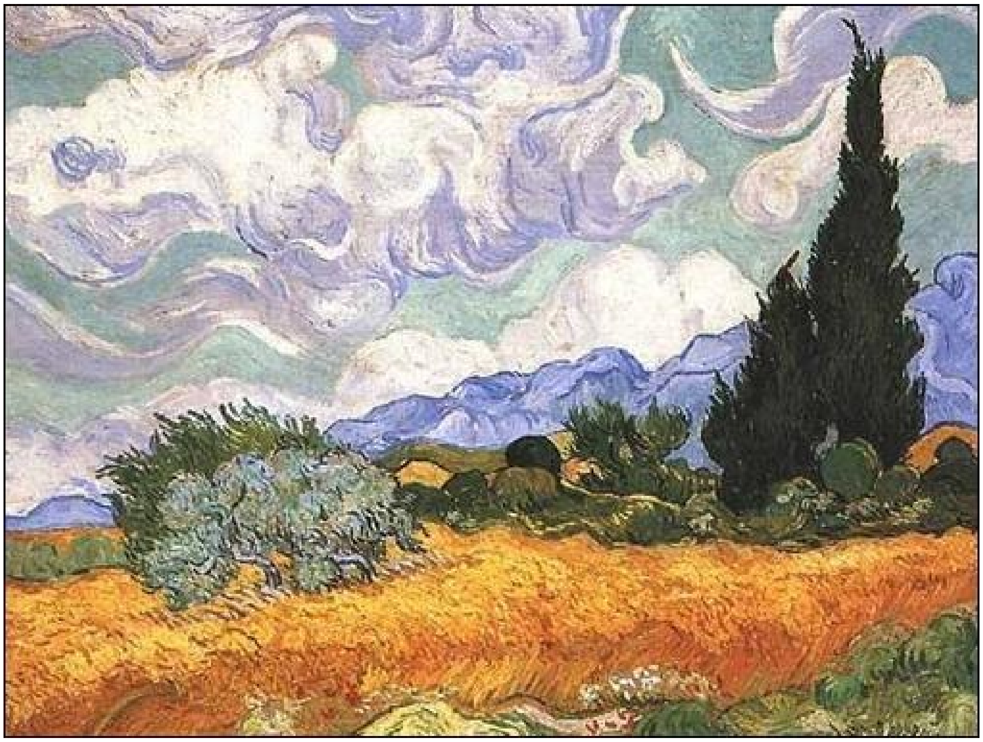
Tree Trunks with Ivy
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 60.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: Summer, 1889



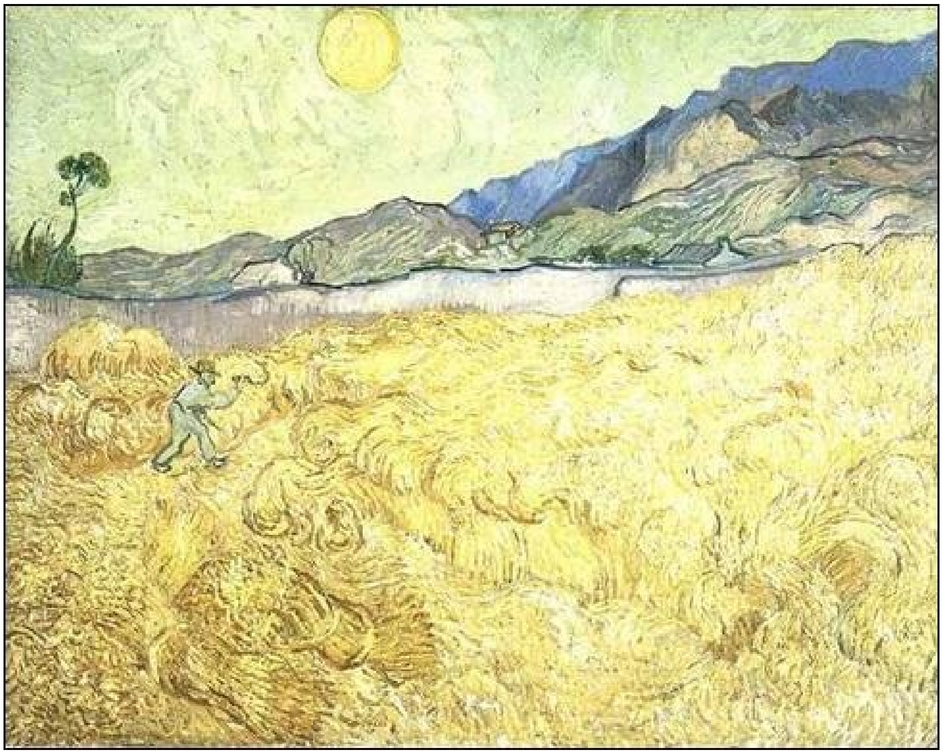
Enclosed Field with Ploughman
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 62.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: late August, 1889



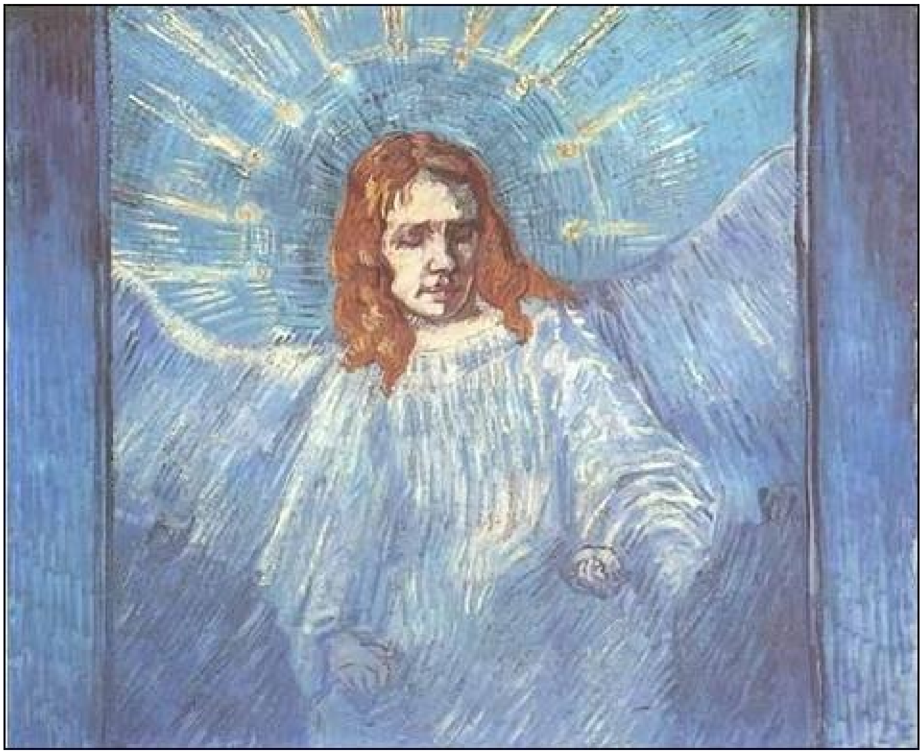
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
57.0 x 43.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: late-August, 1889



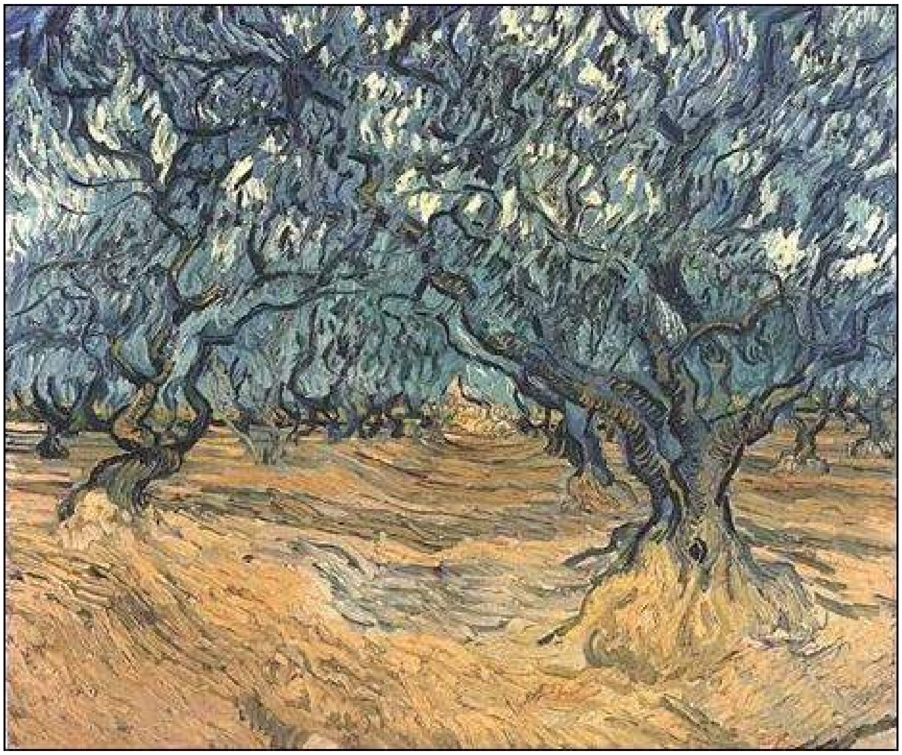
Wheat Field with Cypresses
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 91.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early September, 1889



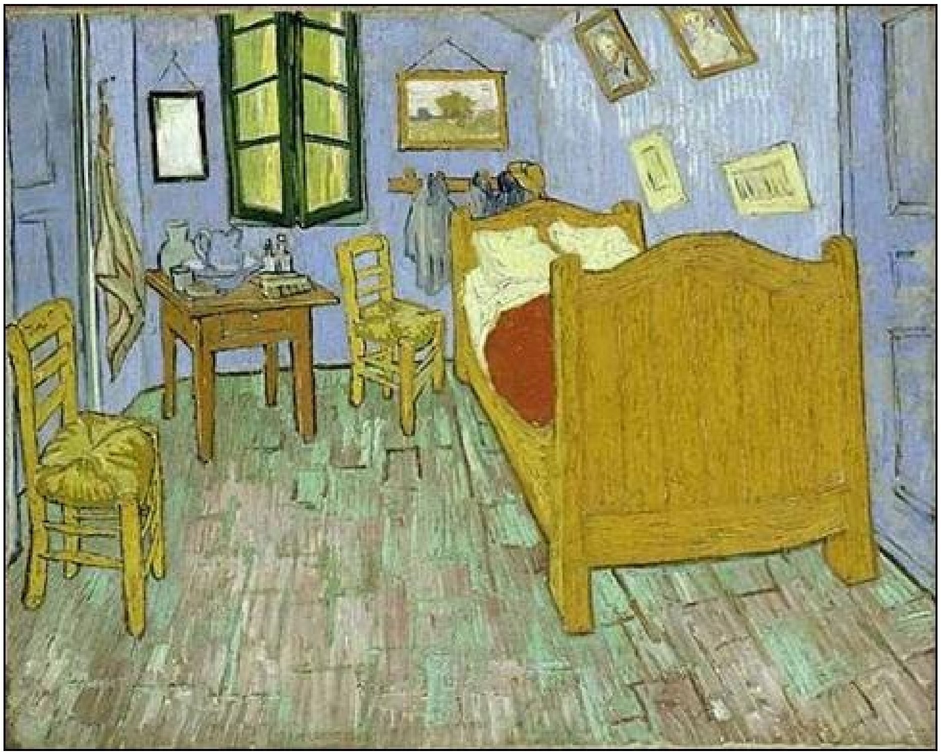
Wheat Fields with Reaper at Sunrise
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early September, 1889



Half Figure of an Angel (after Rembrandt)
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 64.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889

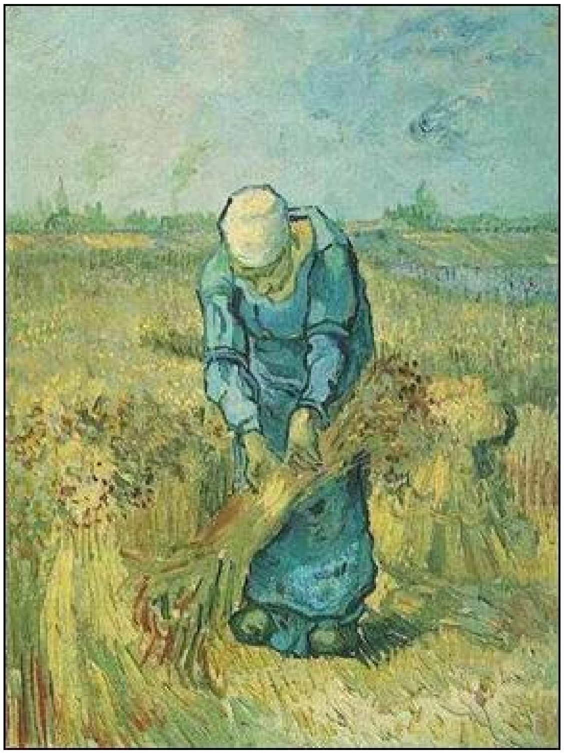


Olive Trees
Oil on canvas
53.5 x 64.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889

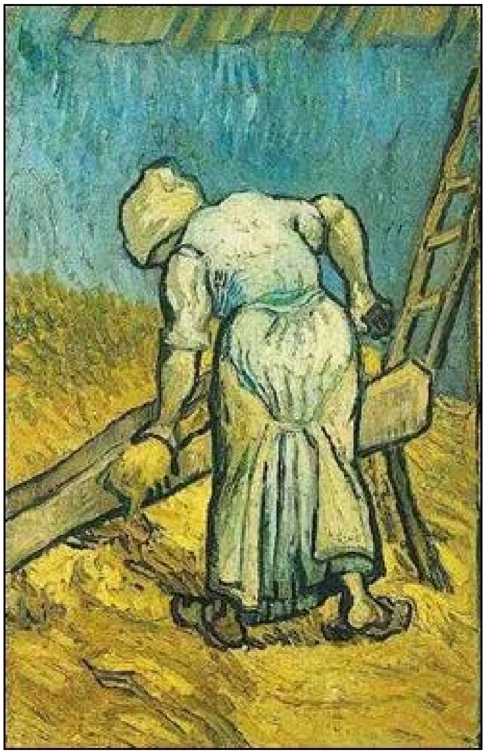


Bedroom, The

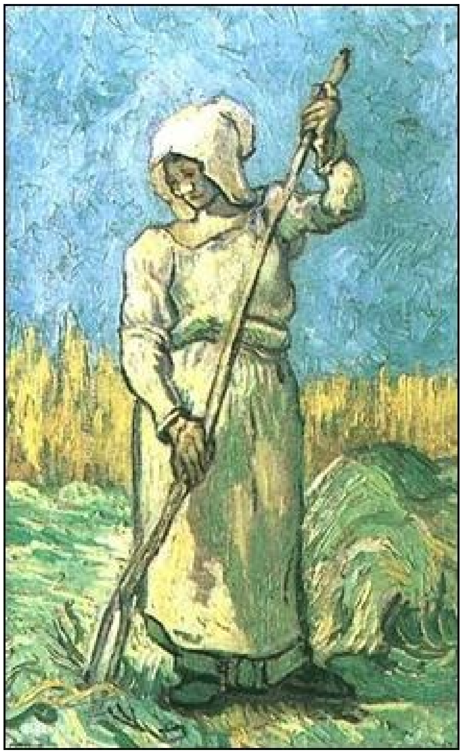
Oil on canvas
73.6 x 92.3 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early September, 1889



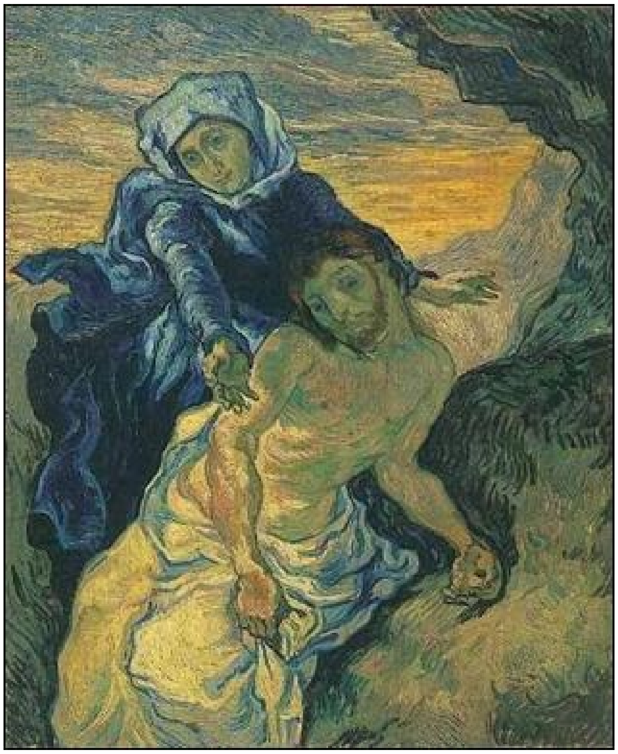
Peasant Woman Binding Sheaves (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
43.0 x 33.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



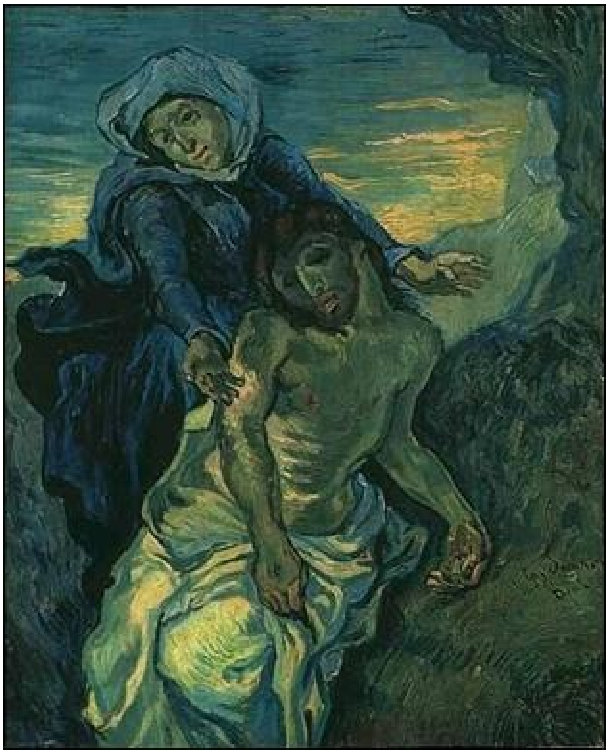
Peasant Woman Cutting Straw (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 26.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



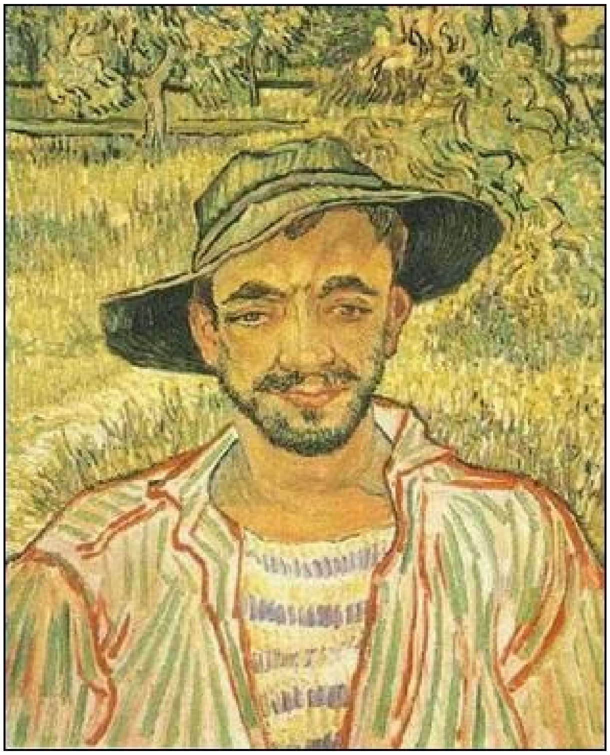
Peasant Woman with a Rake (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
39.0 x 24.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



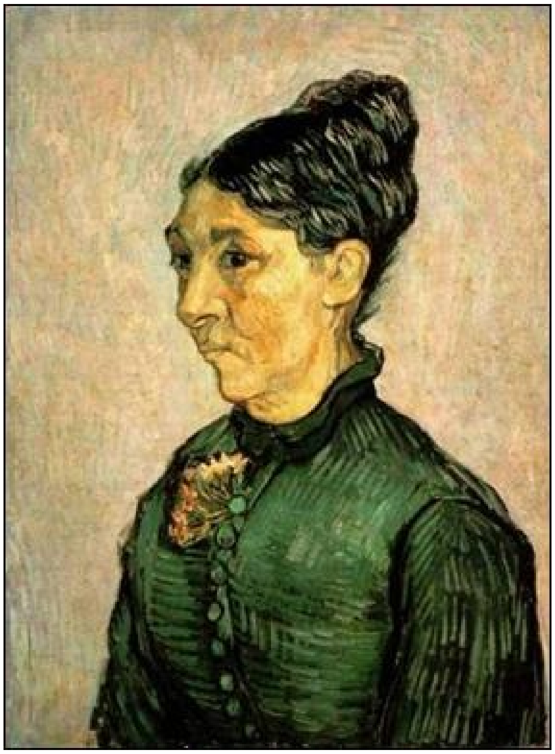
Pietà (after Delacroix), The
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 60.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



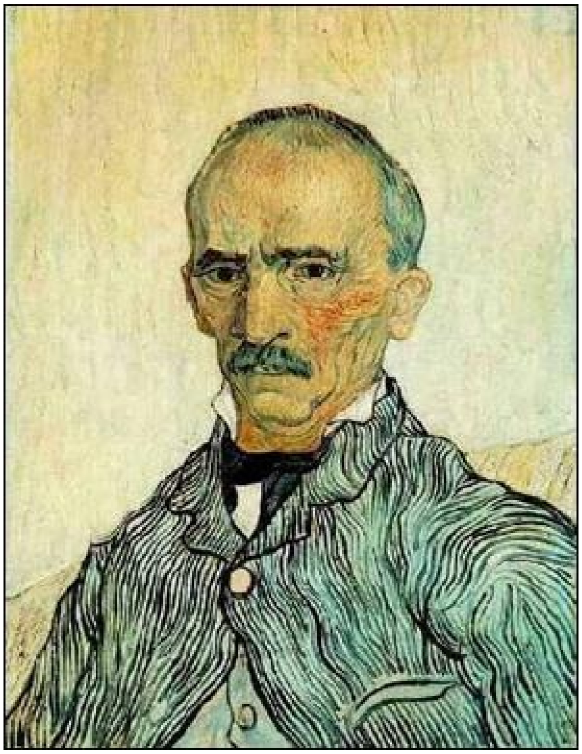
Pietà (after Delacroix)
Oil on canvas
42.0 x 34.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



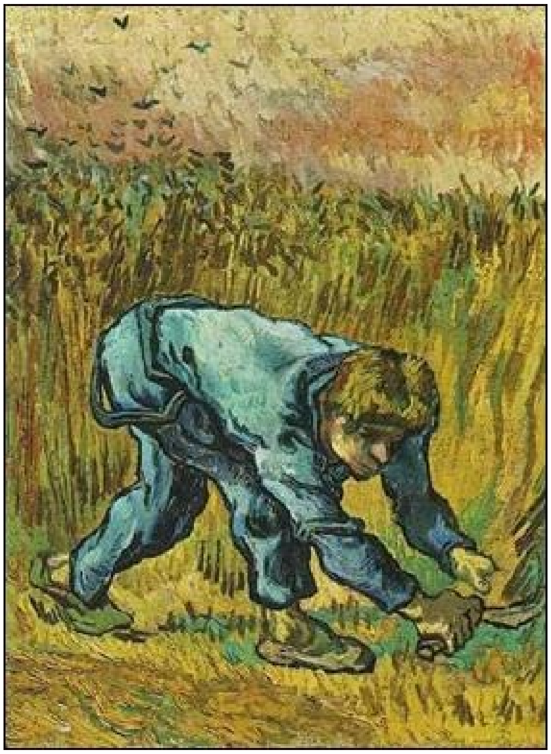
Portrait of a Young Peasant
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 50.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



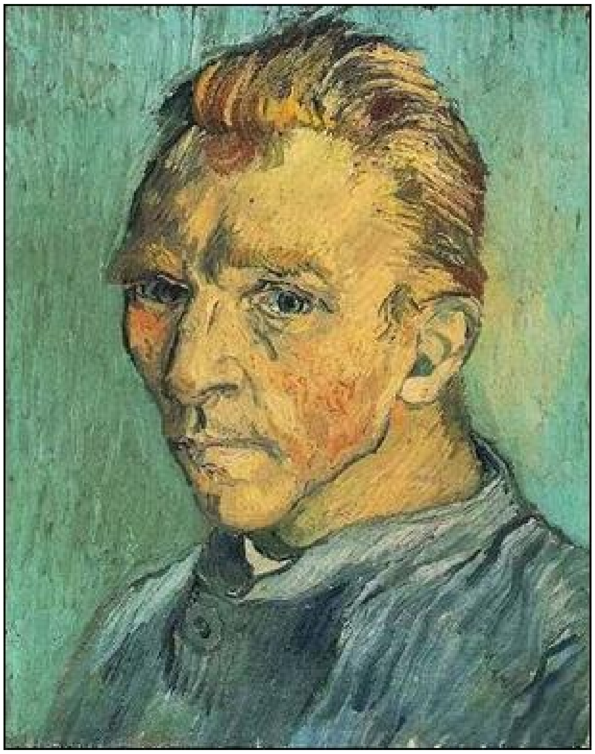
Portrait of Madame Trabuc
Oil on canvas on panel
64.0 x 49.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



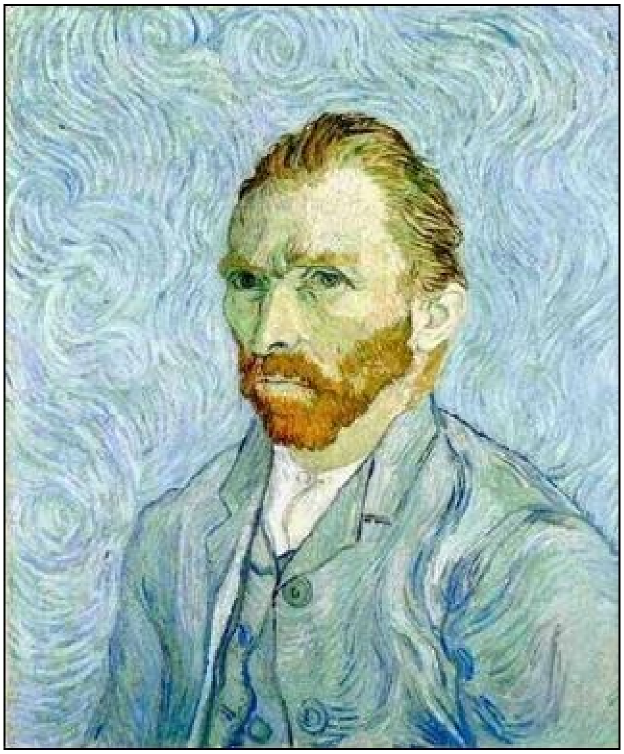
Portrait of Trabuc, an Attendant at Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 46.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



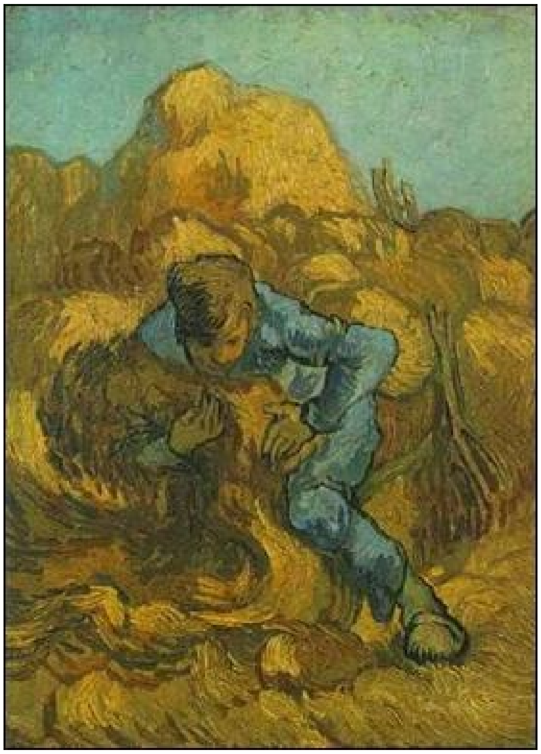
Reaper with Sickle (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 33.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



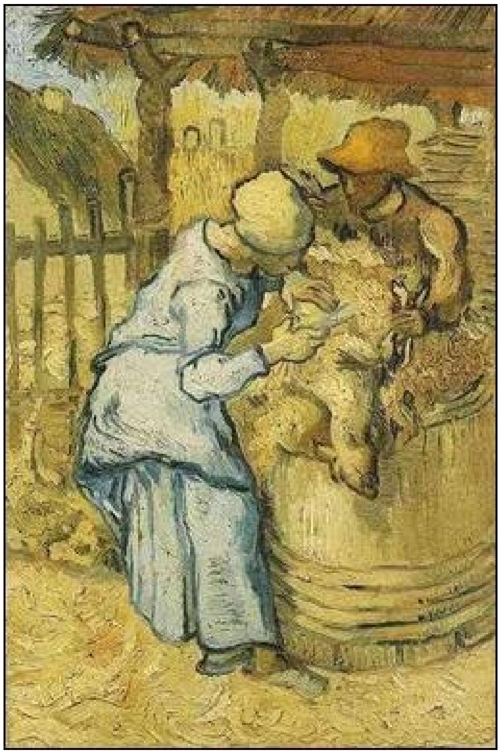
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
40.0 x 31.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



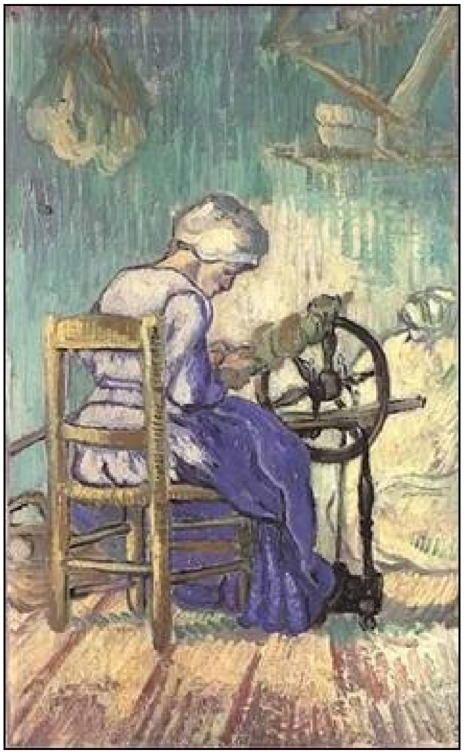
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



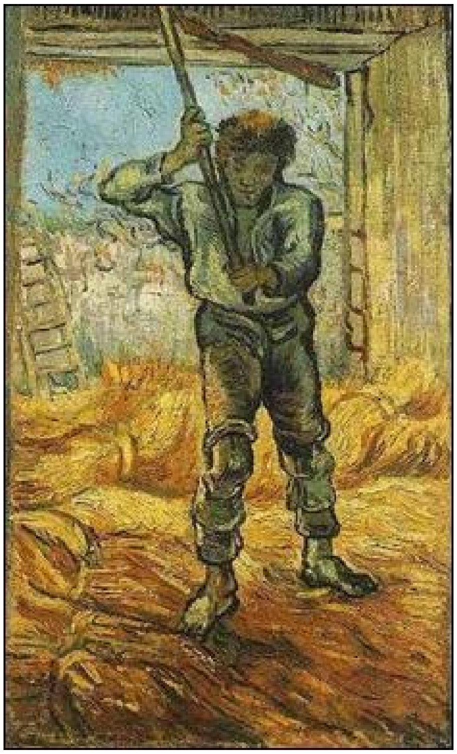
Sheaf-Binder, The (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
44.5 x 32.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



Sheep-Shearers, The (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
43.5 x 29.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889

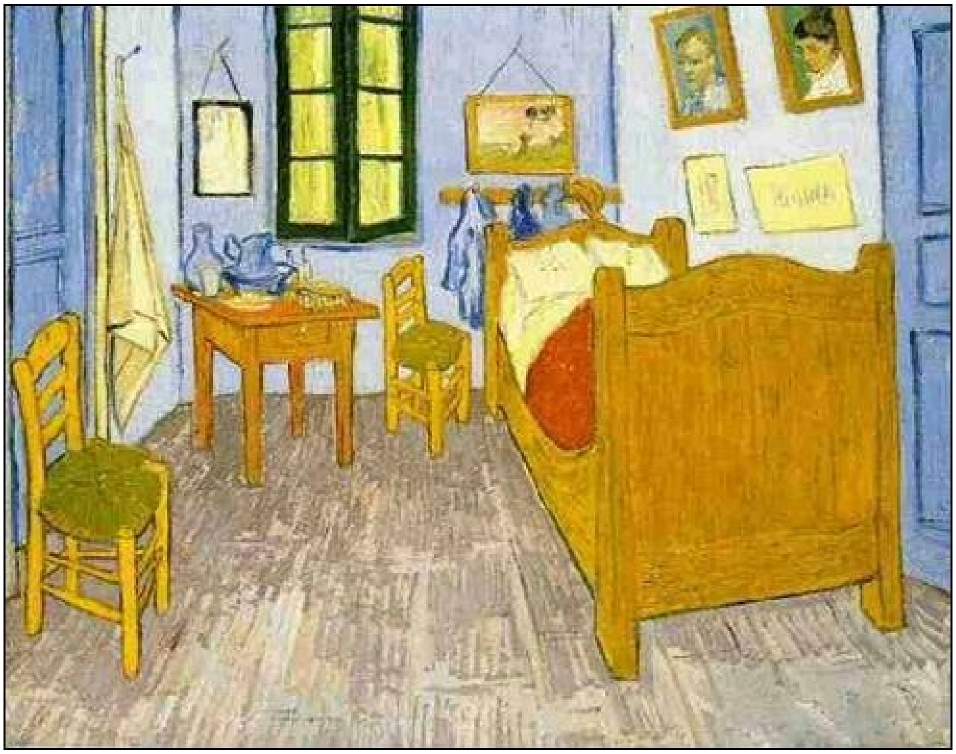


The Spinner
Oil on canvas
40.0 x 25.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889

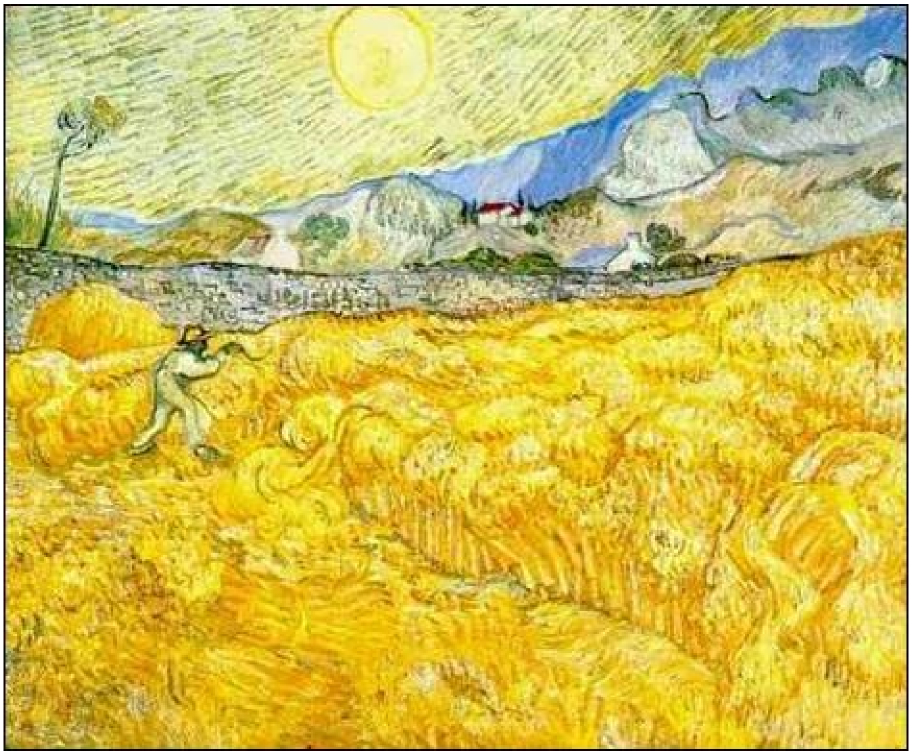


Thresher (after Millet), The

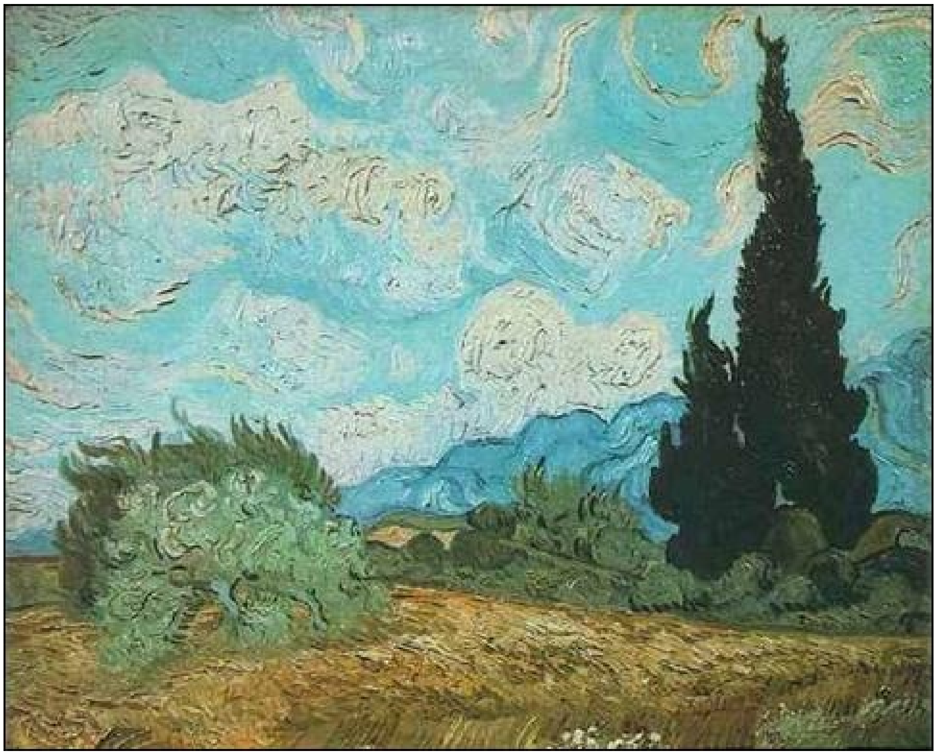
Oil on canvas
44.0 x 27.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



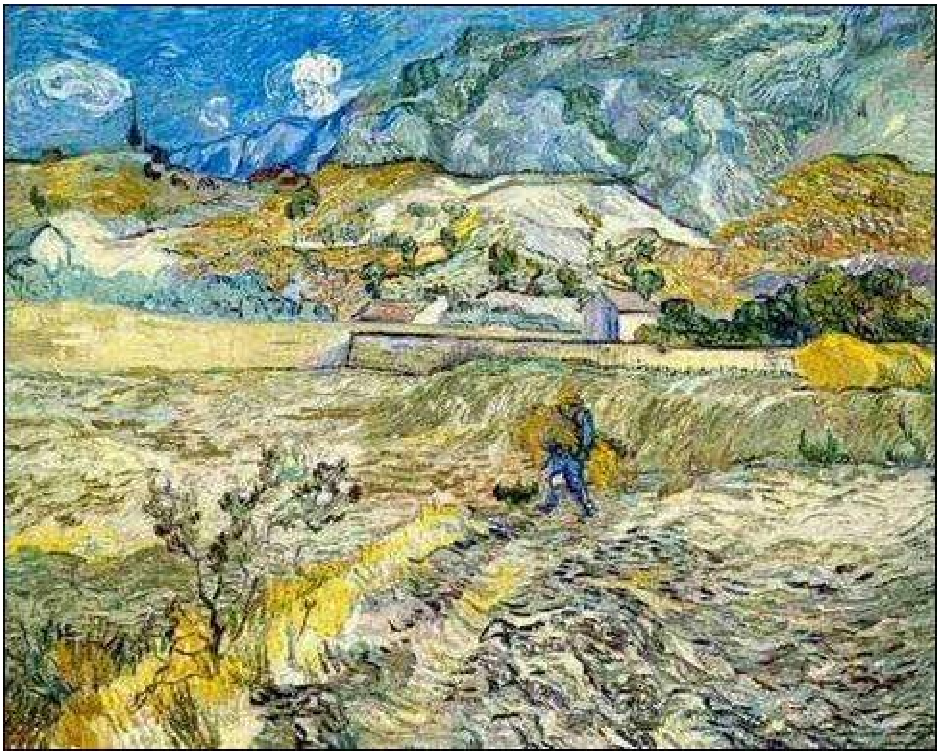
Vincent's Bedroom in Arles
Oil on canvas
56.5 x 74.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



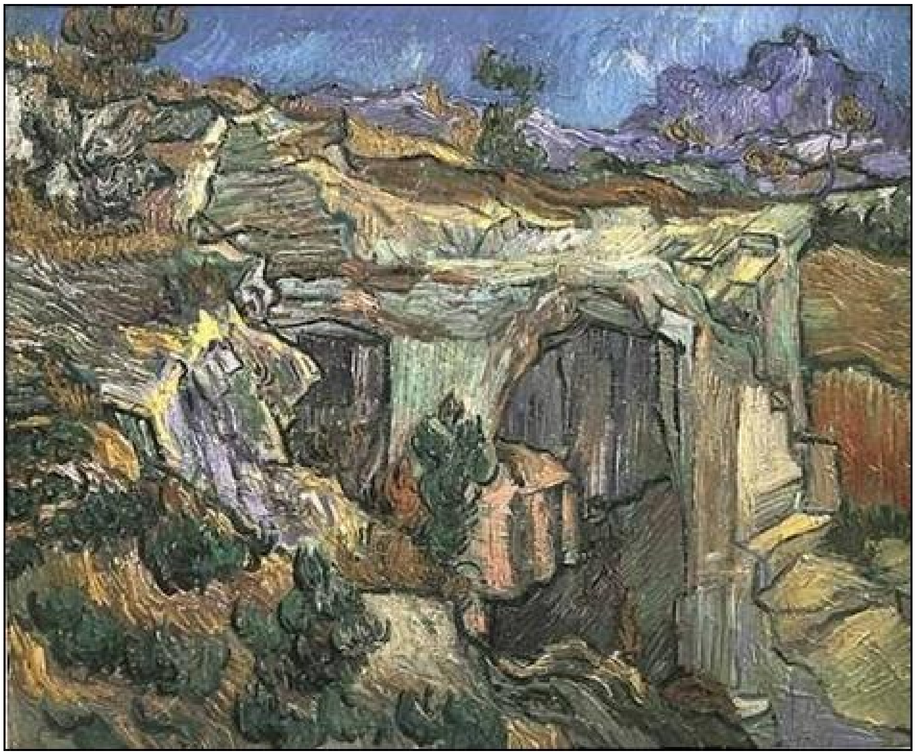
Wheat Field Behind Saint-Paul Hospital with a Reaper
Oil on canvas
59.5 x 72.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



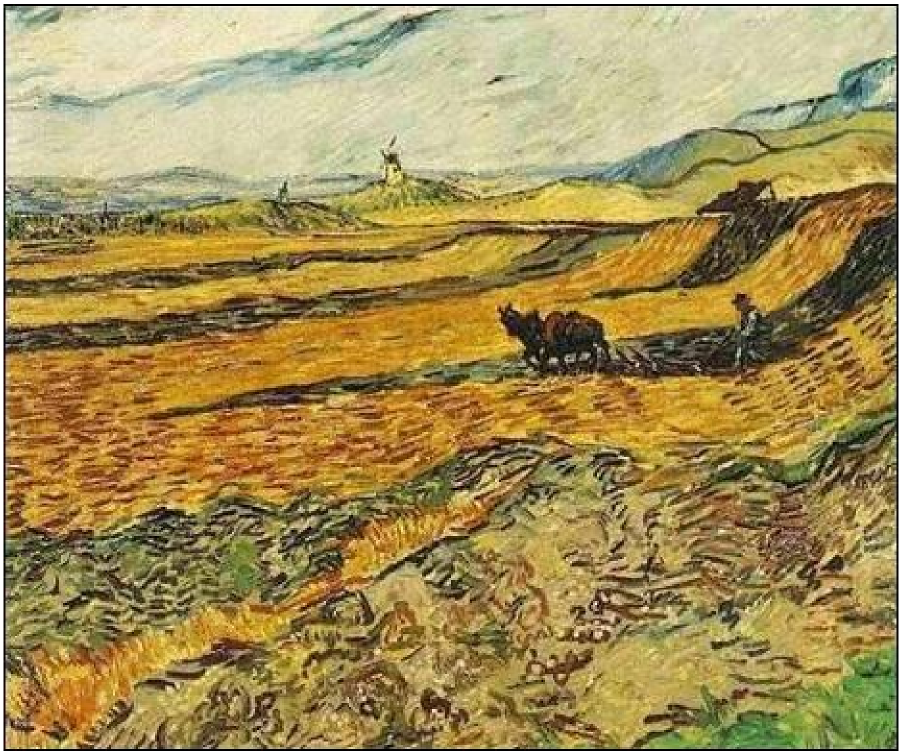
Wheat Field with Cypresses
Oil on canvas
51.5 x 65.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: September, 1889



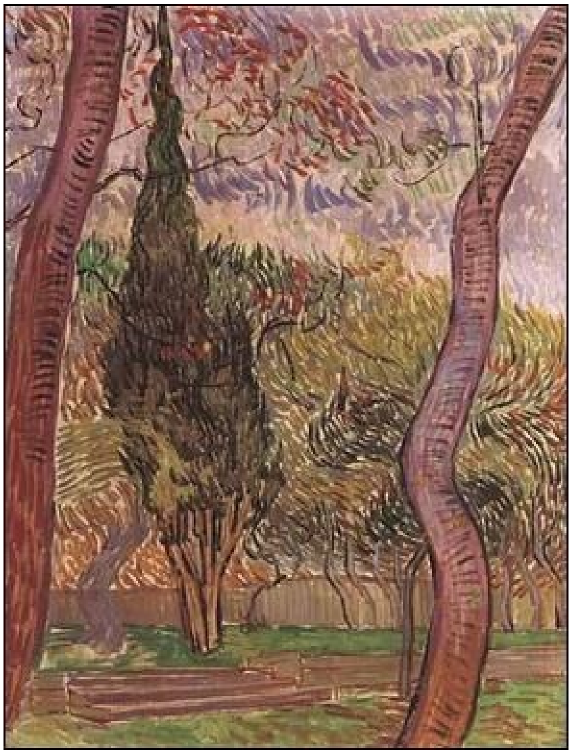
Enclosed Wheat Field with Peasant
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early October, 1889



Entrance to a Quarry near Saint-Rémy
Oil on canvas
52.0 x 64.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

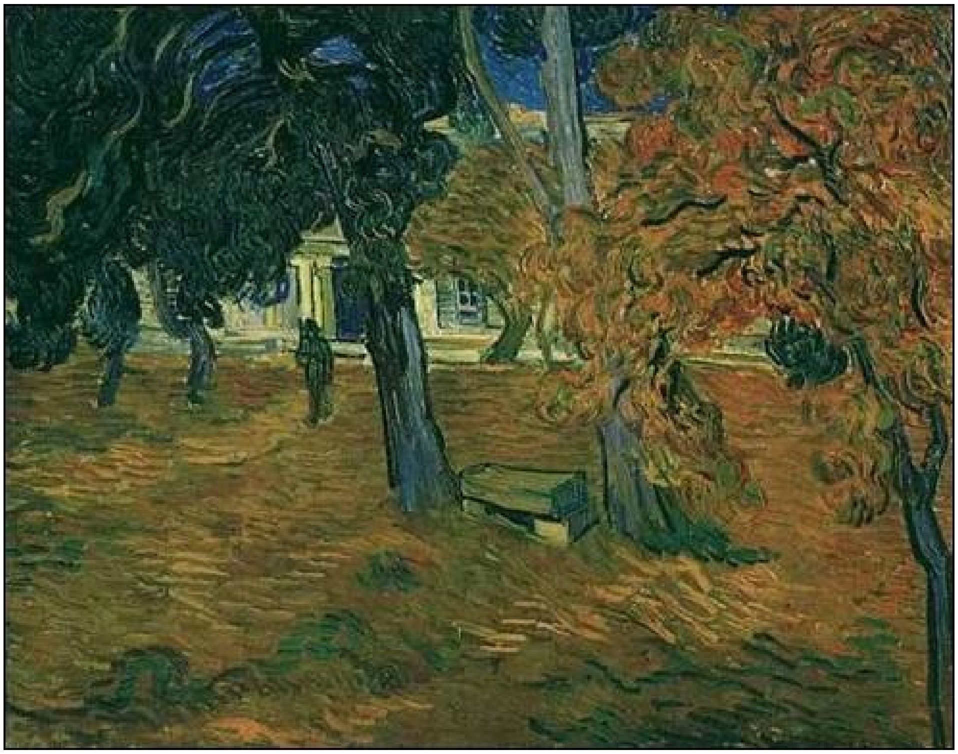


Field with Ploughman and Mill
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 67.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

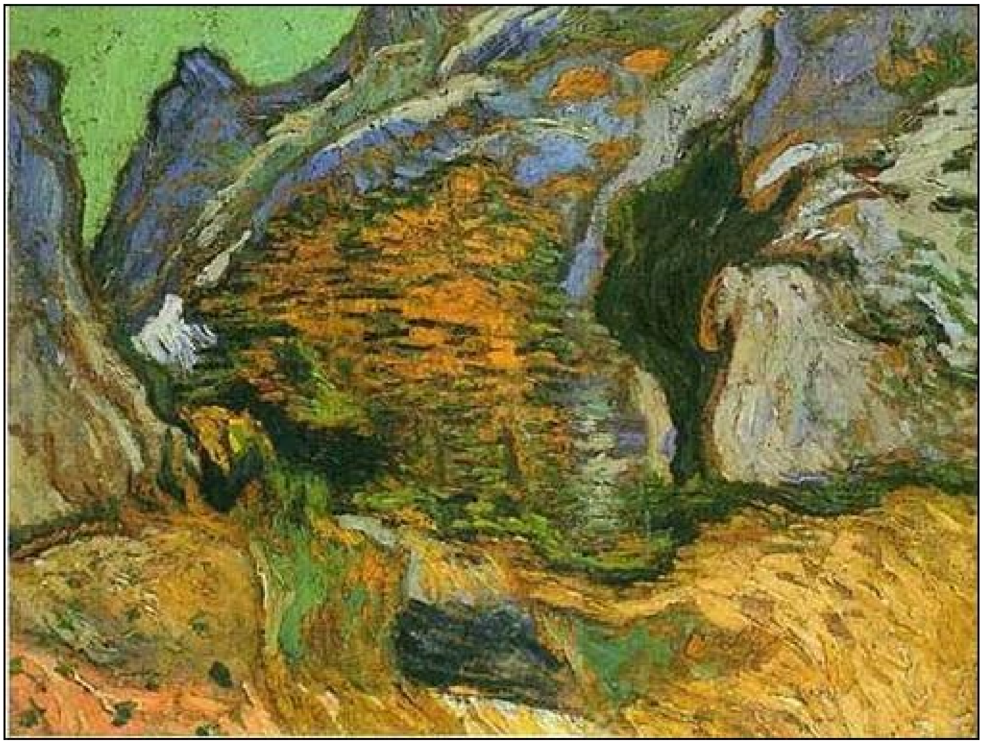


Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The

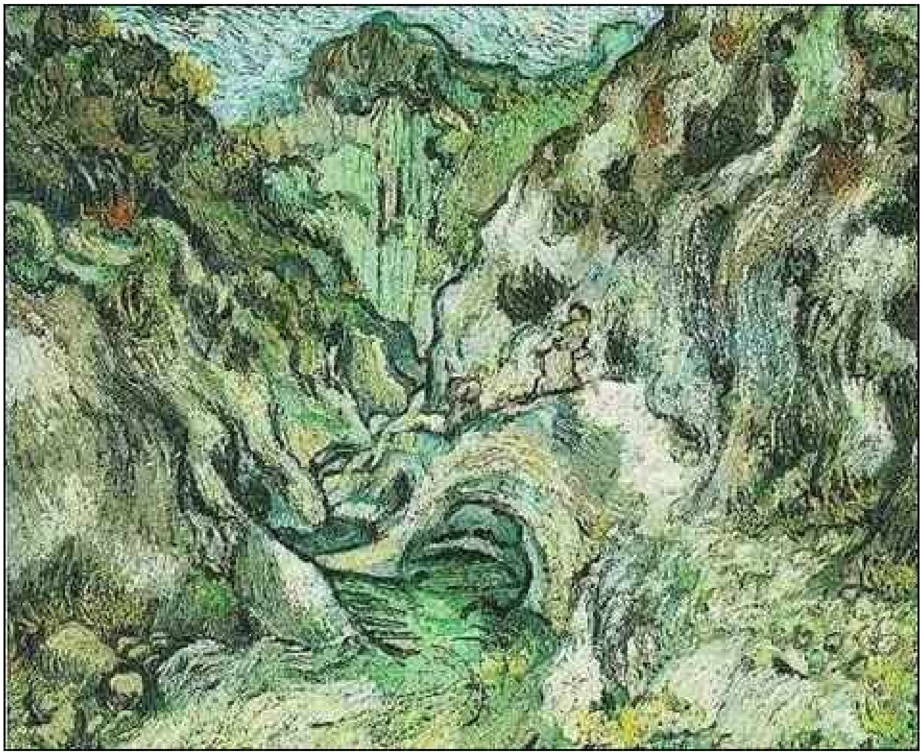
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 49.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



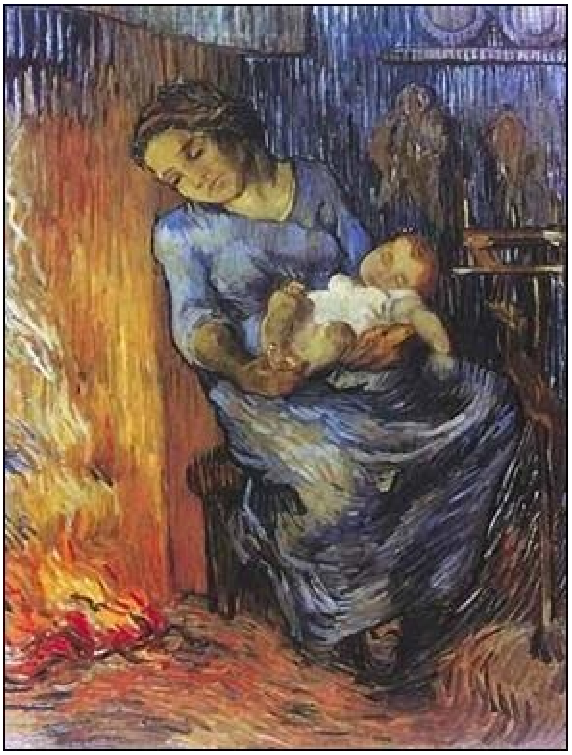
Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 63.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



Les Peiroulets Ravine
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 41.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

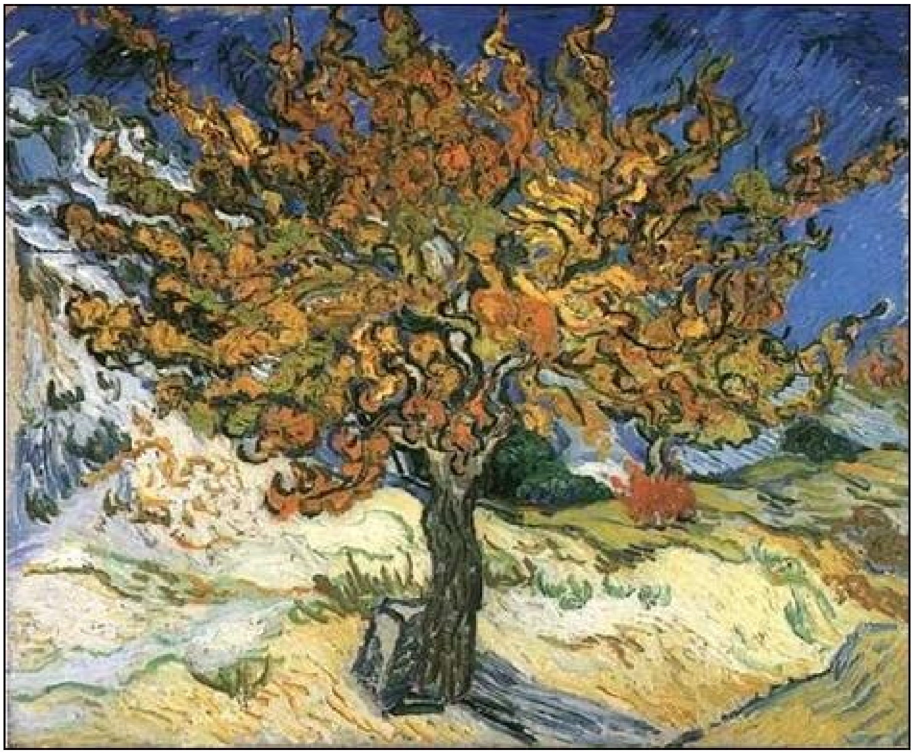


Les Peiroulets Ravine
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

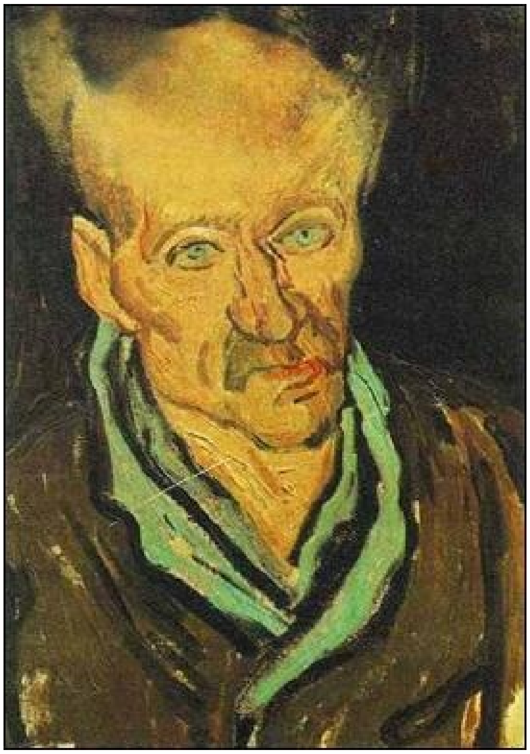


Man is at Sea (after Demont-Breton), The

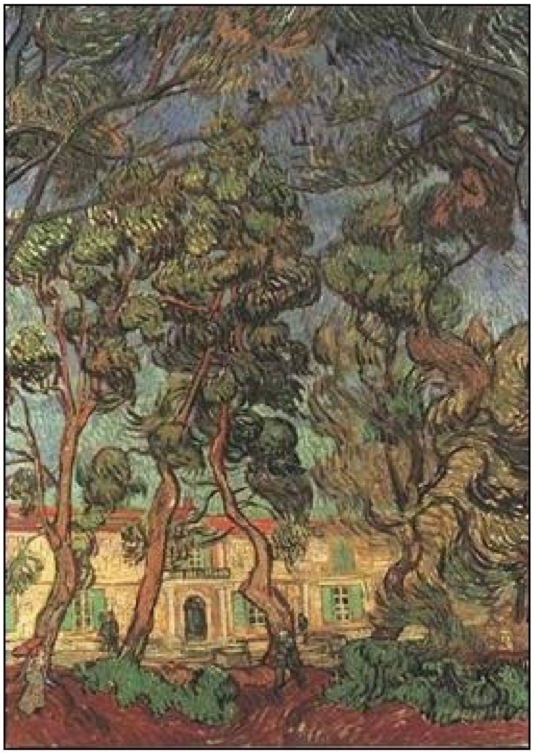
Oil on canvas
66.0 x 51.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



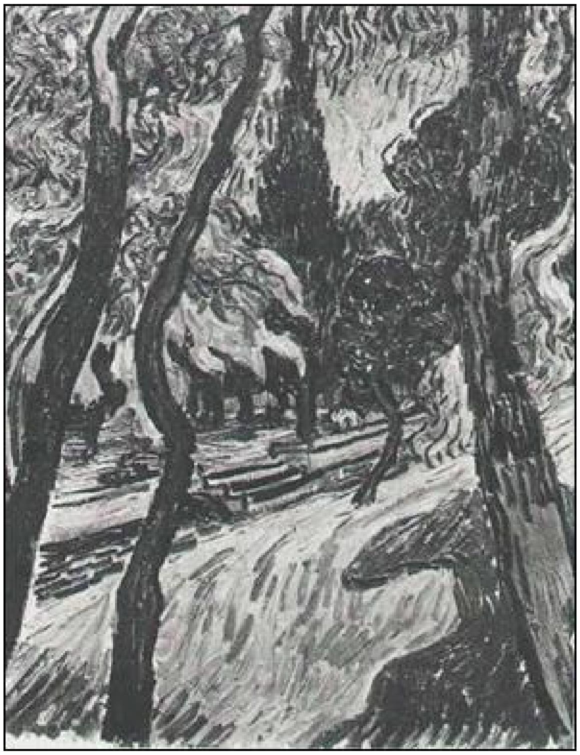
The Mulberry Tree
Oil on canvas
54.0 x 65.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



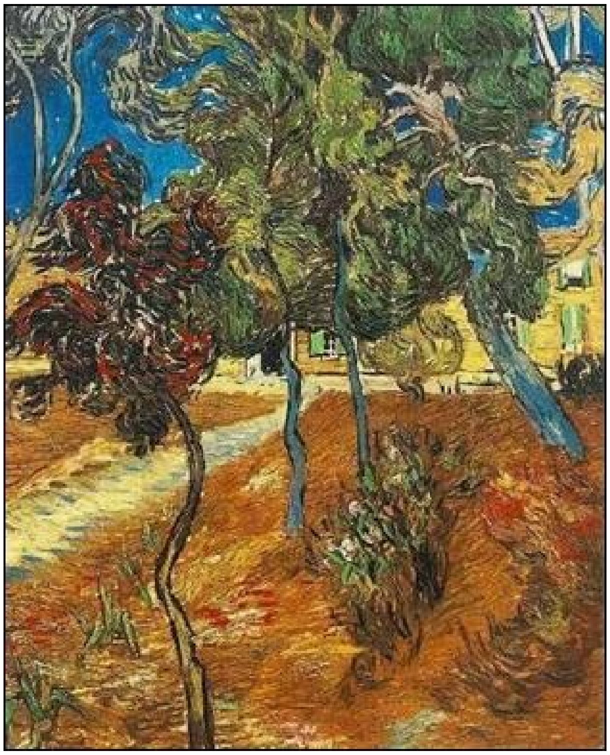
Portrait of a Patient in Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 23.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



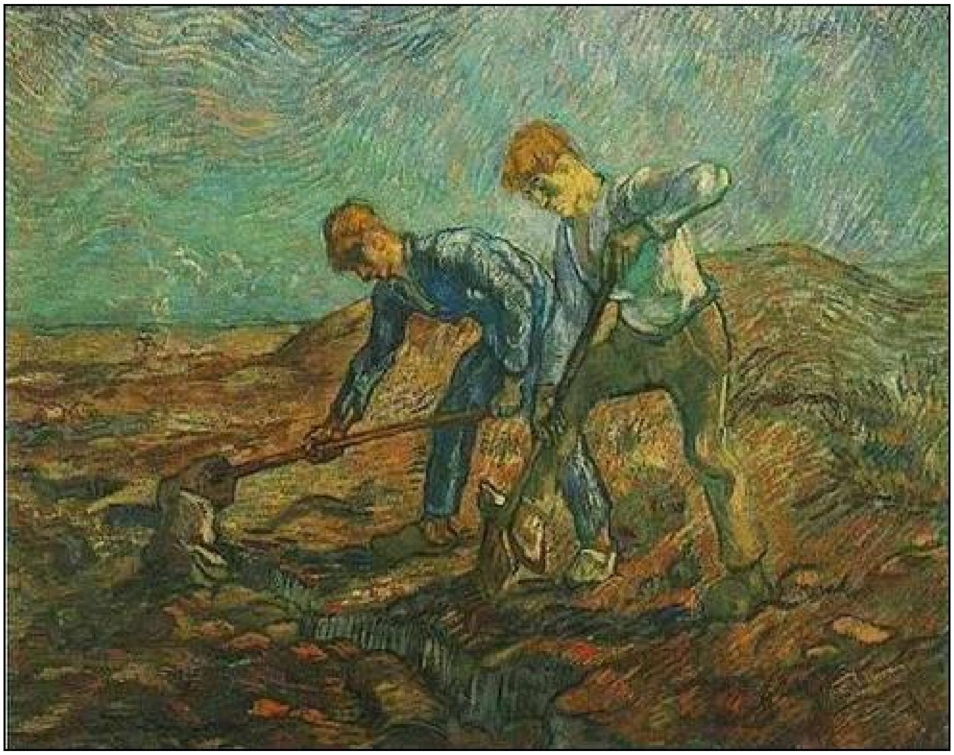
Trees in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
90.2 x 73.3 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



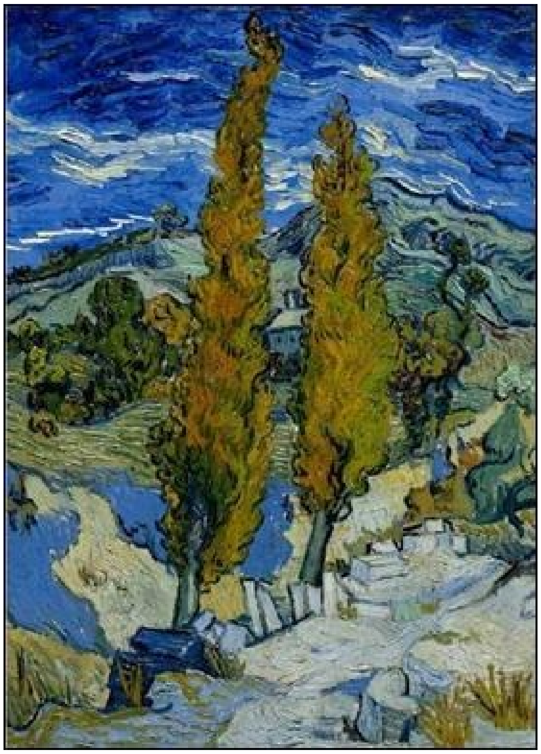
Trees in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
42.0 x 32.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



Trees in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 60.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

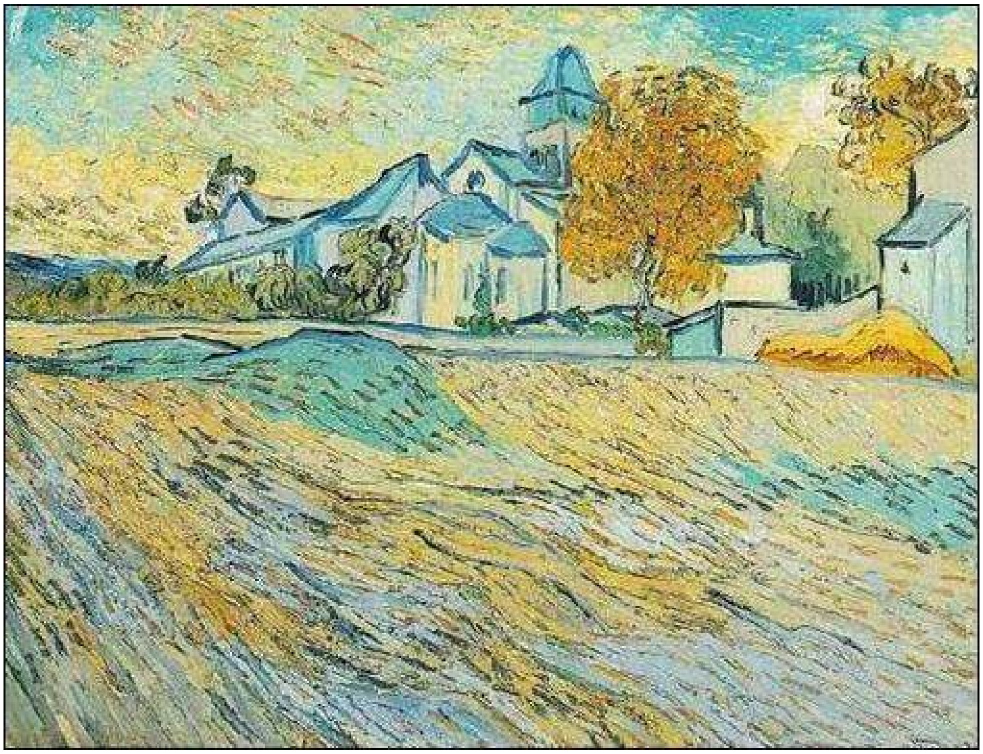


Two Peasants Digging
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

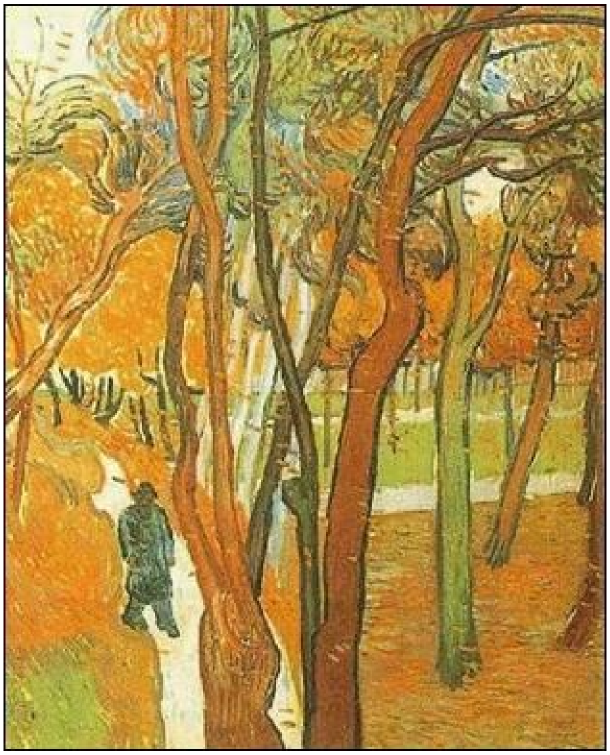


Two Poplars on a Road Through the Hills

Oil on canvas
61.6 x 45.7 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

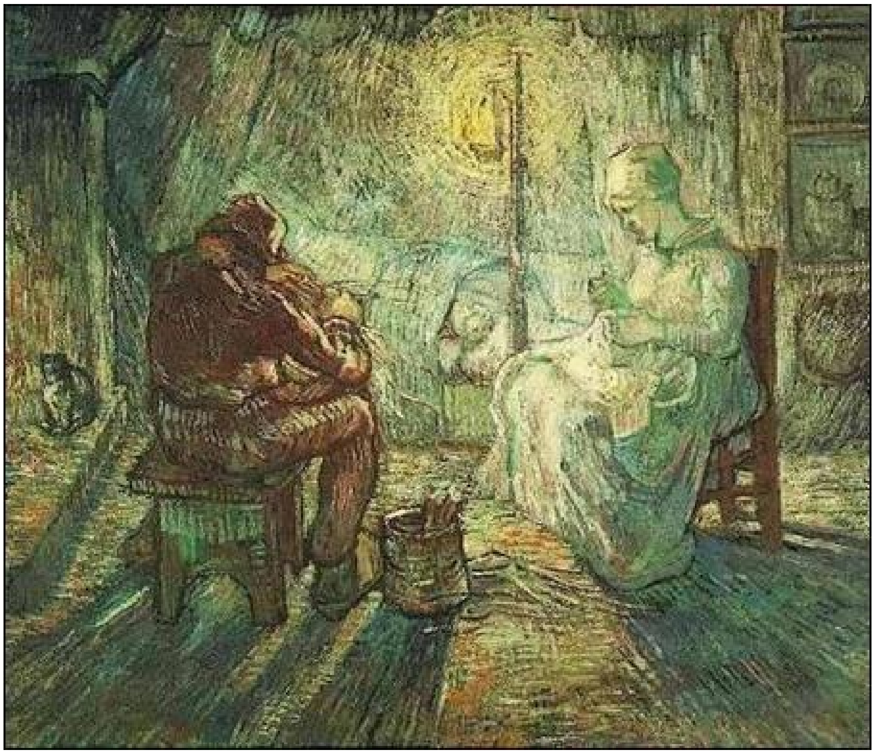


View of the Church of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole
Oil on canvas
44.5 x 60.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889

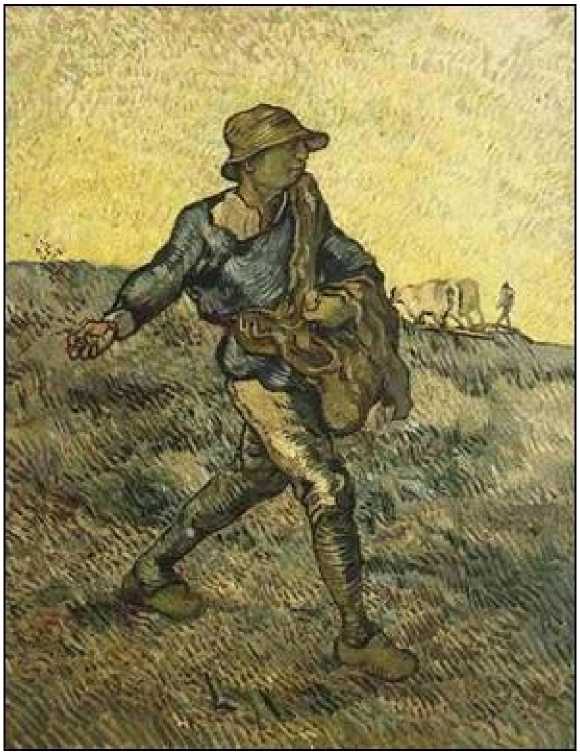


Walk: Falling Leaves, The

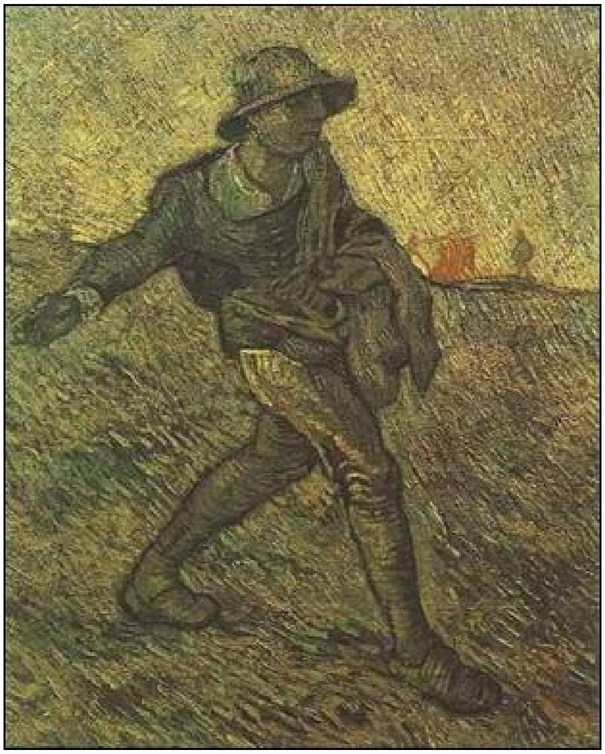
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 60.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October, 1889



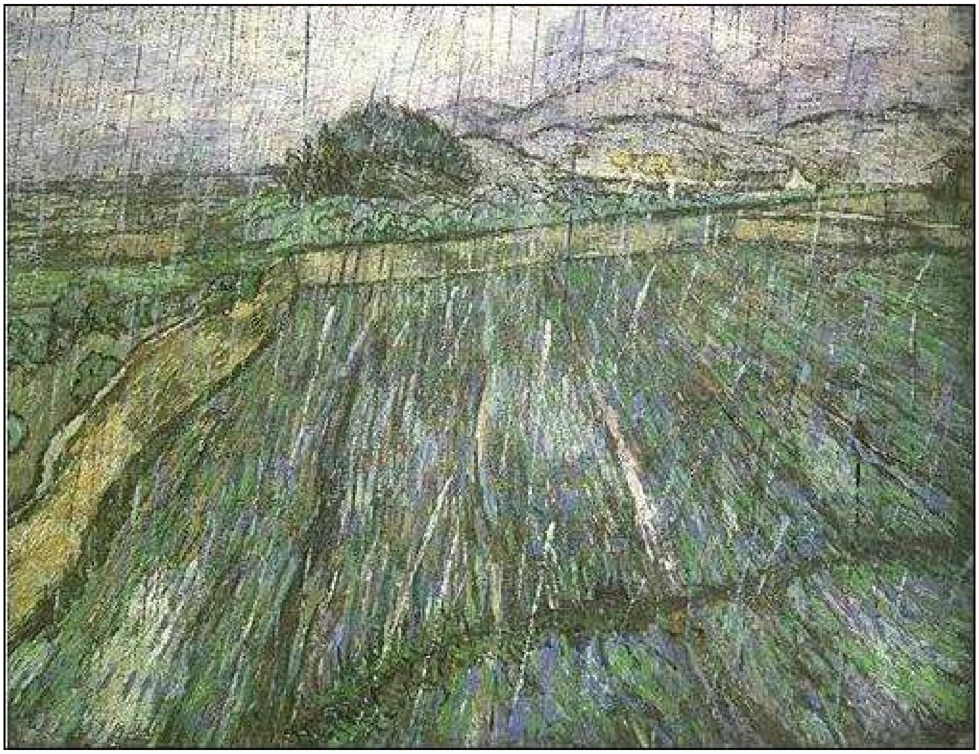
Evening: The Watch (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
74.5 x 93.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: late October, 1889



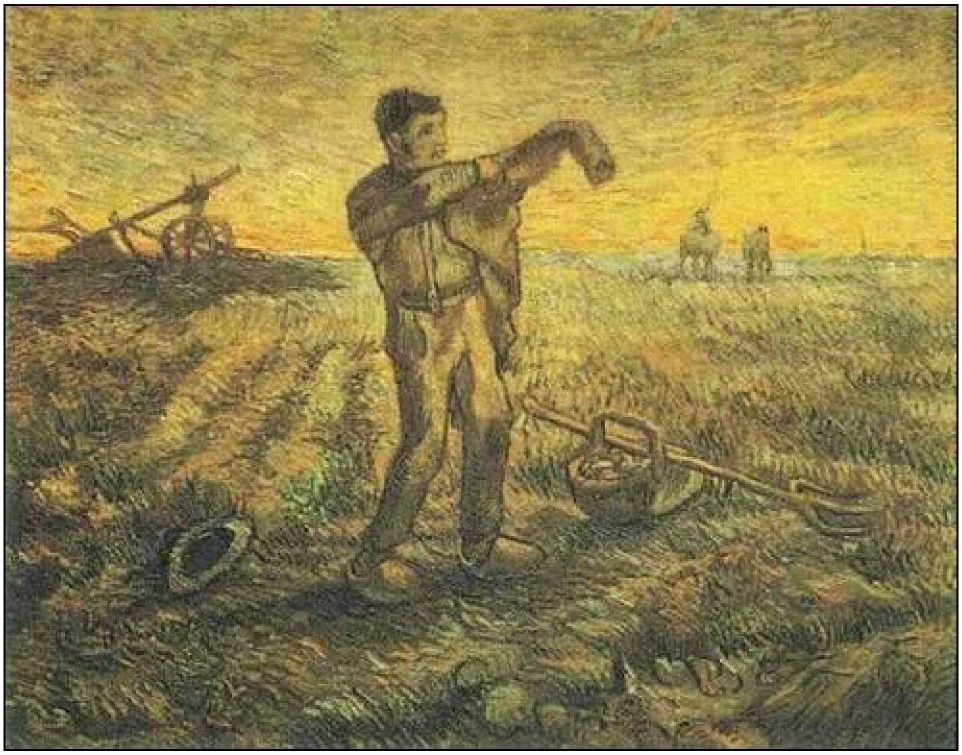
Sower, The (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
80.8 x 66.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: Late October, 1889



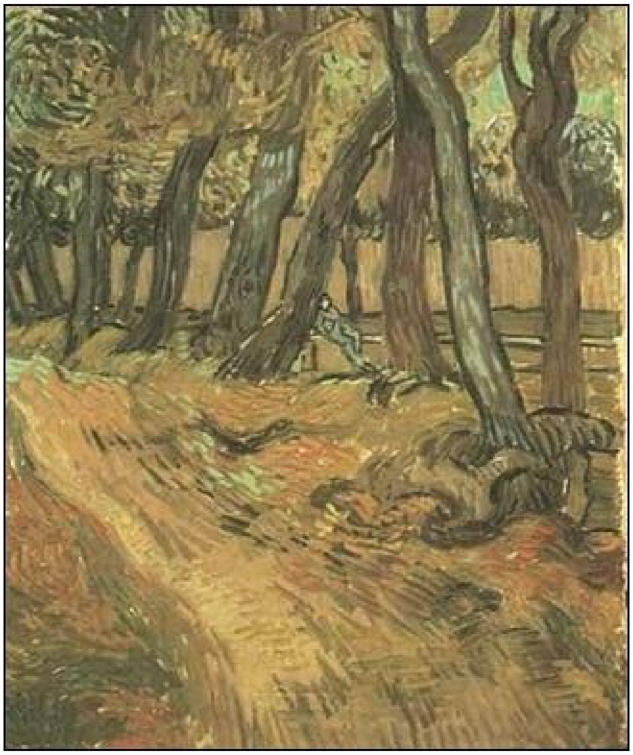
Sower, The (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 55.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: October-November, 1889



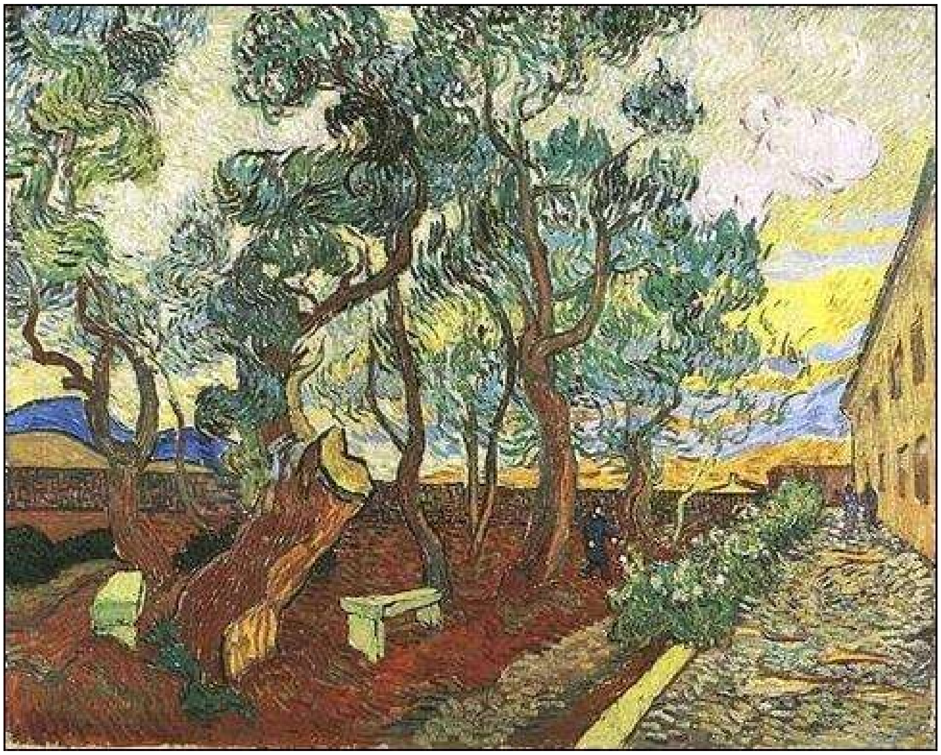
Wheat Field in Rain
Oil on canvas
74.3 x 93.1 cm.
Saint-Rémy: early November, 1889



Evening: The End of the Day (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 94.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889

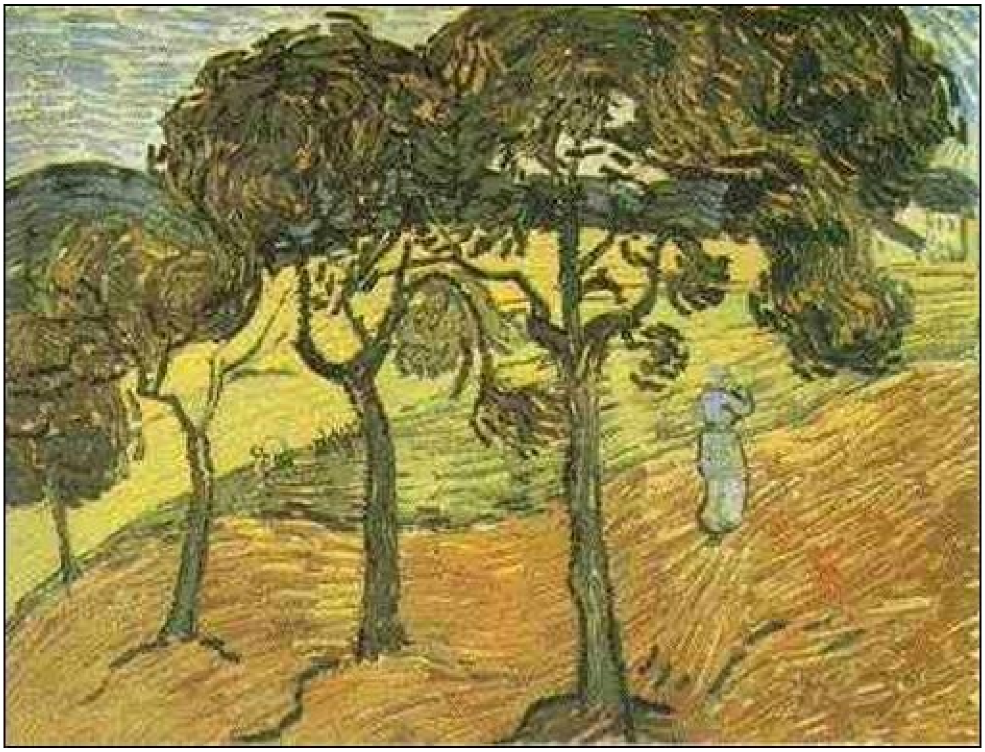


Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital with Figure, The
Oil on canvas
61.0 x 50.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889

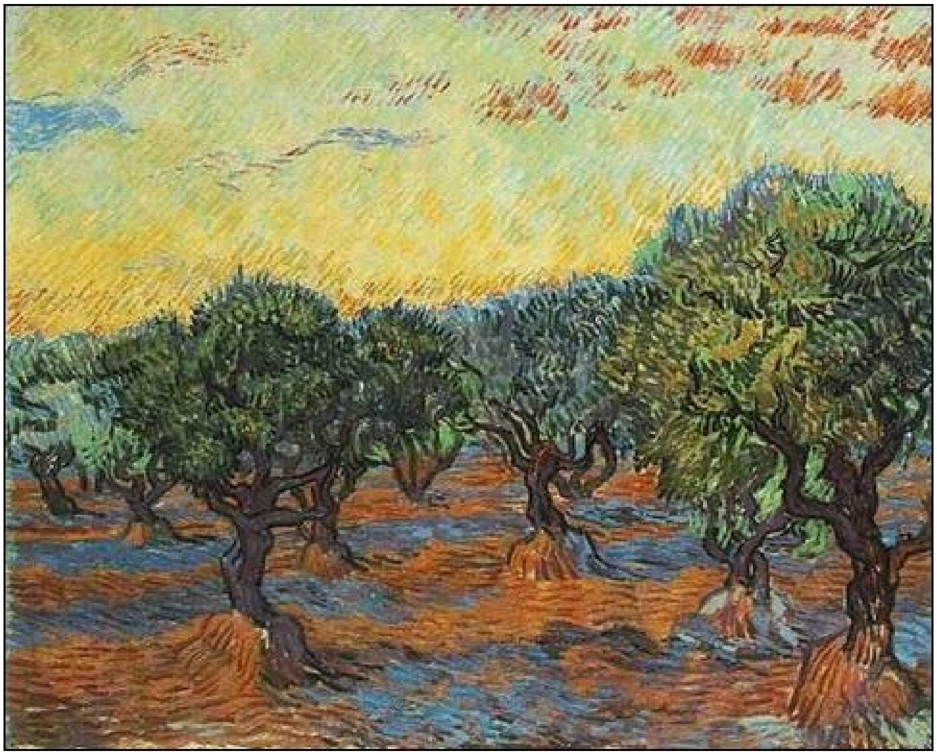


Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The

Oil on canvas
73.1 x 92.6 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889

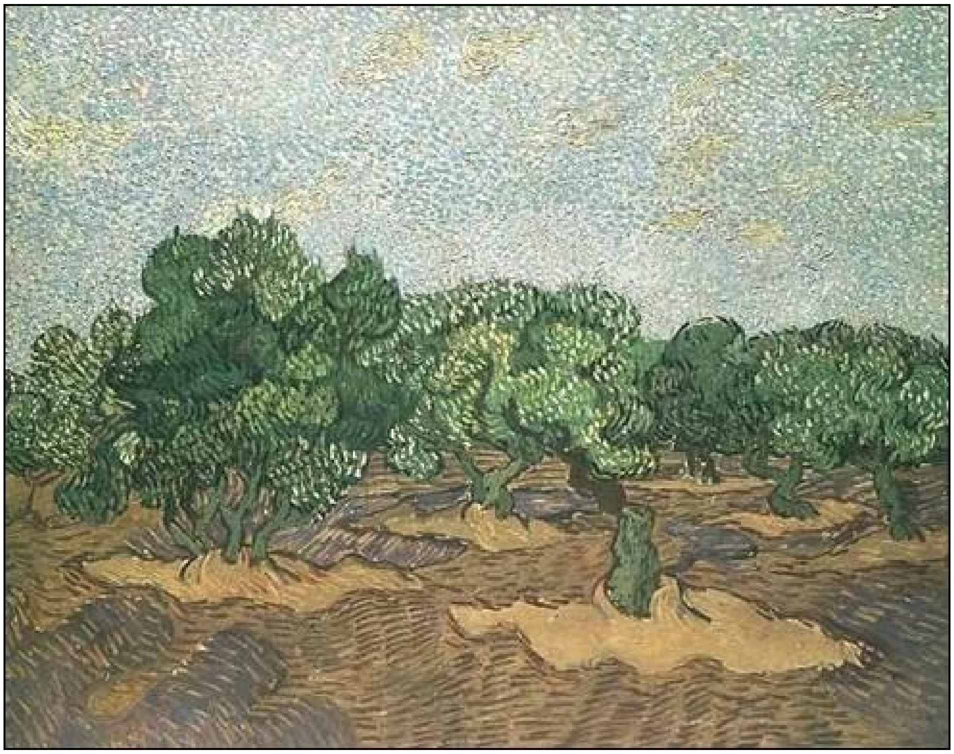


Landscape with Trees and Figures
Oil on canvas
49.9 x 65.4 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889

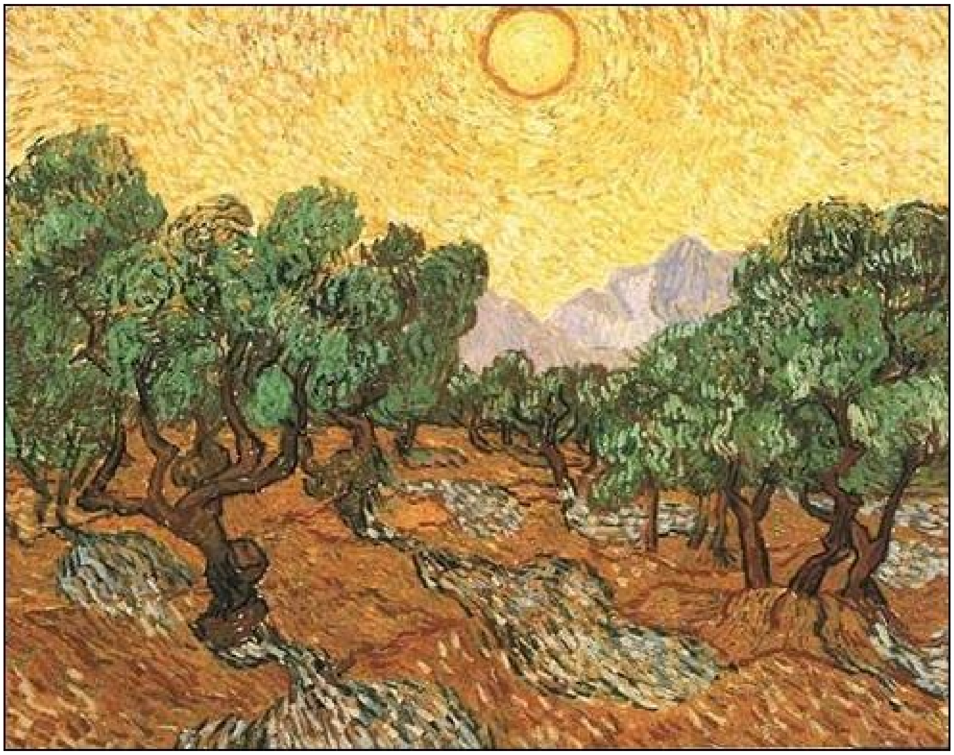


Olive Grove: Orange Sky

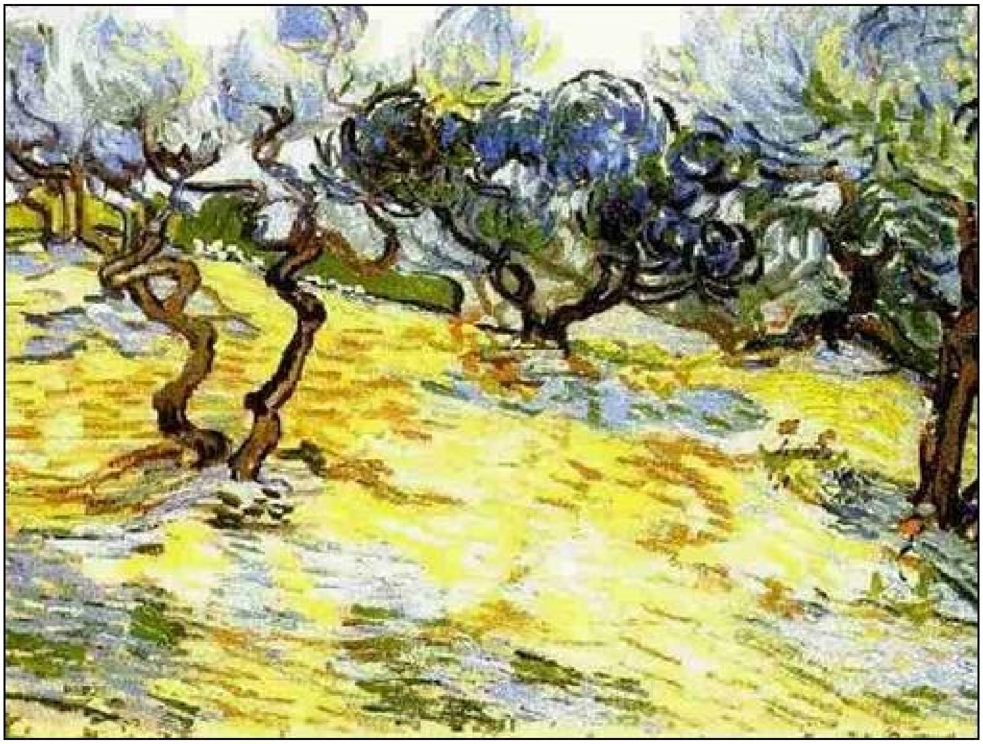
Oil on canvas
74.0 x 93.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



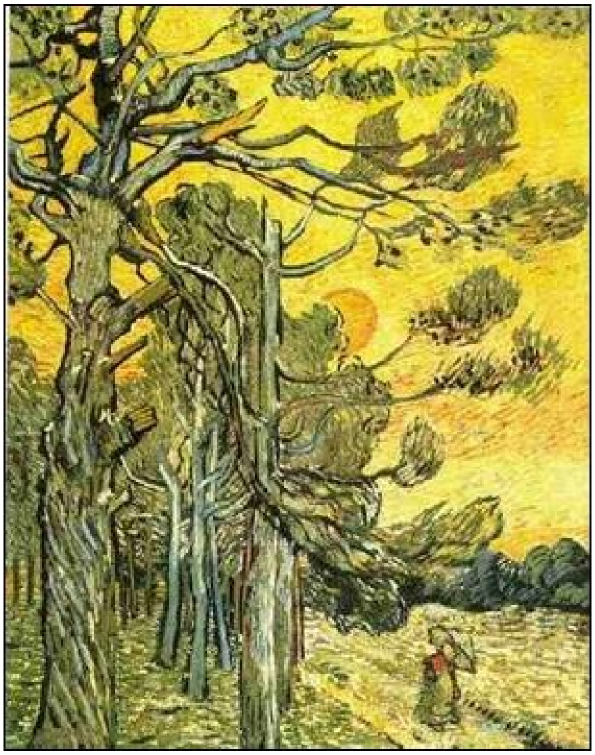
Olive Grove: Pale Blue Sky
Oil on canvas
72.7 x 92.1 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



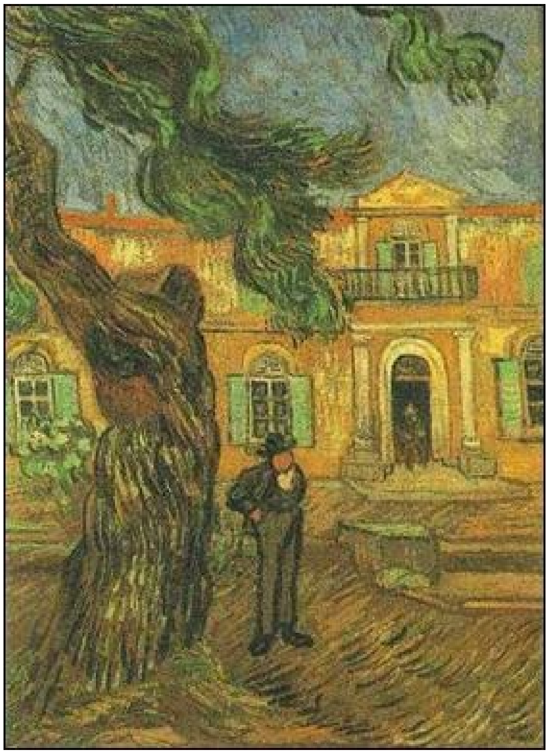
Olive Trees with Yellow Sky and Sun
Oil on canvas
73.7 x 92.7 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



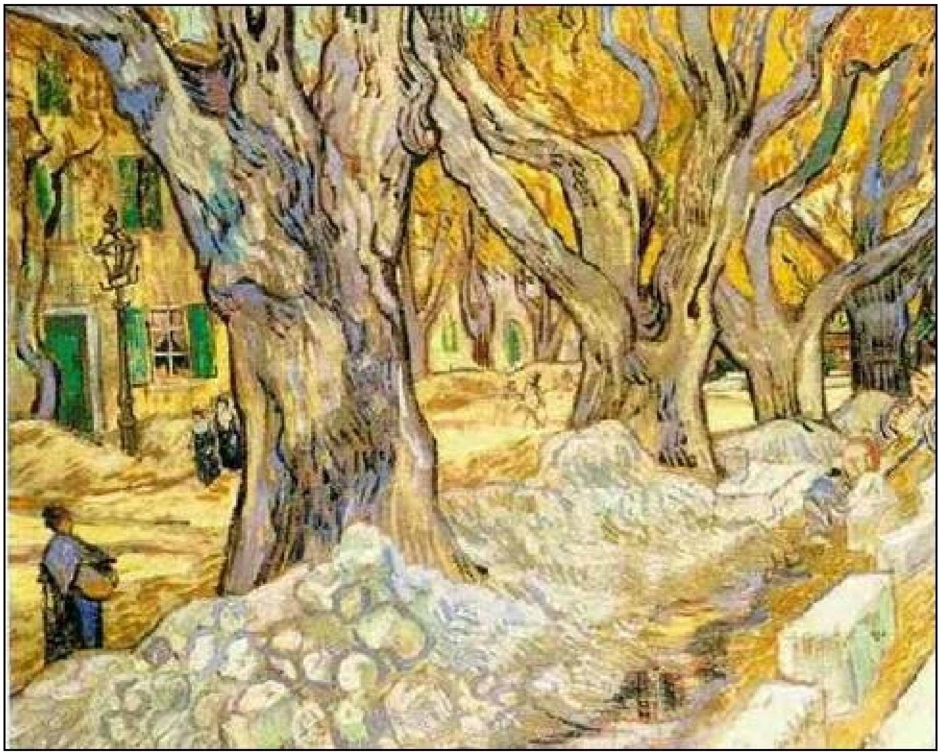
Olive Trees: Bright Blue Sky
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 63.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



Pine Trees against a Red Sky with Setting Sun
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889

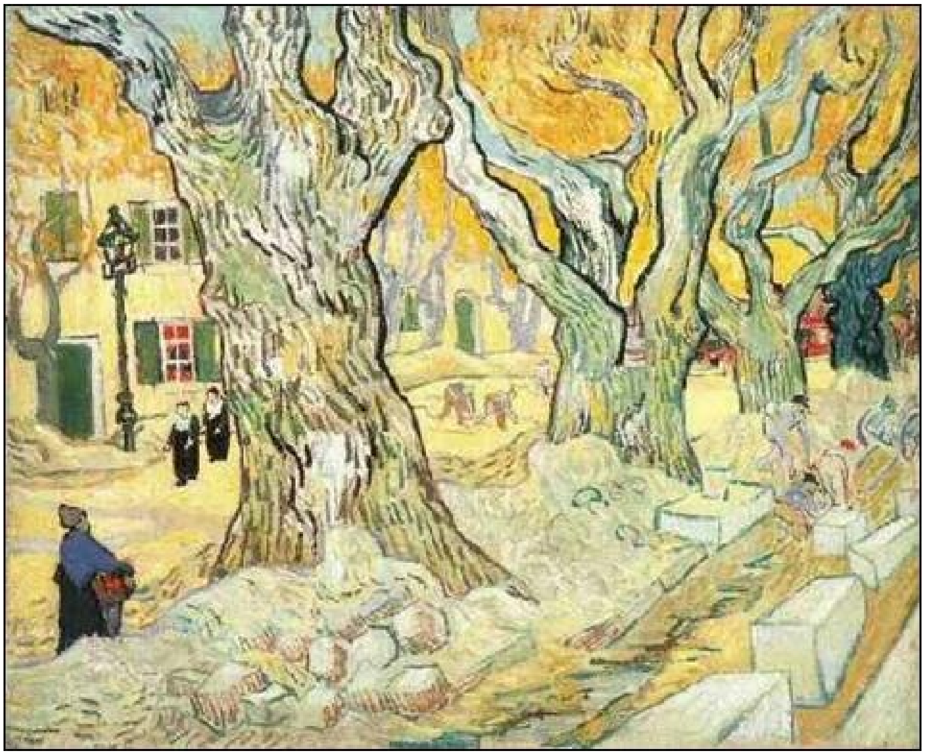


Pine Trees with Figure in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
58.0 x 45.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889

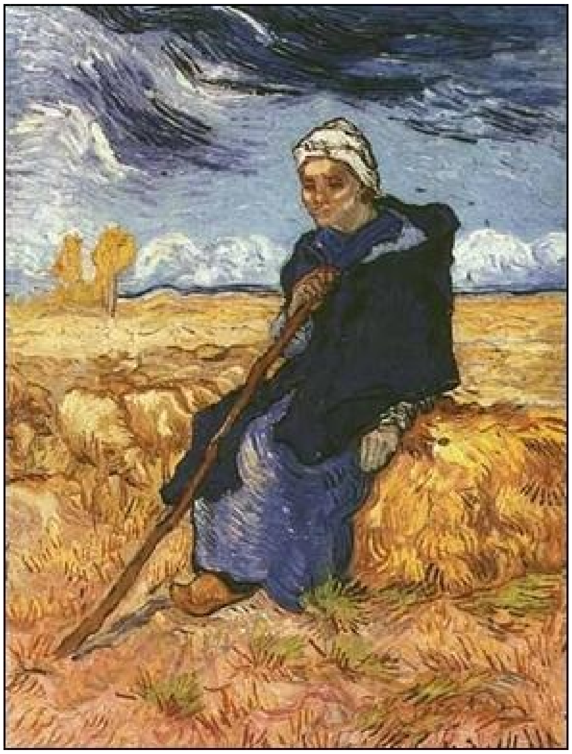


Road Menders, The

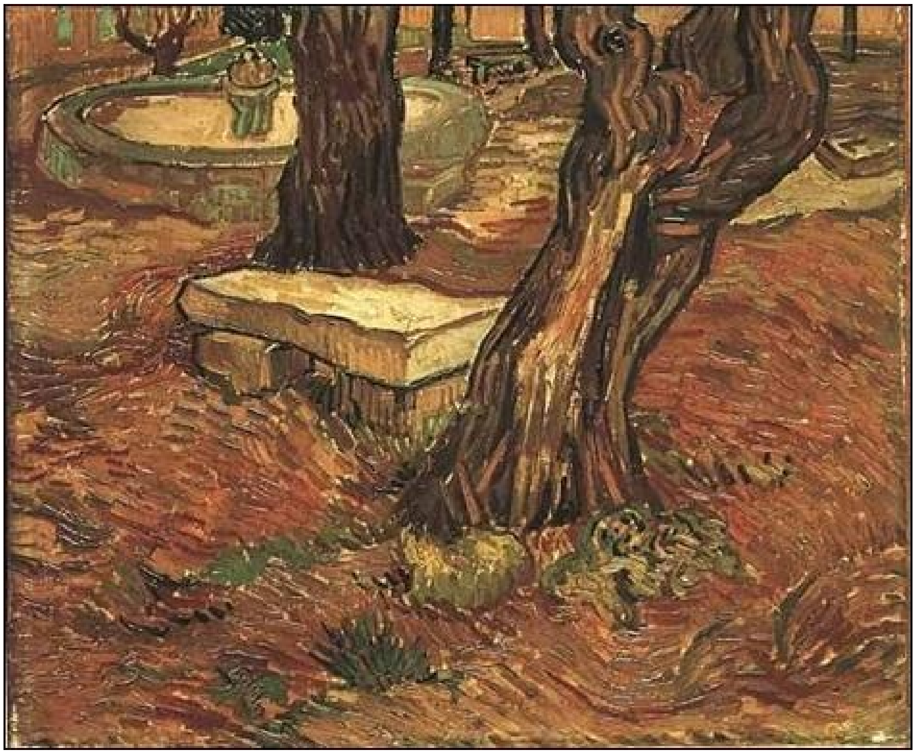
Oil on canvas
73.4 x 91.8 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



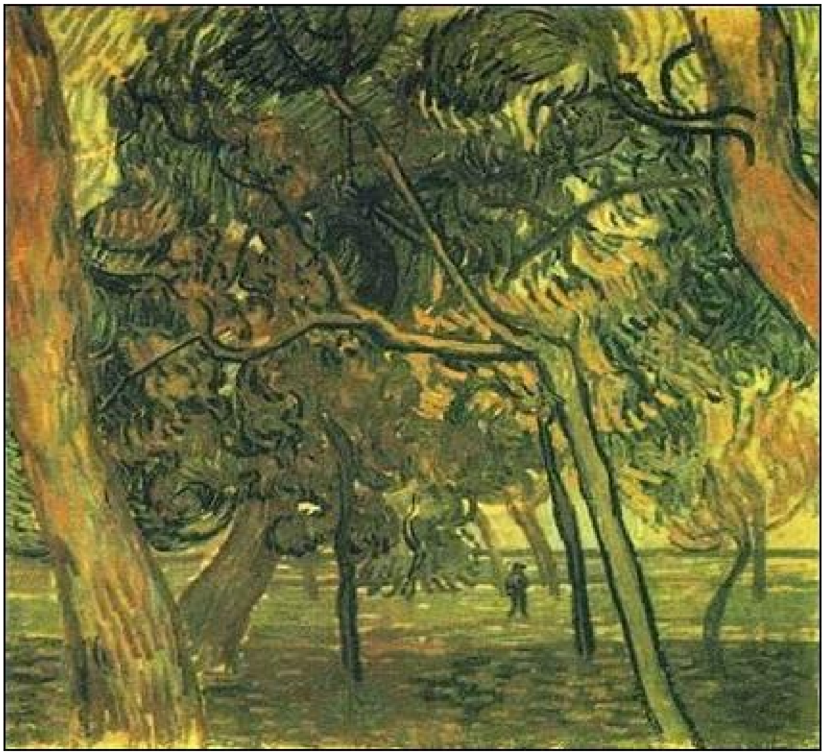
Road Menders, The
Oil on canvas
71.0 x 93.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



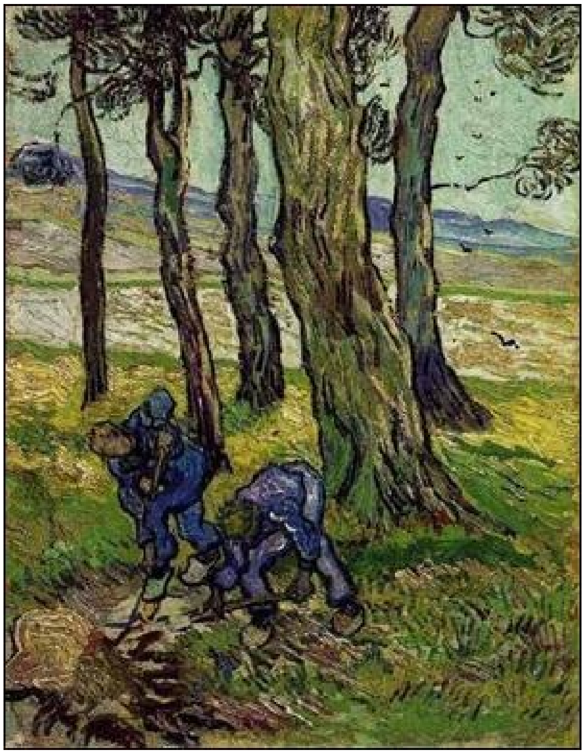
Shepherdess, The (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
52.7 x 40.7 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



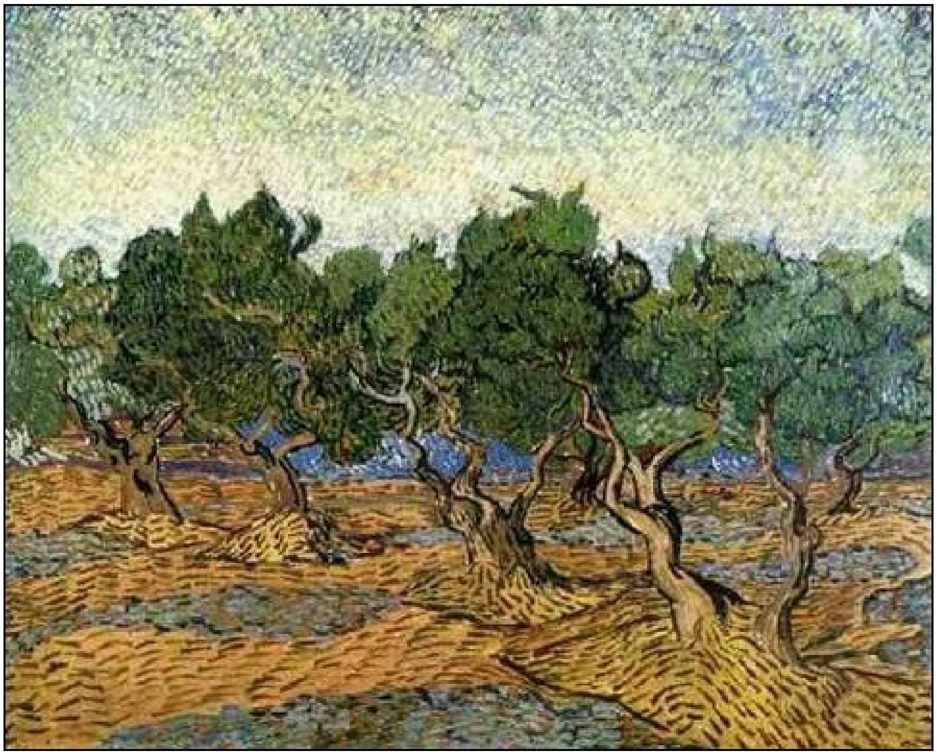
Stone Bench in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Oil on canvas
39.5 x 47.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



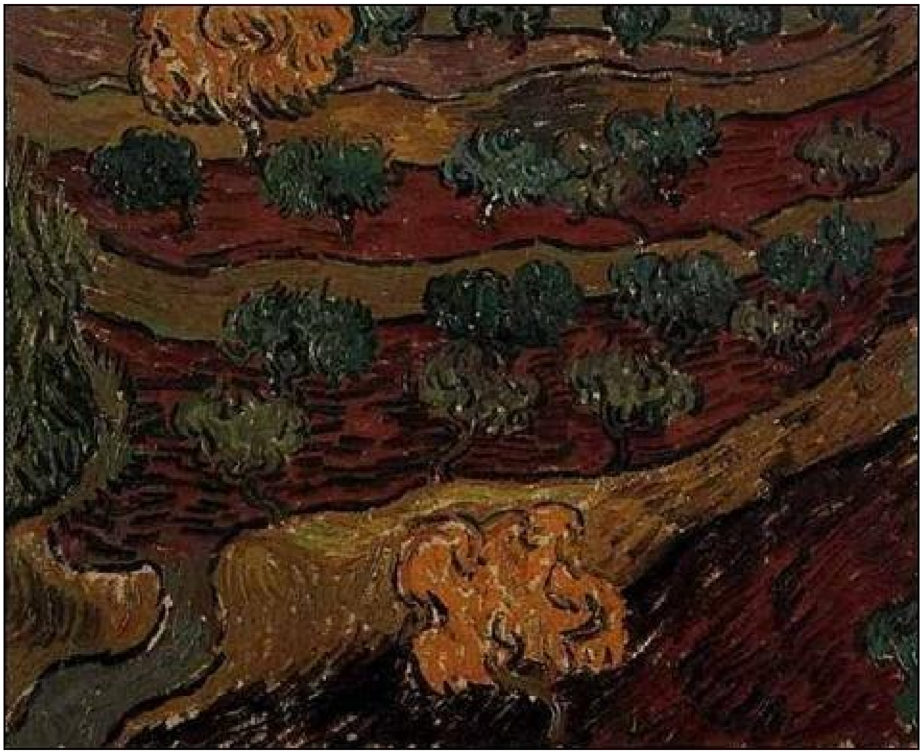
Study of Pine Trees
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 51.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November, 1889



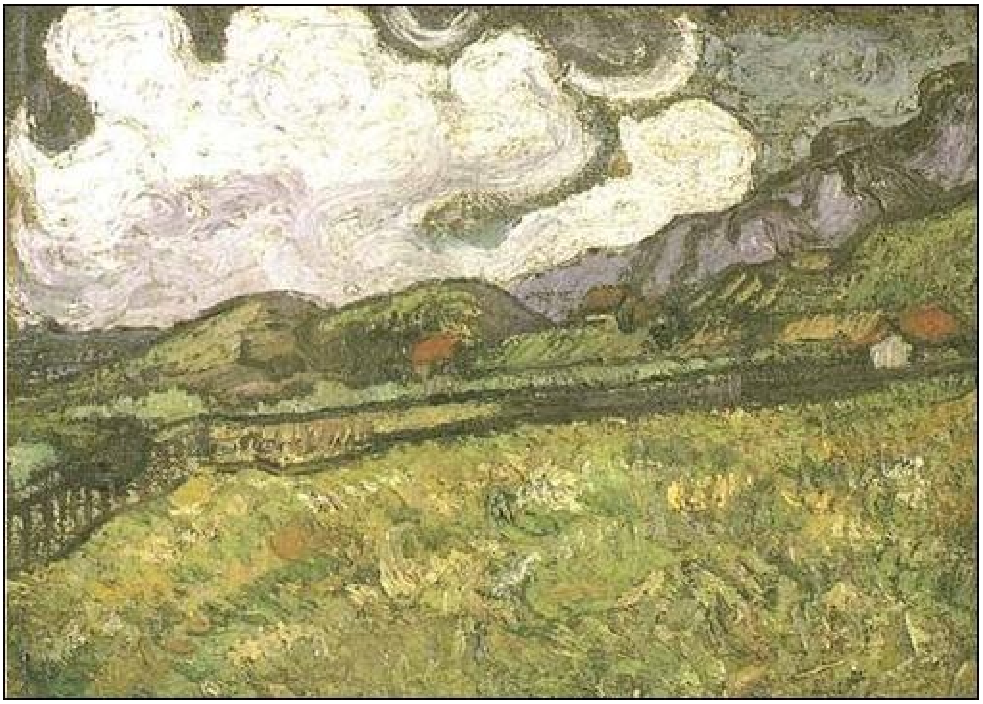
Two Diggers Among Trees
Oil on canvas
65.1 x 50.2 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November-December, 1889



Olive Grove
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November-December, 1889

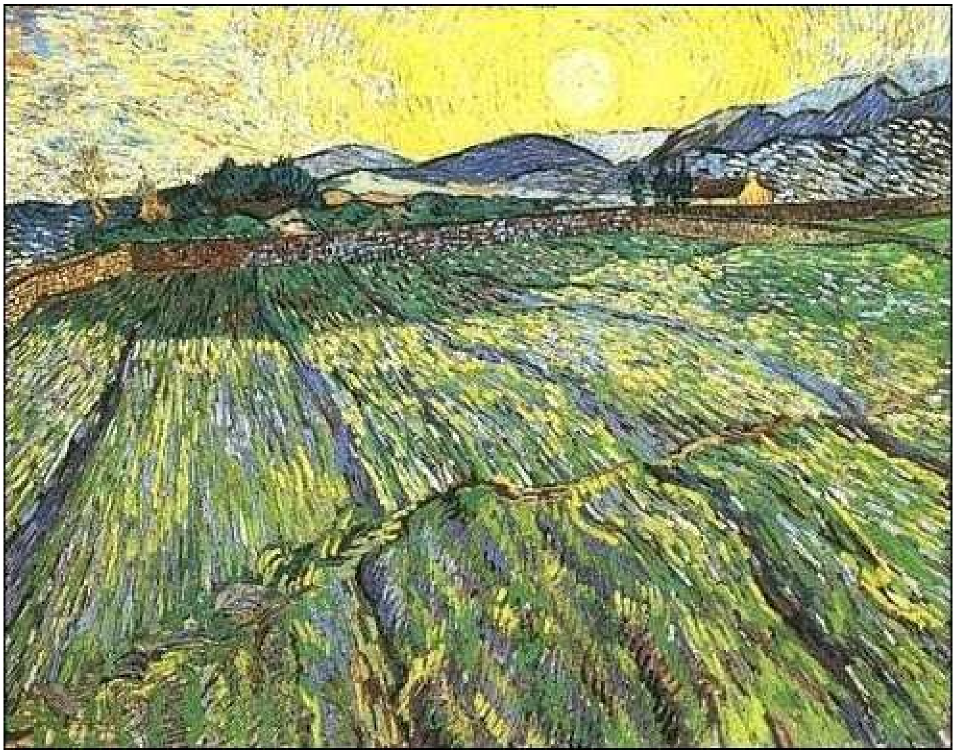


Olive Trees against a Slope of a Hill
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 40.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November-December, 1889

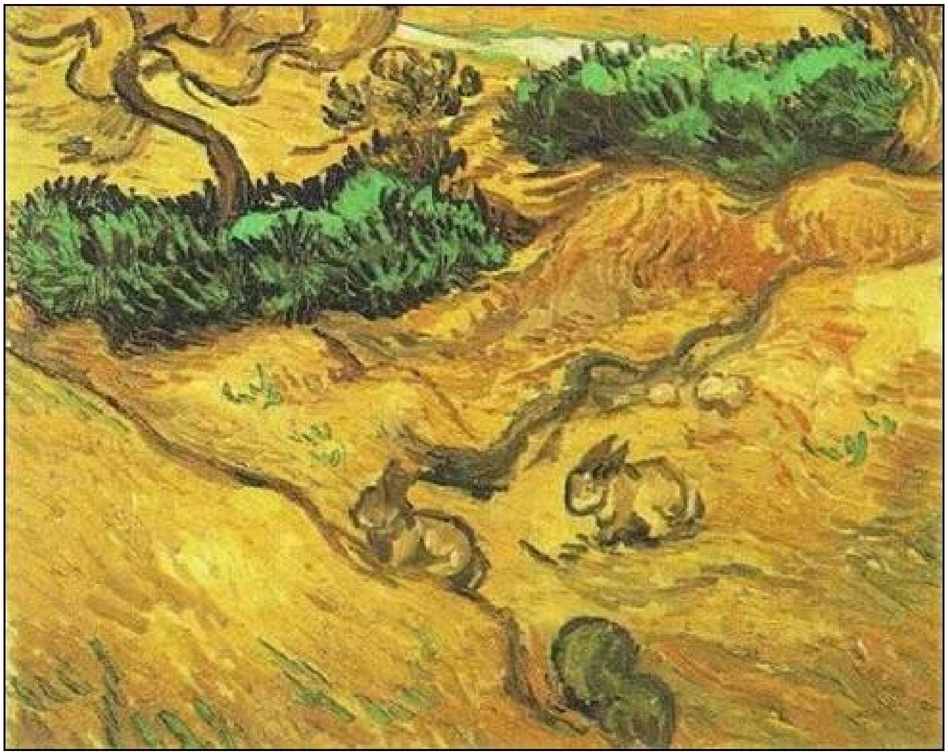


Wheat Field Behind Saint-Paul Hospital

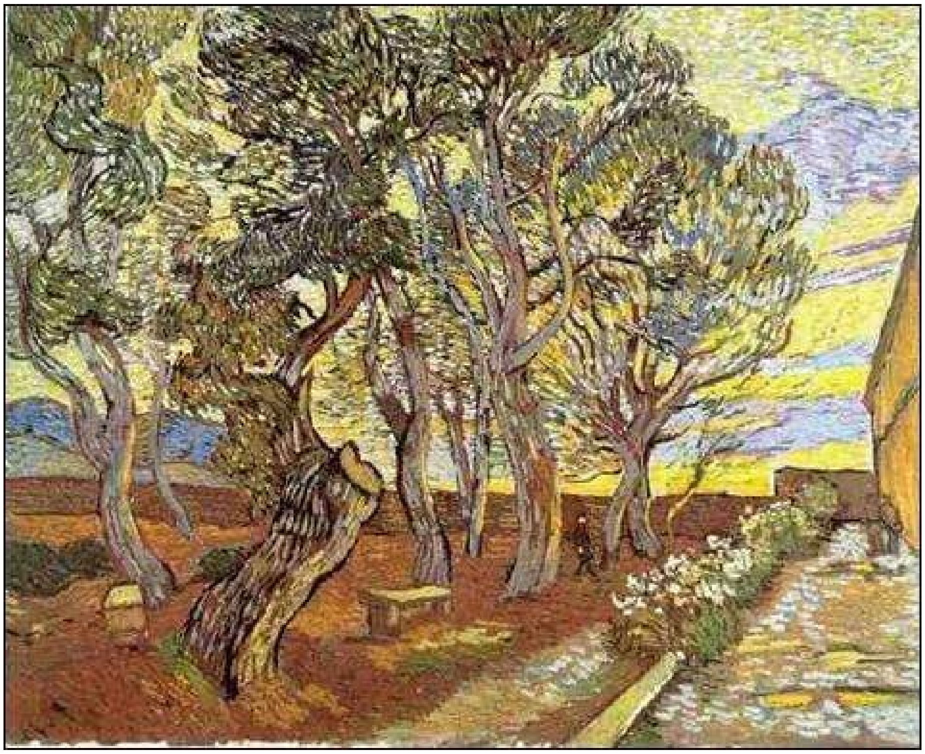
Oil on canvas
24.0 x 33.7 cm.
Saint-Rémy: November-December, 1889



Enclosed Field with Rising Sun
Oil on canvas
71.0 x 90.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

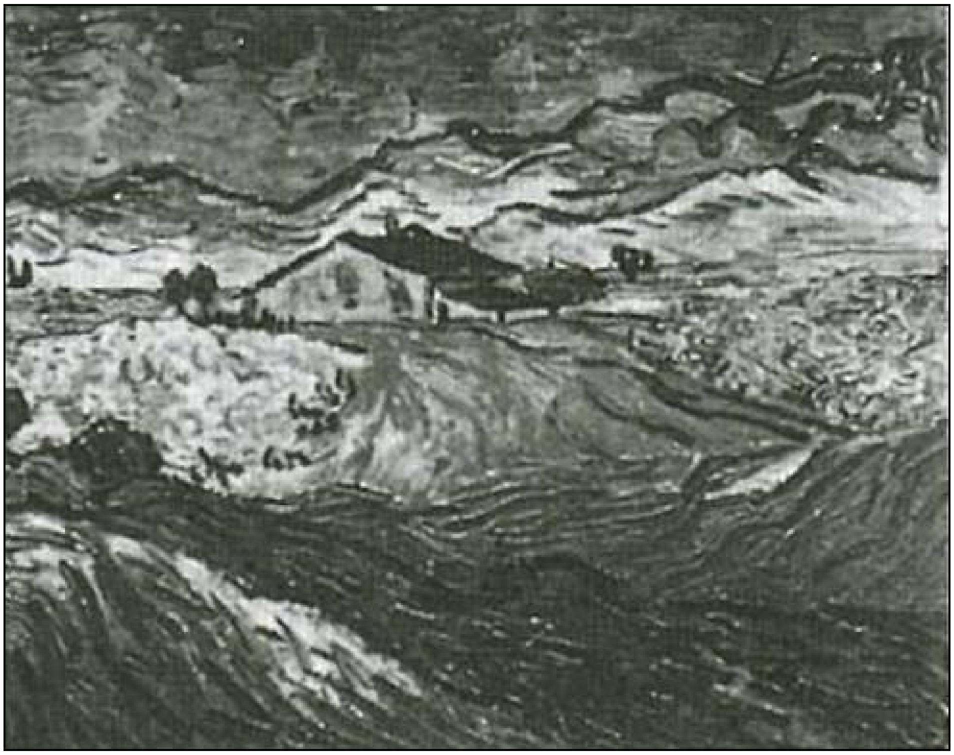


Field with Two Rabbits
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 40.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

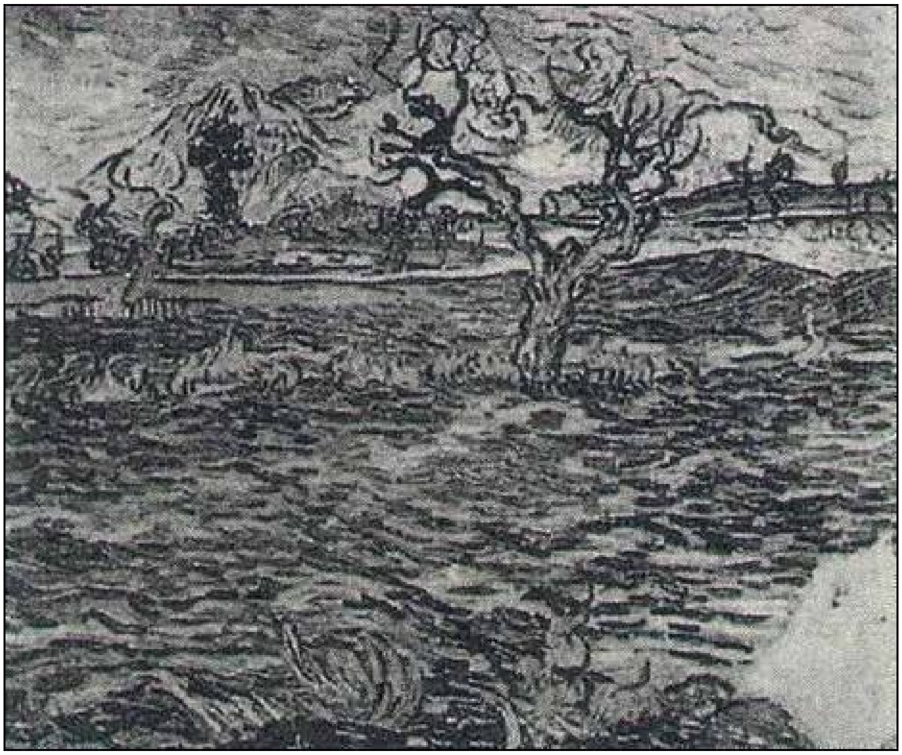


Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The

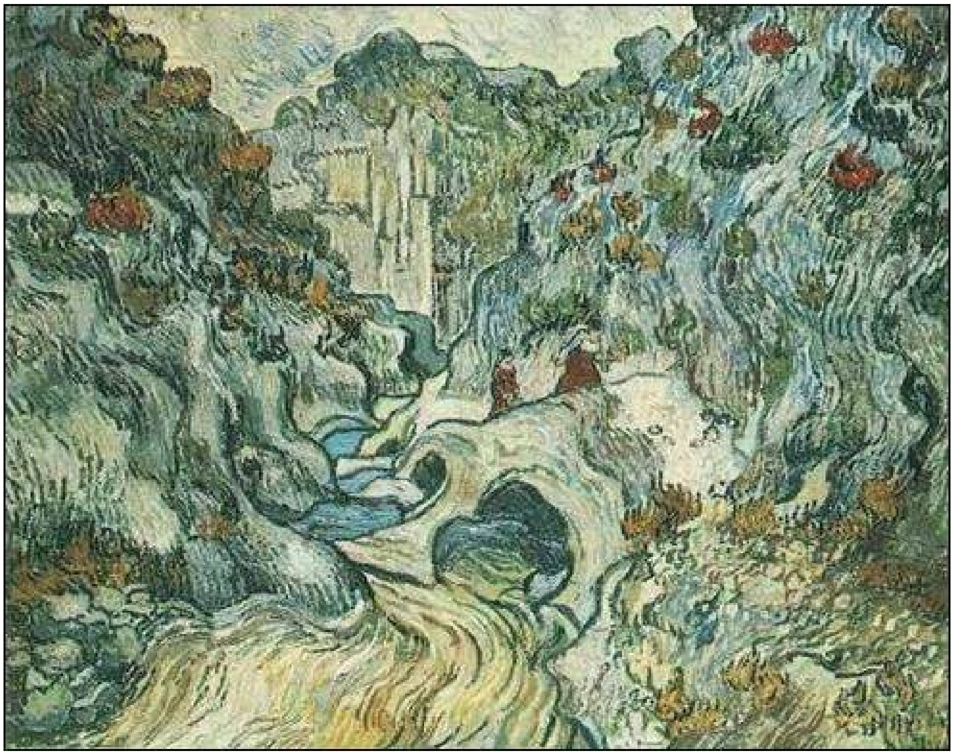
Oil on canvas
71.5 x 90.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889



Landscape in the Neighbourhood of Saint-Rémy
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

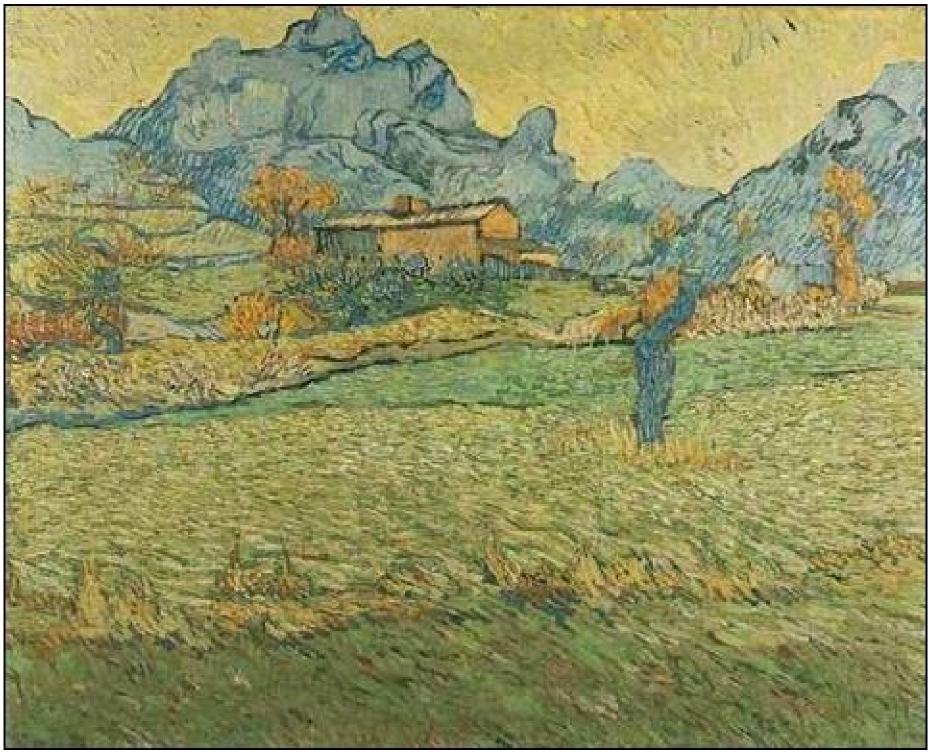


Landscape with Olive Tree and Mountains in the Background
Oil on canvas
45.0 x 55.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

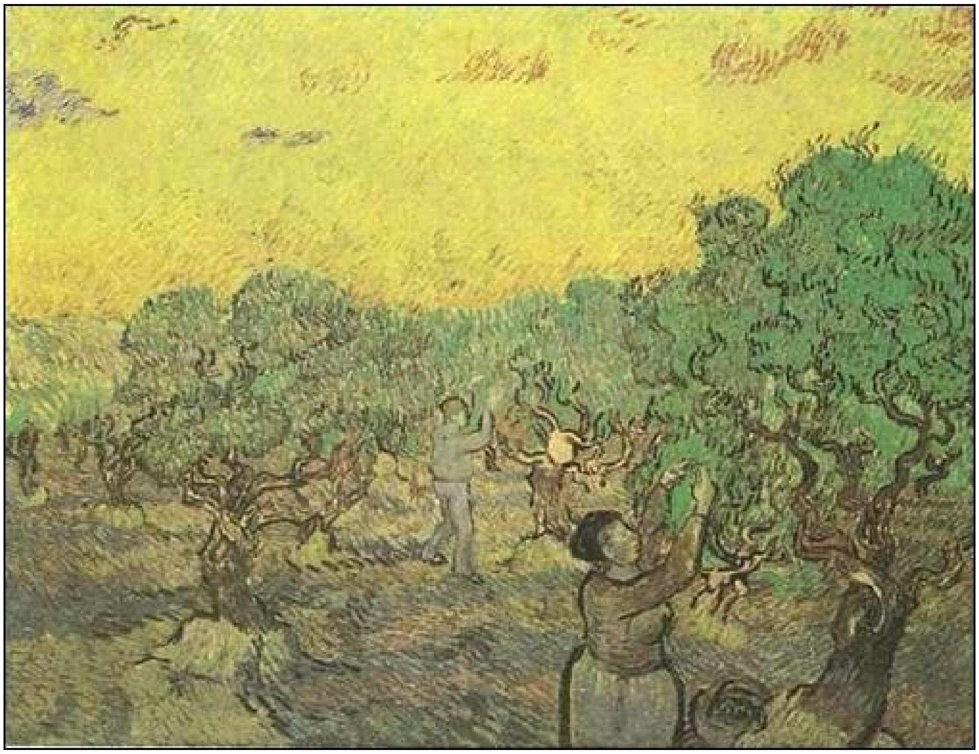


Les Peiroulets Ravine

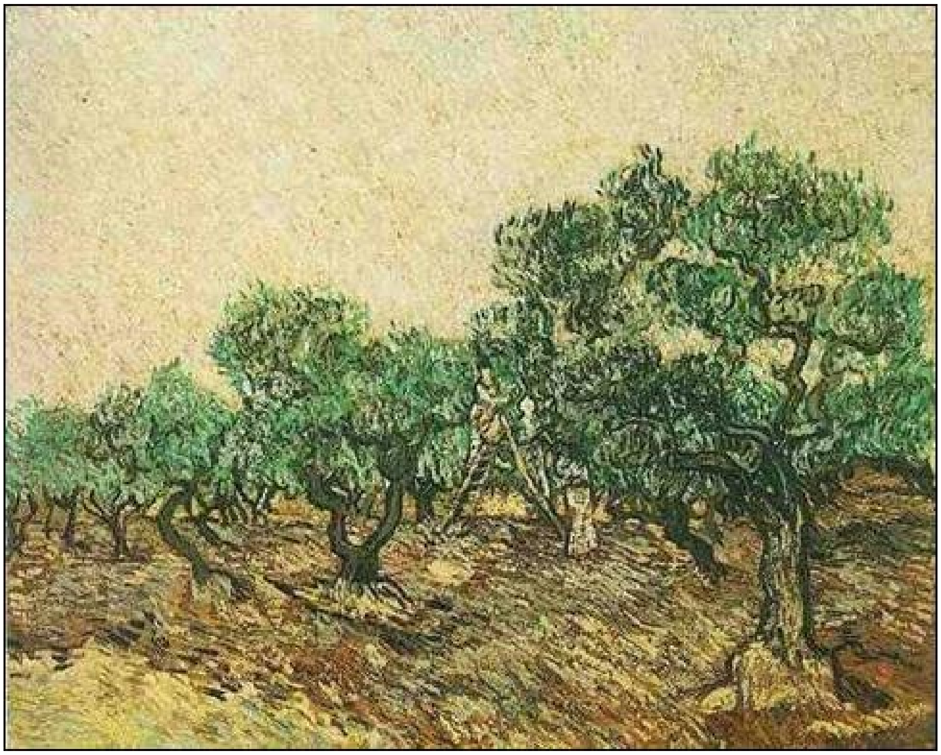
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889



Meadow in the Mountains: Le Mas de Saint-Paul, A
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 91.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

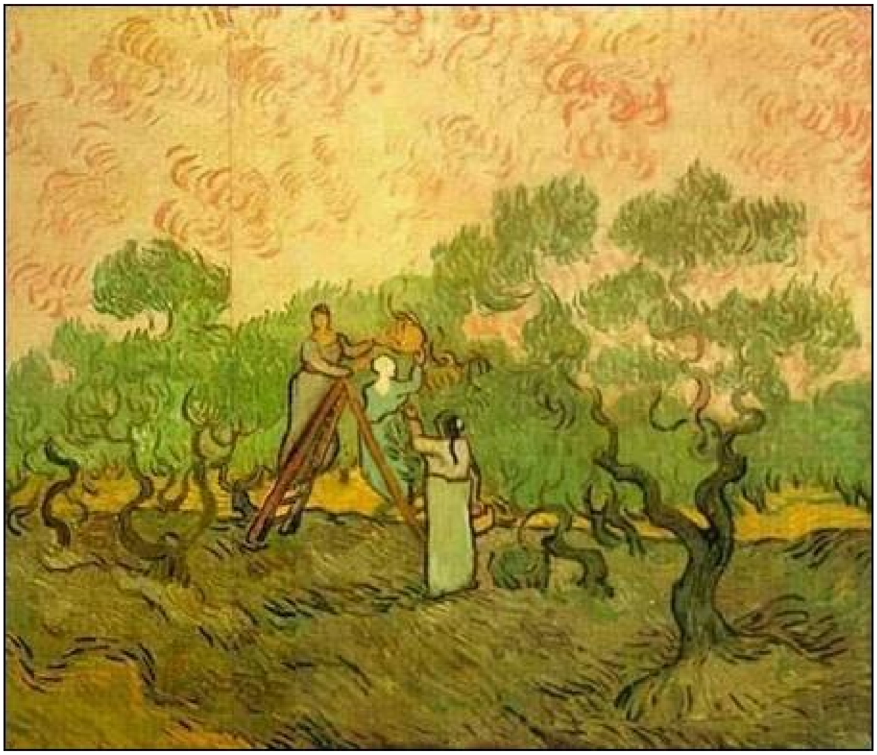


Olive Grove with Picking Figures
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

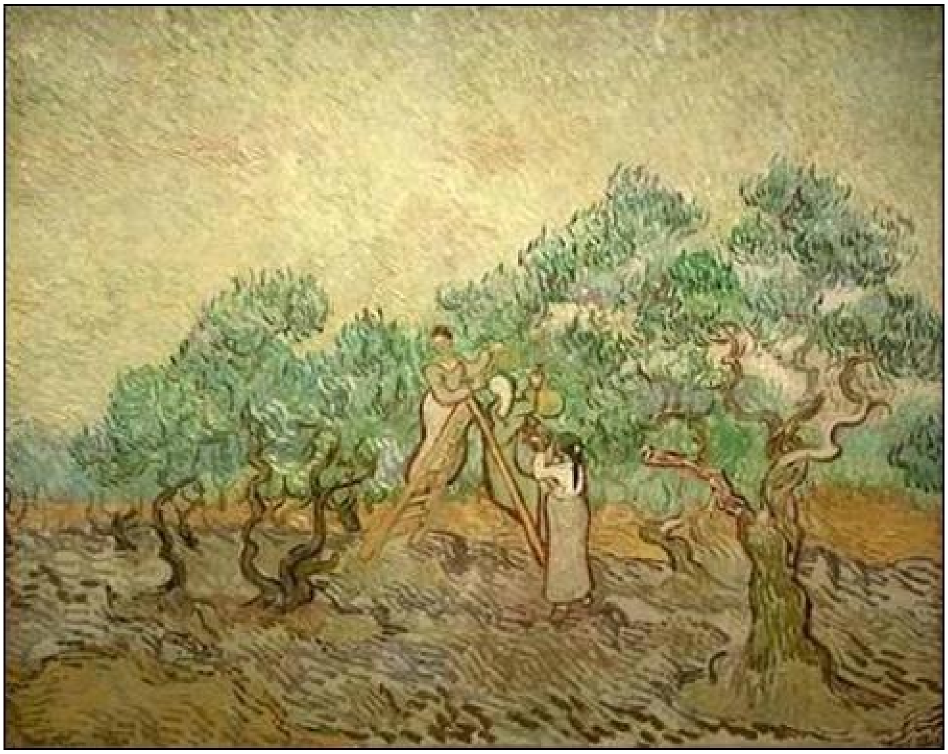


Olive Picking

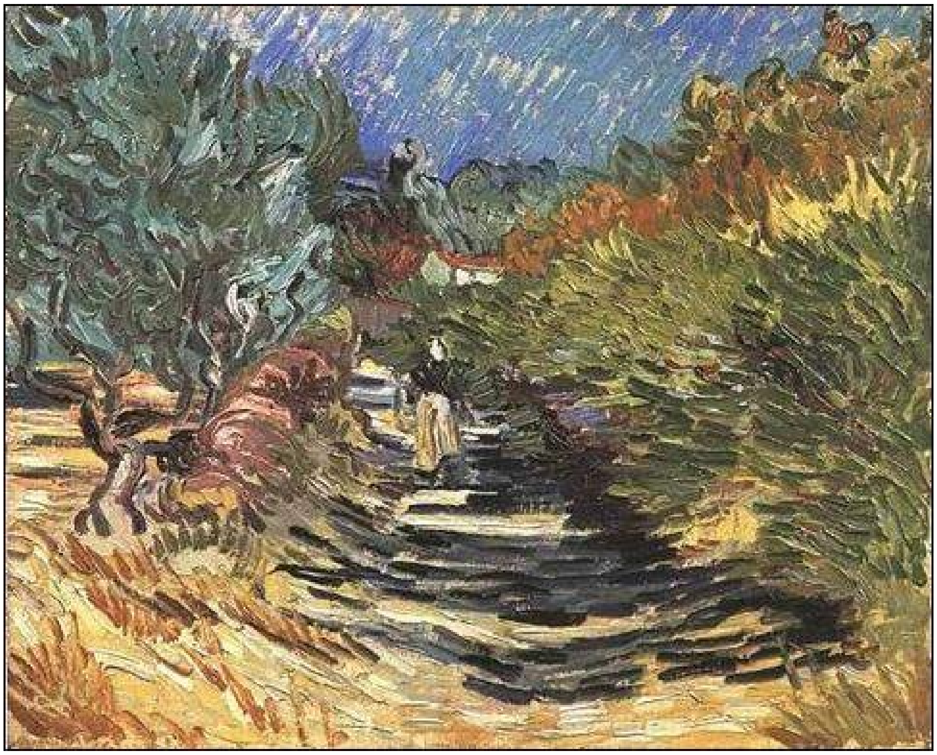
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889



Olive Picking
Oil on canvas
72.4 x 89.9 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

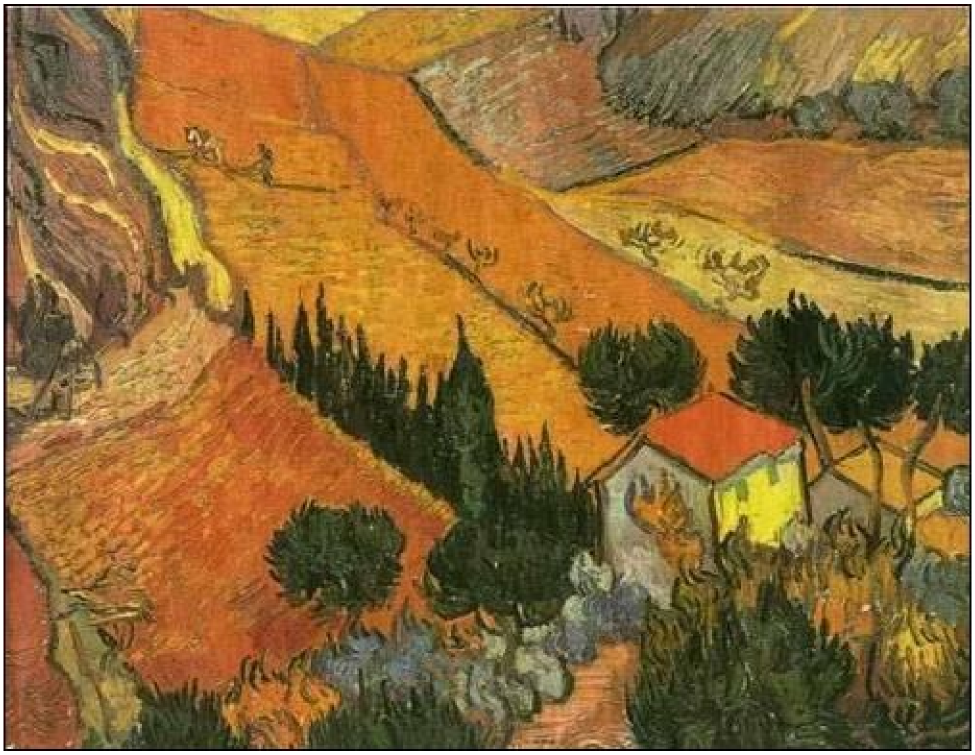


Olive Picking
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

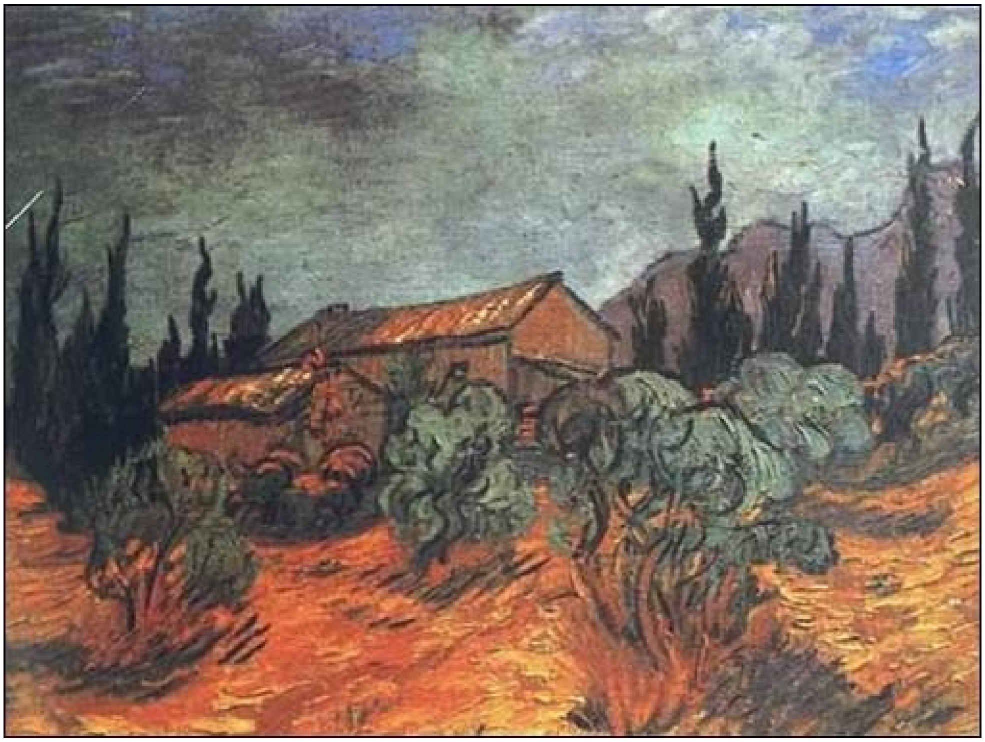


Road at Saint-Remy with Female Figure, A

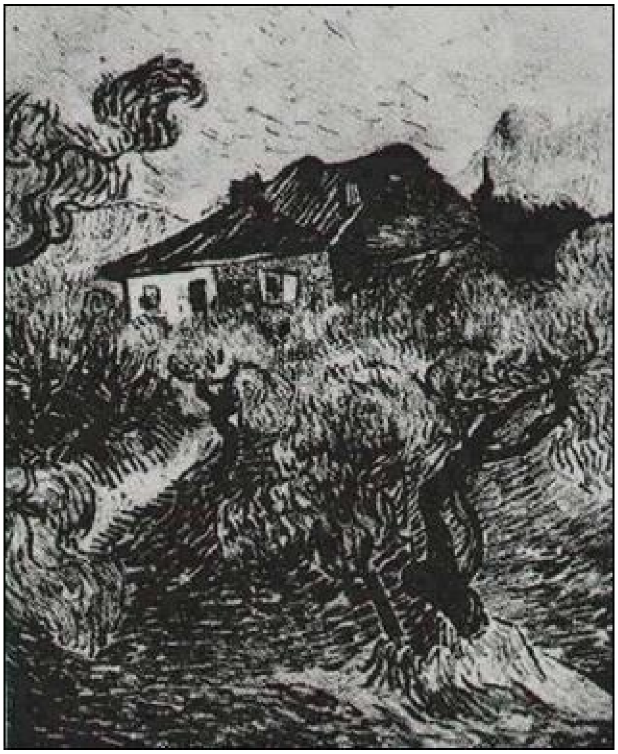
Oil on canvas
32.2 x 40.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889



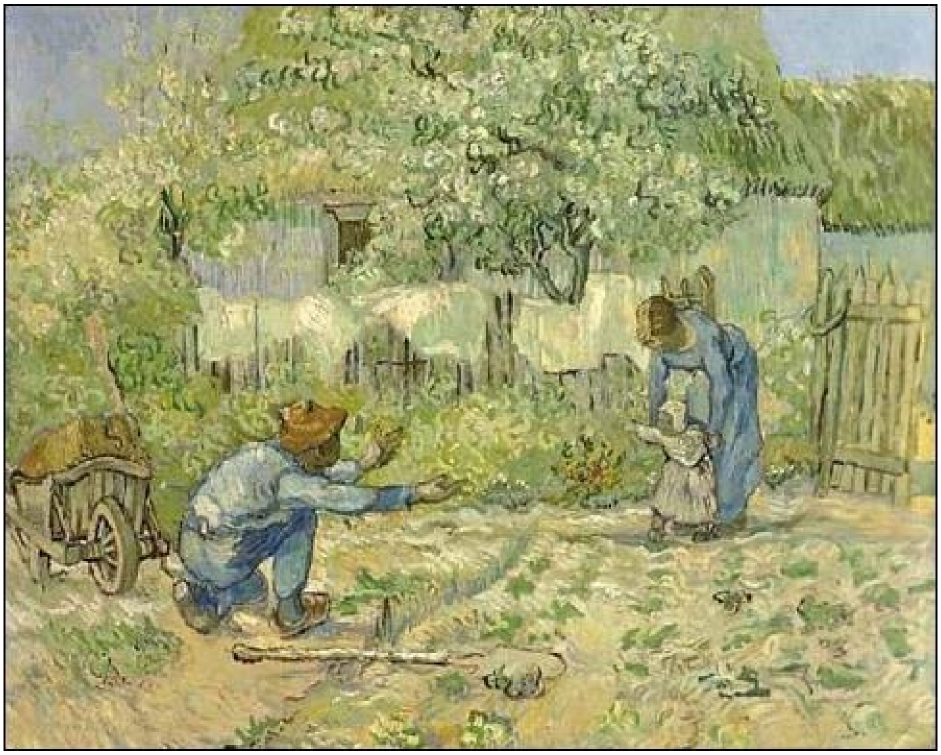
Valley with Ploughman Seen from Above
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 41.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889



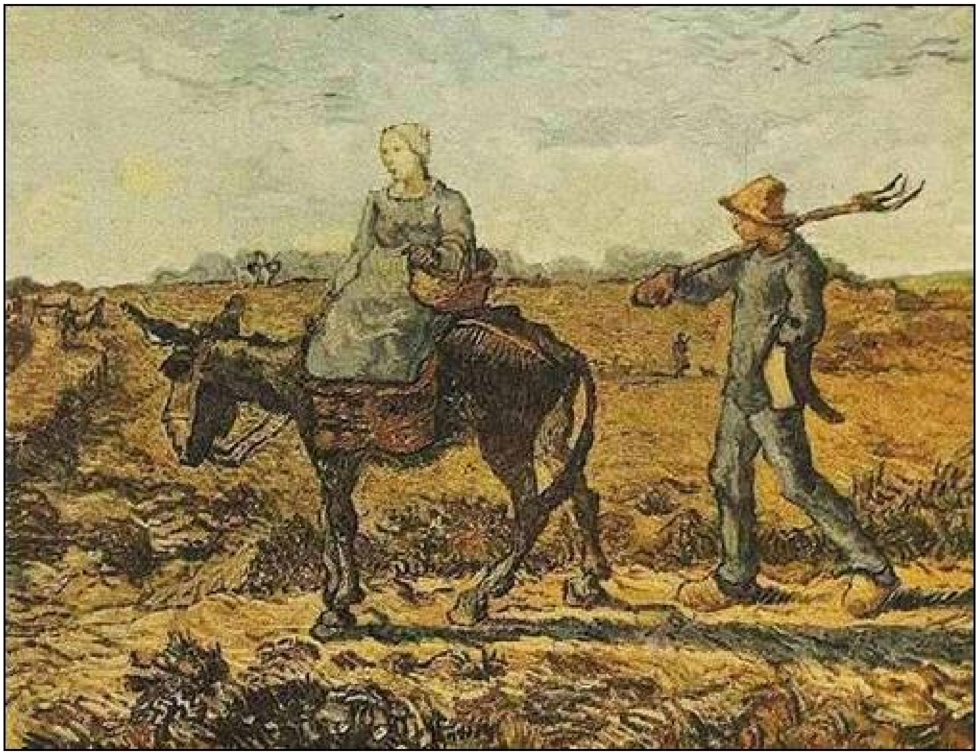
Wooden Sheds
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 60.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889



White Cottage Among the Olive Trees, The
Oil on canvas
70.0 x 60.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: December, 1889

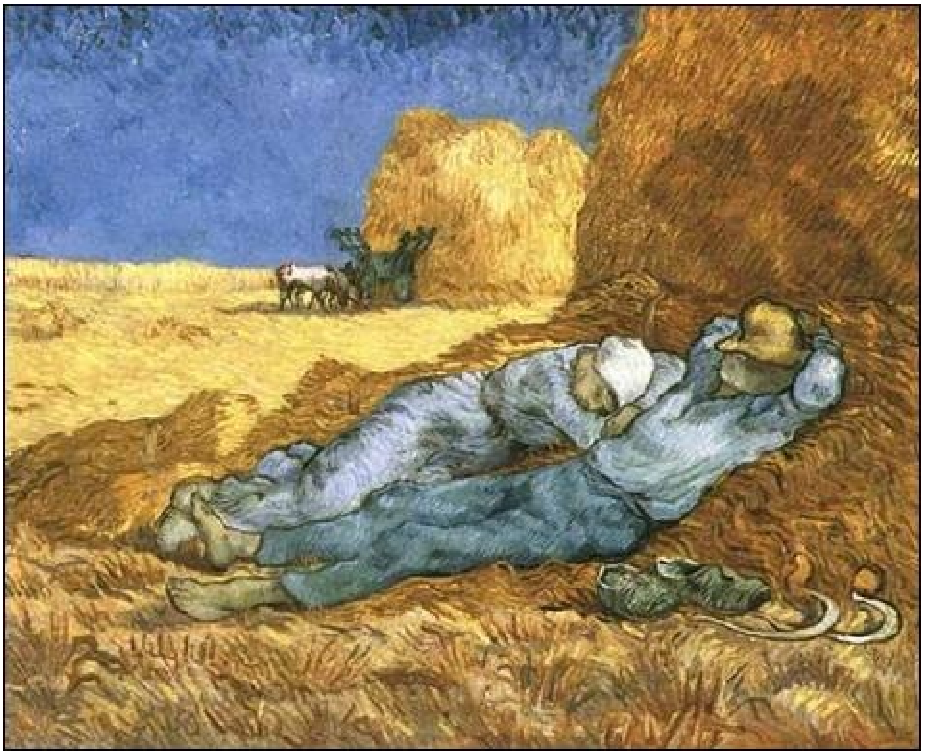


First Steps (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
72.4 x 91.2 cm.
Saint-Rémy: January, 1890

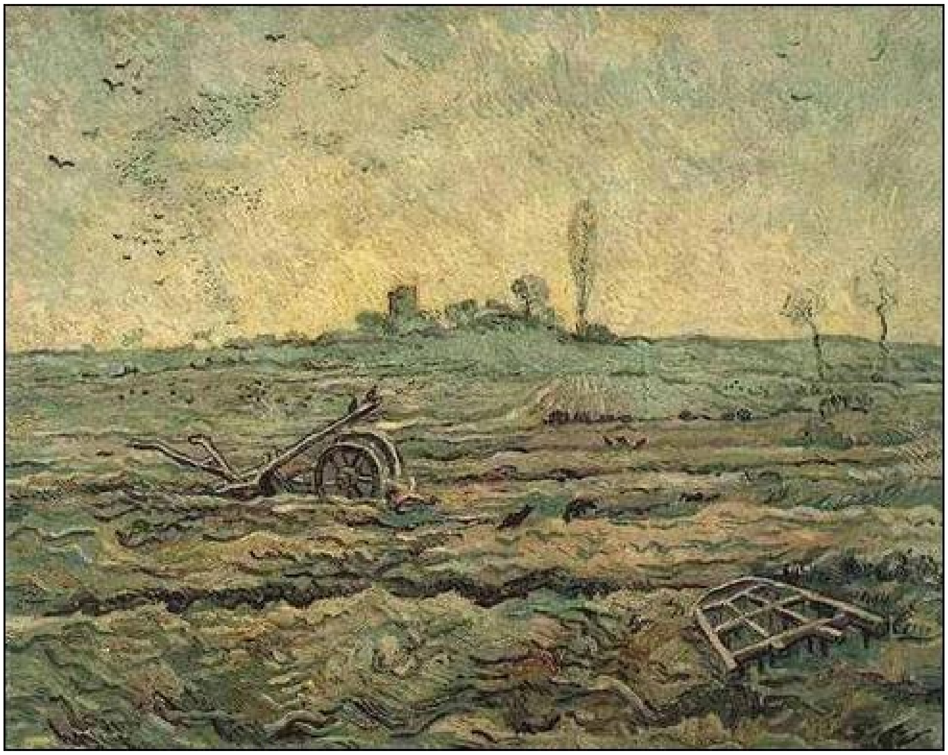


Morning: Peasant Couple Going to Work

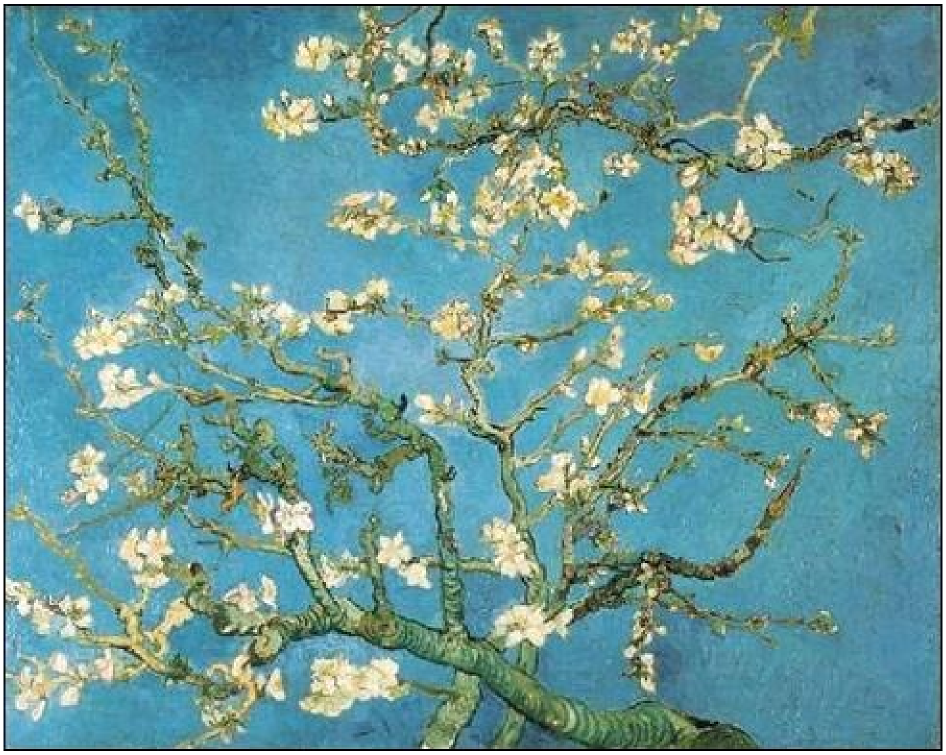
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: January, 1890



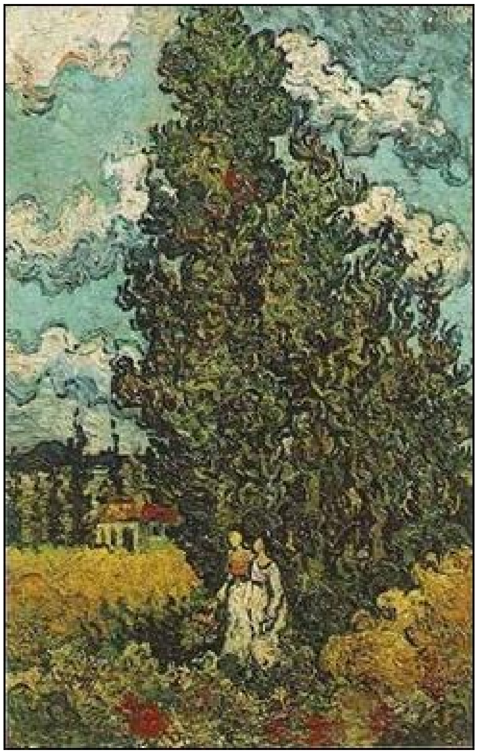
Noon: Rest from Work (after Millet)
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 91.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: January, 1890



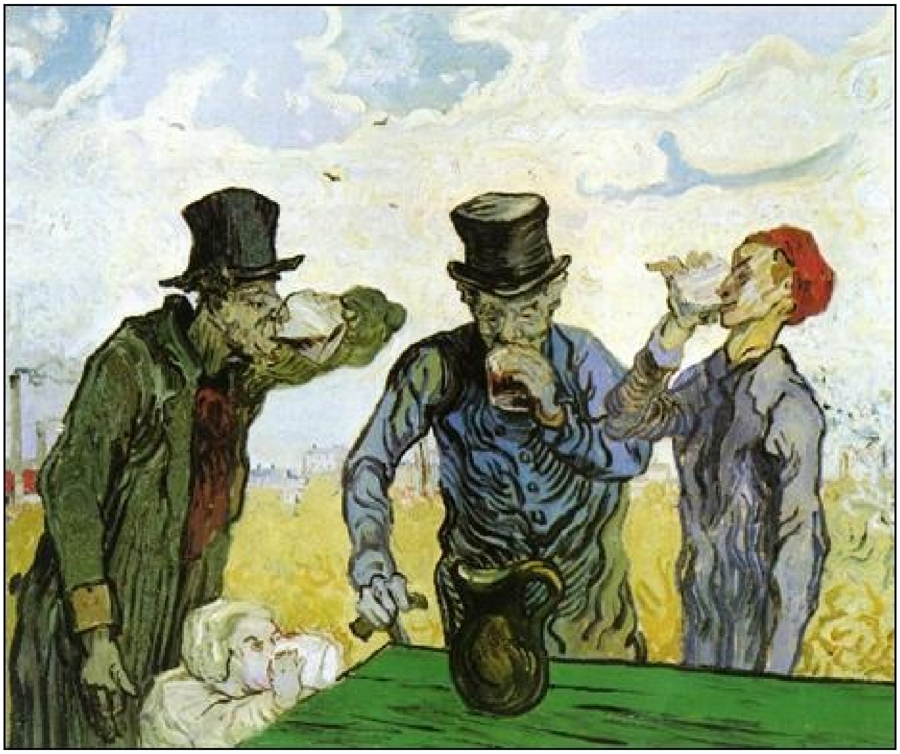
Plough and the Harrow (after Millet), The
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: January, 1890



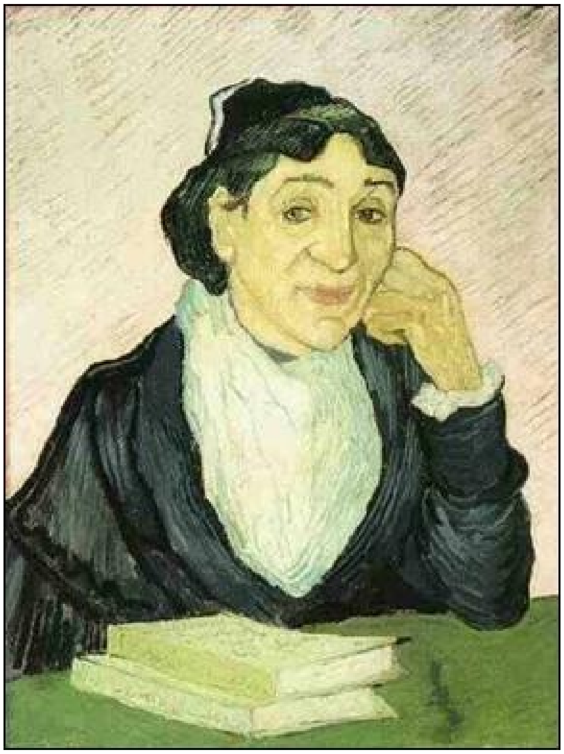
Blossoming Almond Tree
Oil on canvas
73.5 x 92.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



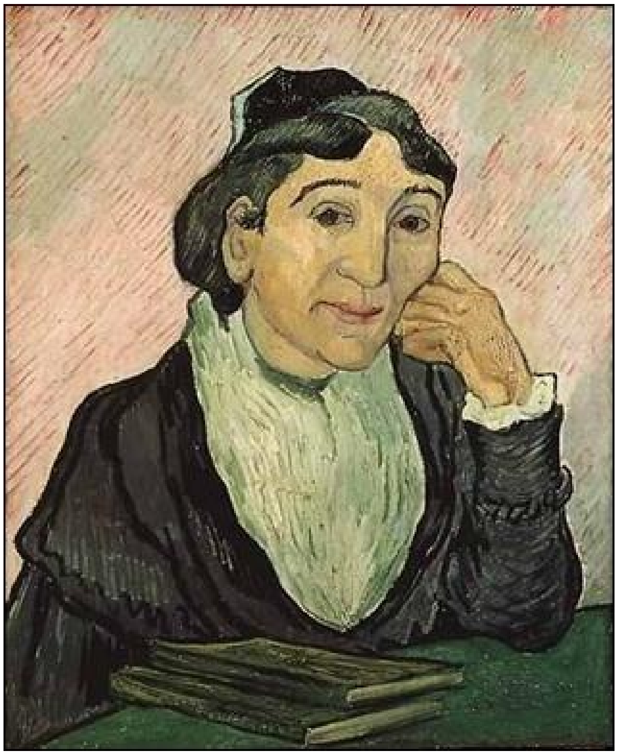
Cypresses and Two Women
Oil on canvas
43.5 x 27.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



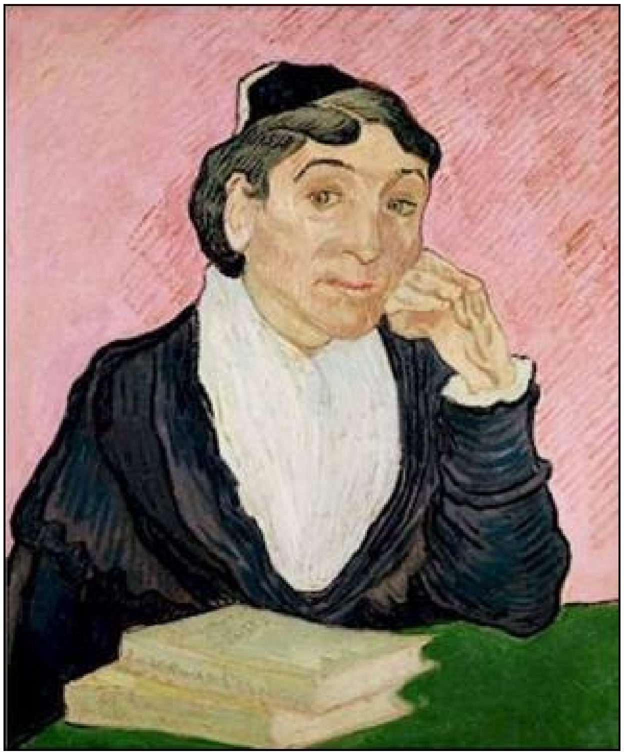
Drinkers, The
Oil on canvas
59.4 x 73.4 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



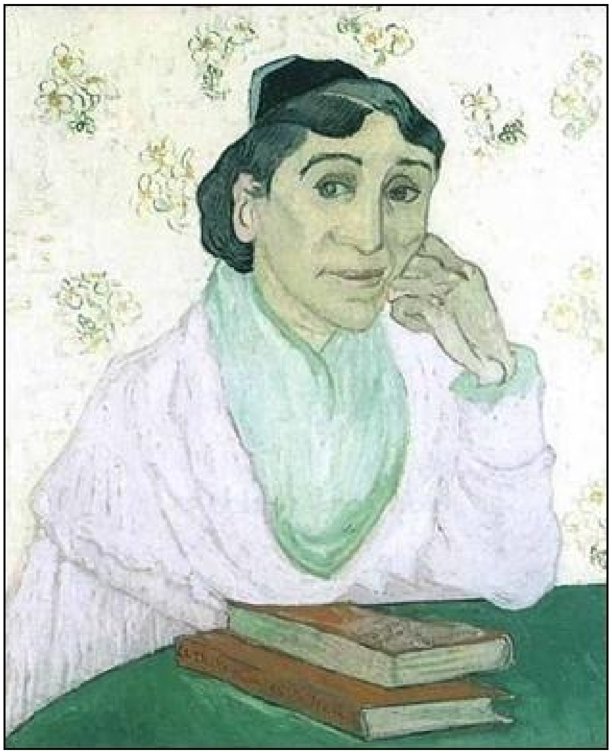
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 49.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



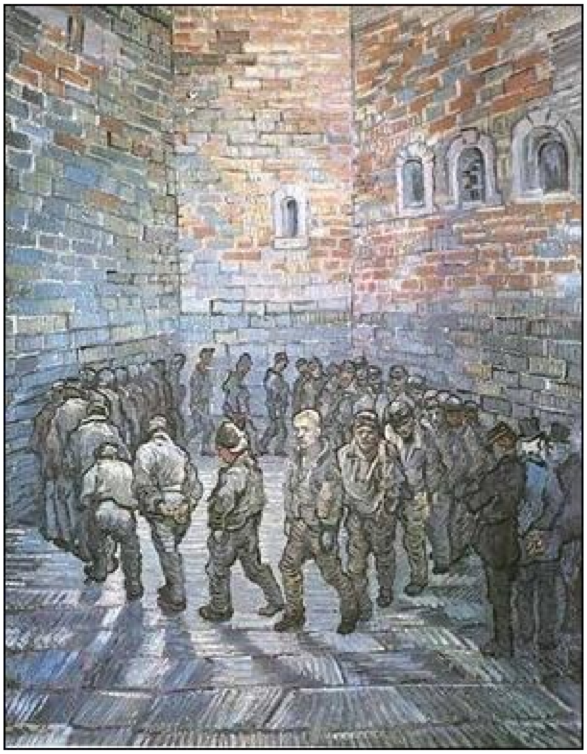
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 50.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



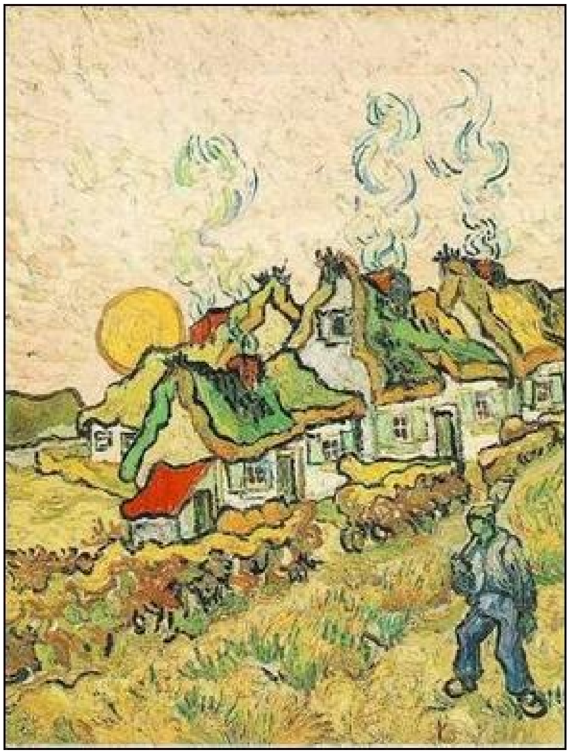
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 54.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



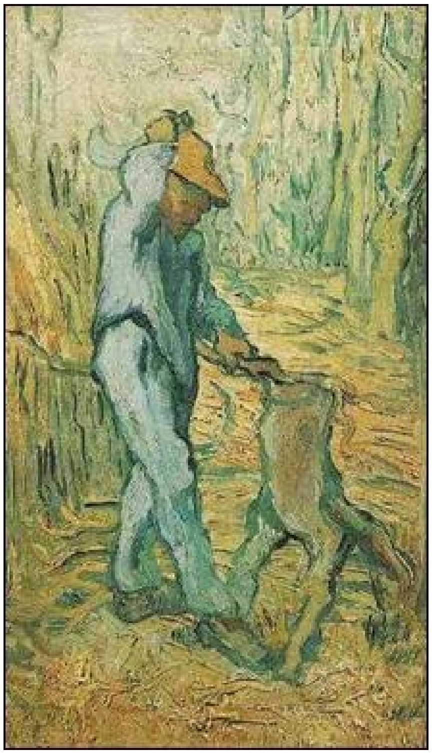
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
Oil on canvas
66.0 x 54.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



Prisoners Exercising (after Doré)
Oil on canvas
80.0 x 64.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: 10-11 February, 1890

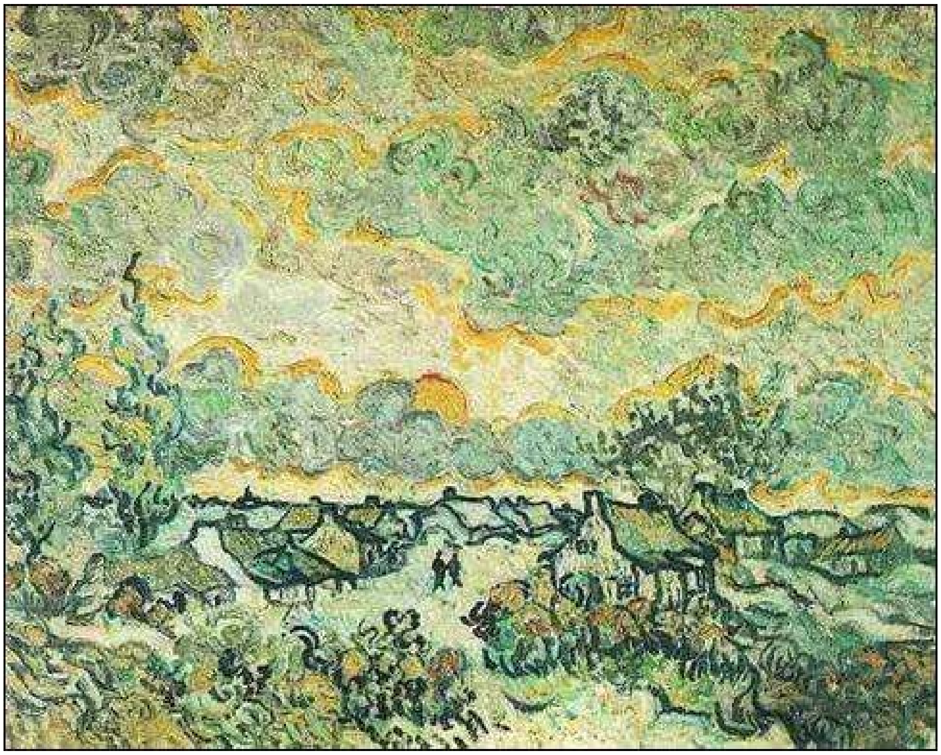


Thatched Cottages in the Sunshine: Reminiscence of the North
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 39.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890

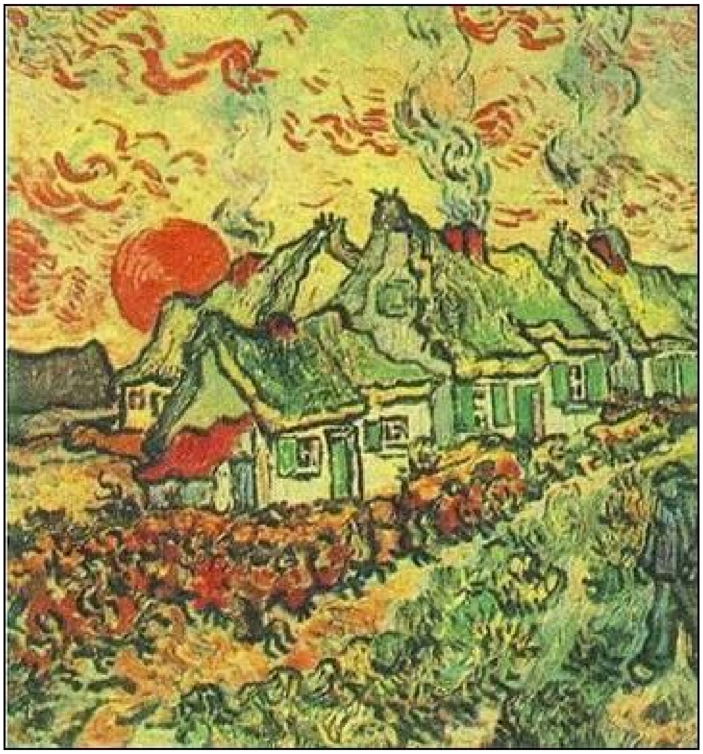


Woodcutter (after Millet), The

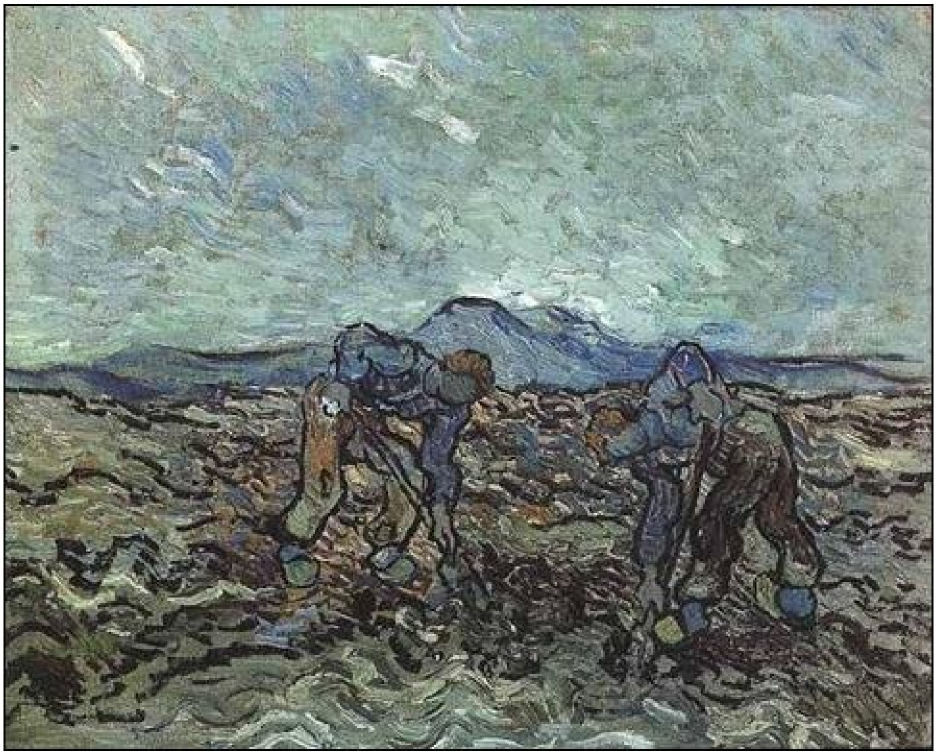
Oil on canvas
43.5 x 25.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: February, 1890



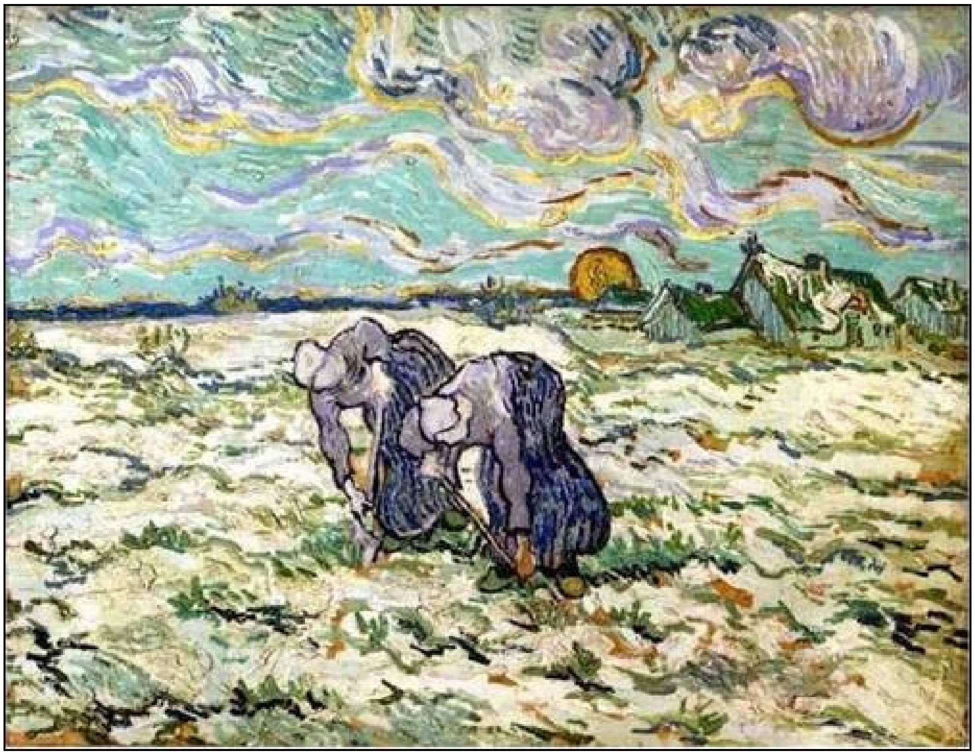
Cottages and Cypresses: Reminiscence of the North
Oil on canvas on panel
29.0 x 36.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: March-April, 1890



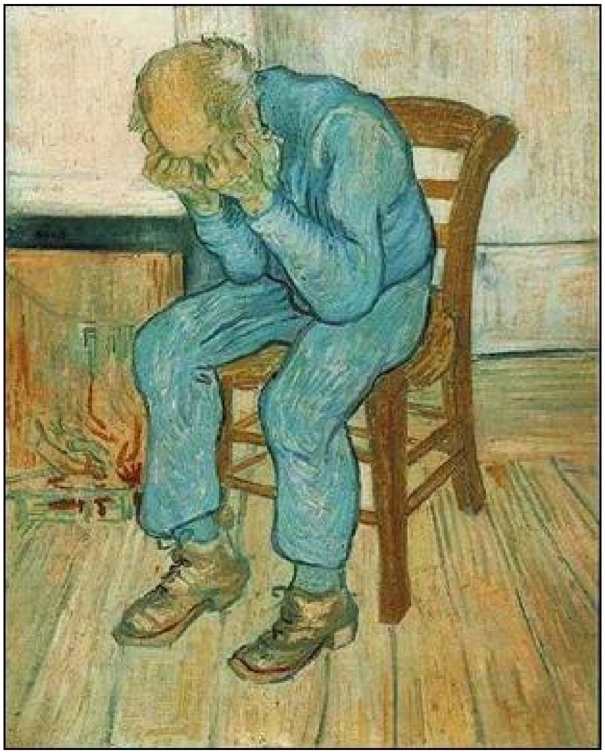
Cottages: Reminiscence of the North
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 43.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: March-April, 1890



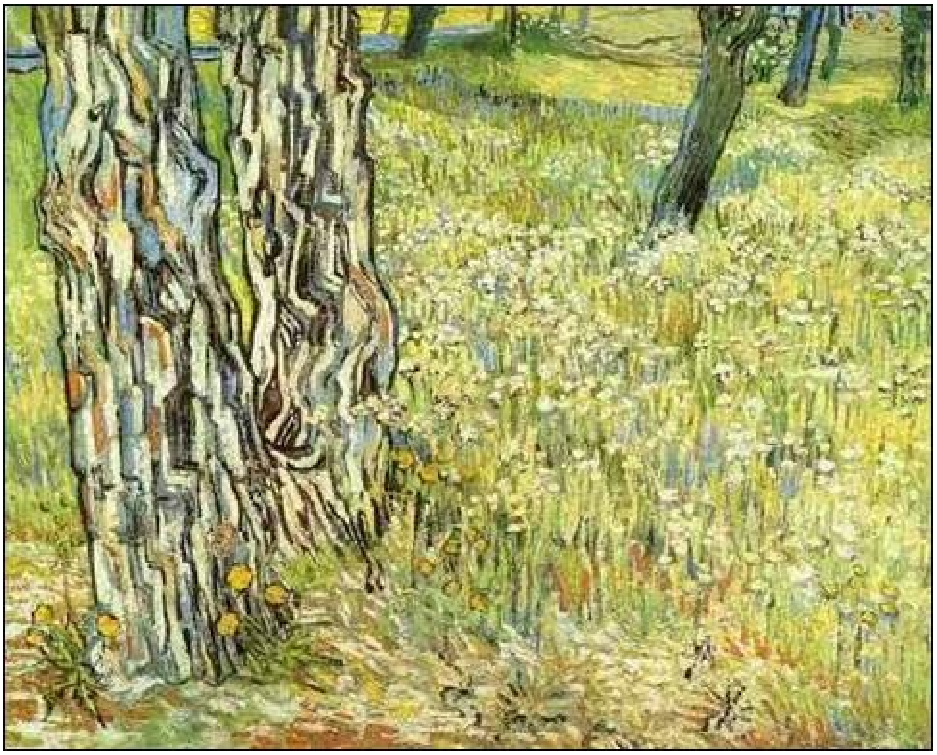
Peasants Lifting Potatoes
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 40.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: March-April, 1890



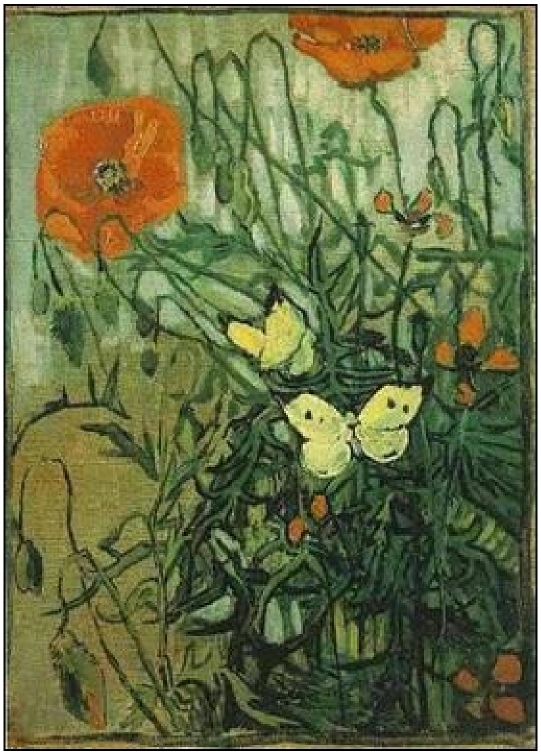
Two Peasant Women Digging in Field with Snow
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 64.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: March-April, 1890



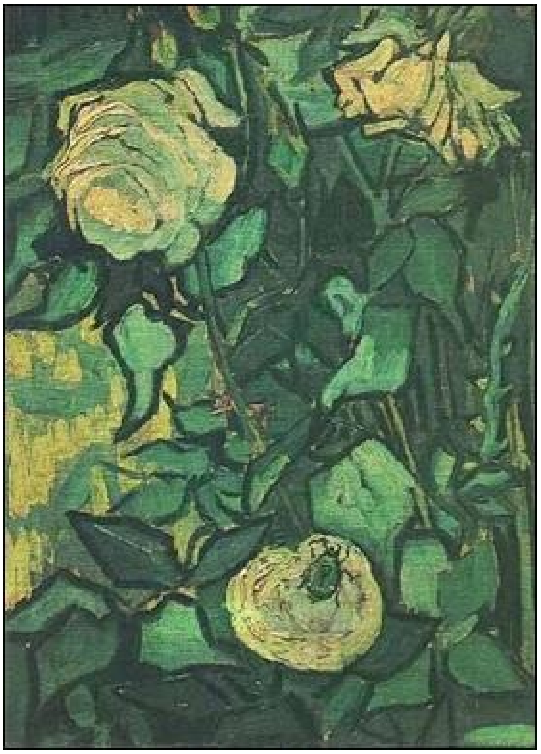
Old Man in Sorrow (On the Threshold of Eternity)
Oil on canvas
81.0 x 65.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: April-May, 1890



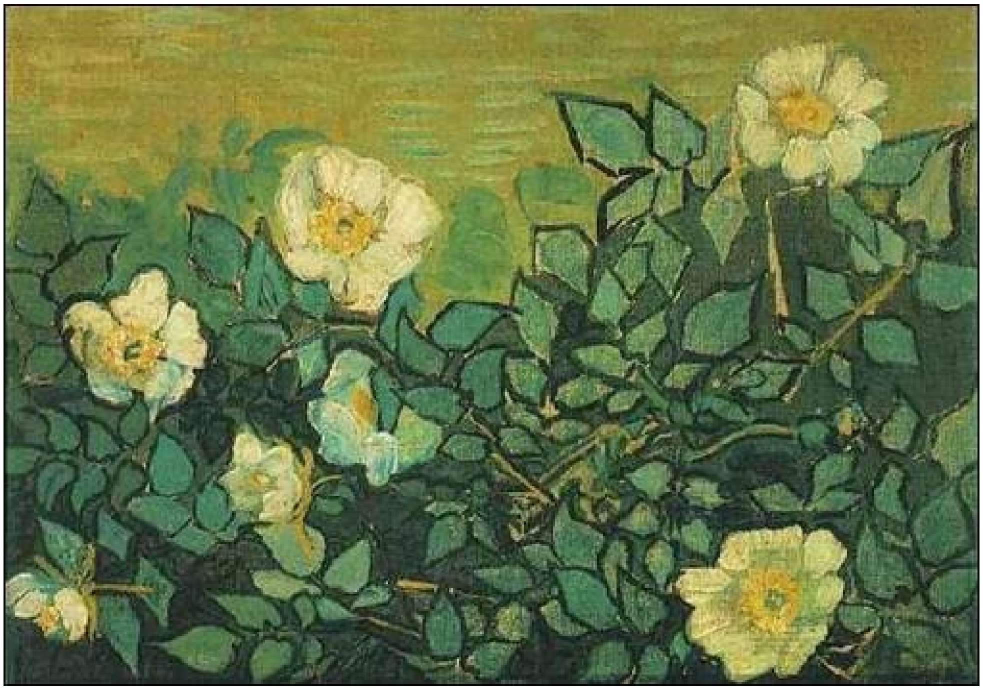
Pine Trees and Dandelions in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 90.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: April-May, 1890



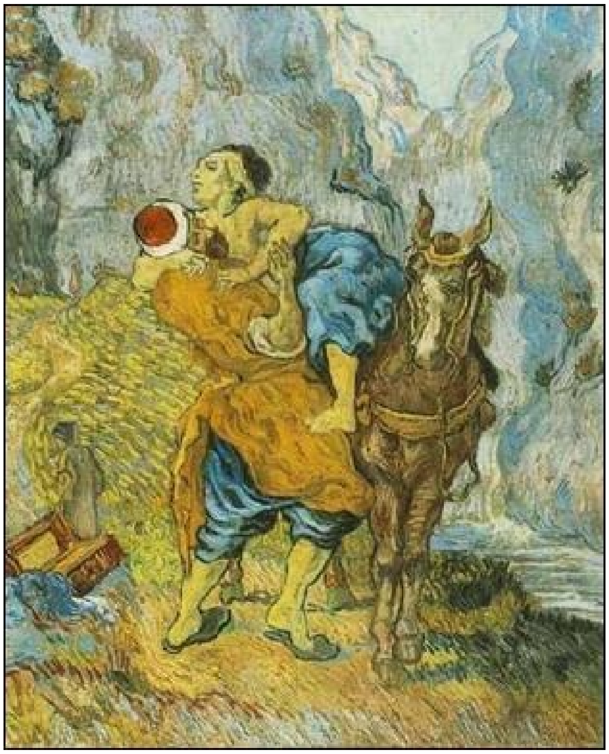
Poppies and Butterflies
Oil on canvas
34.5 x 25.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: April-May, 1890



Roses and Beetle
Oil on canvas
33.5 x 24.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: April-May, 1890

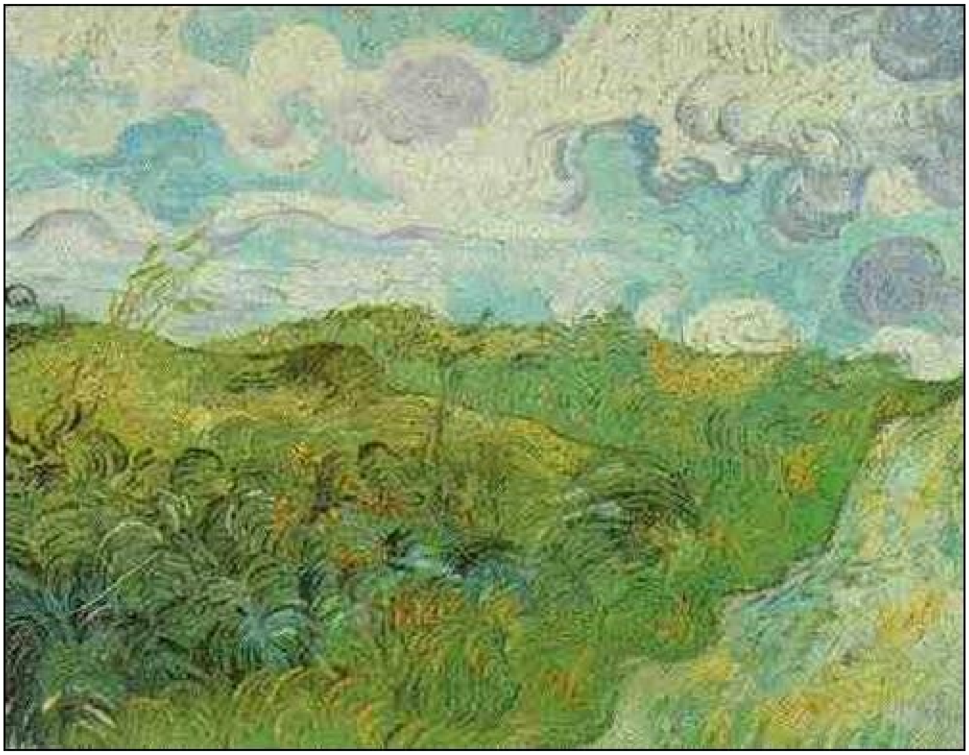


Wild Roses
Oil on canvas
24.5 x 33.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: April-May, 1890

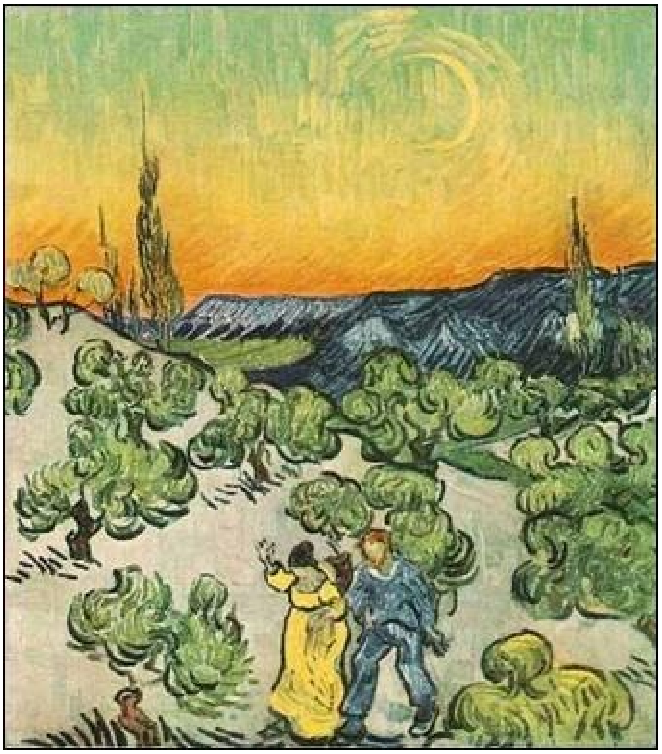


Good Samaritan (after Delacroix), The

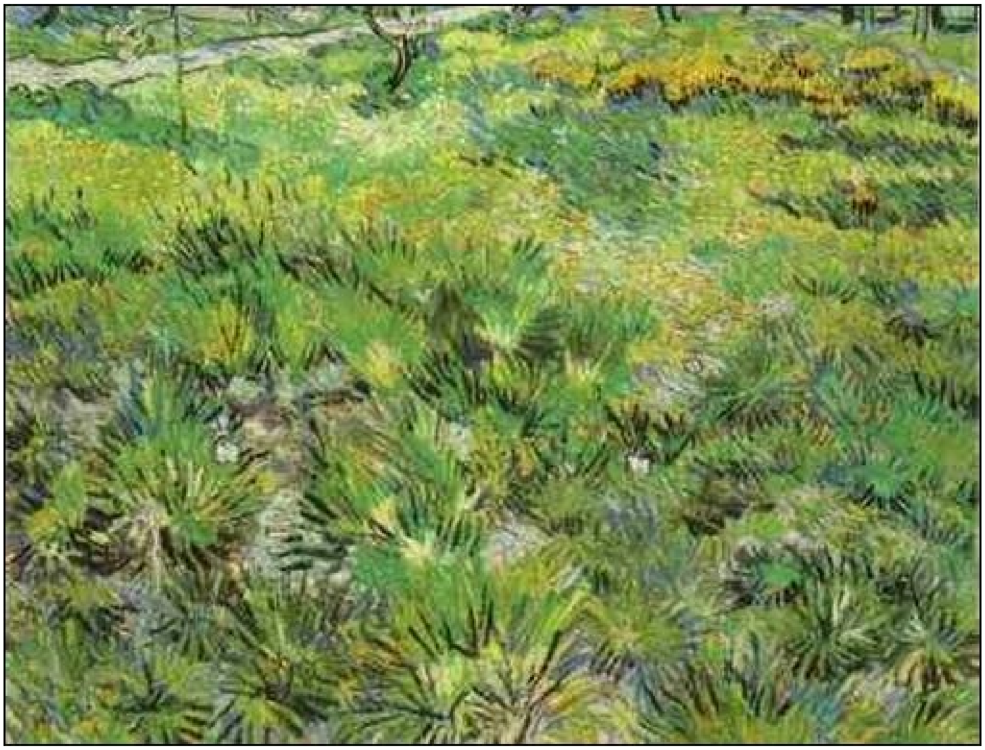
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 60.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890



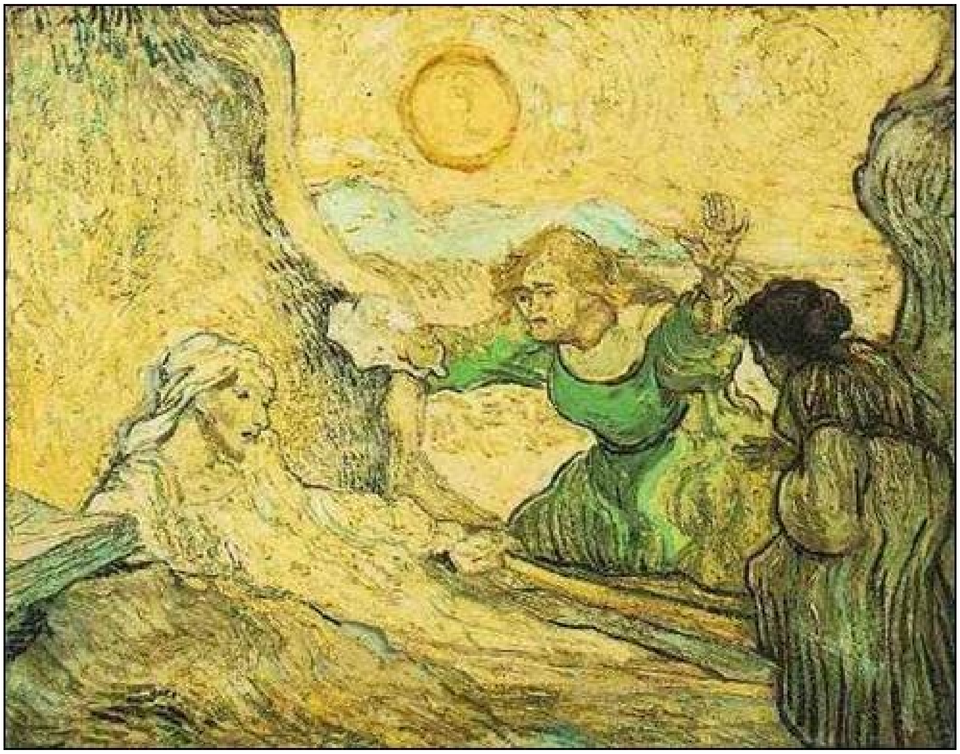
Green Wheat Fields
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 93.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890



Landscape with Couple Walking and Crescent Moon
Oil on canvas
49.5 x 45.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890

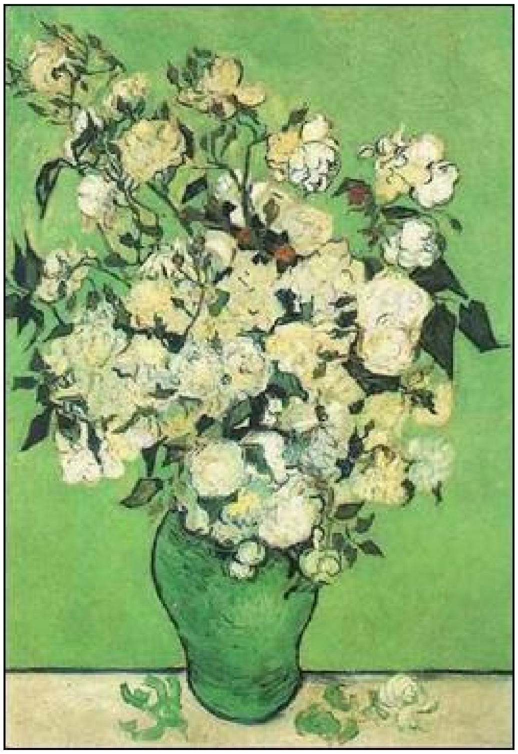


Meadow in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Oil on canvas
64.5 x 81.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890



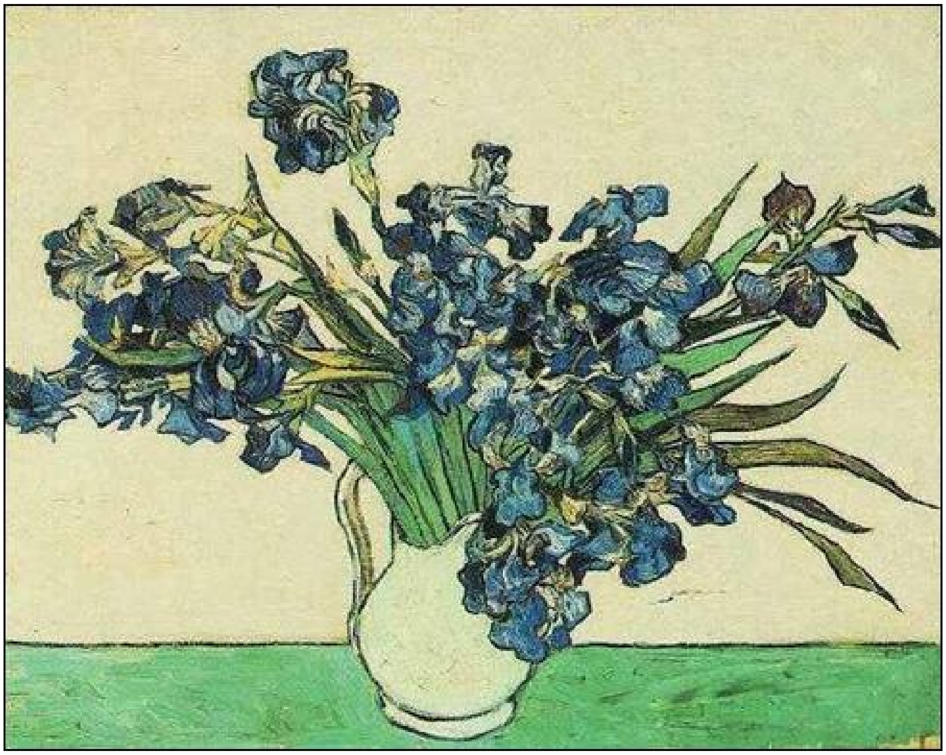
Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt), The

Oil on paper
50.0 x 65.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890



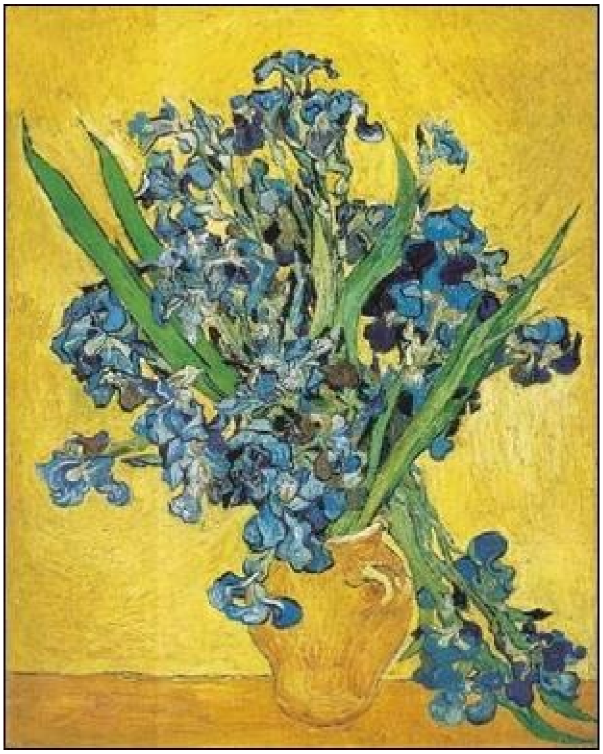
Still Life: Pink Roses in a Vase

Oil on canvas
92.6 x 73.7 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890

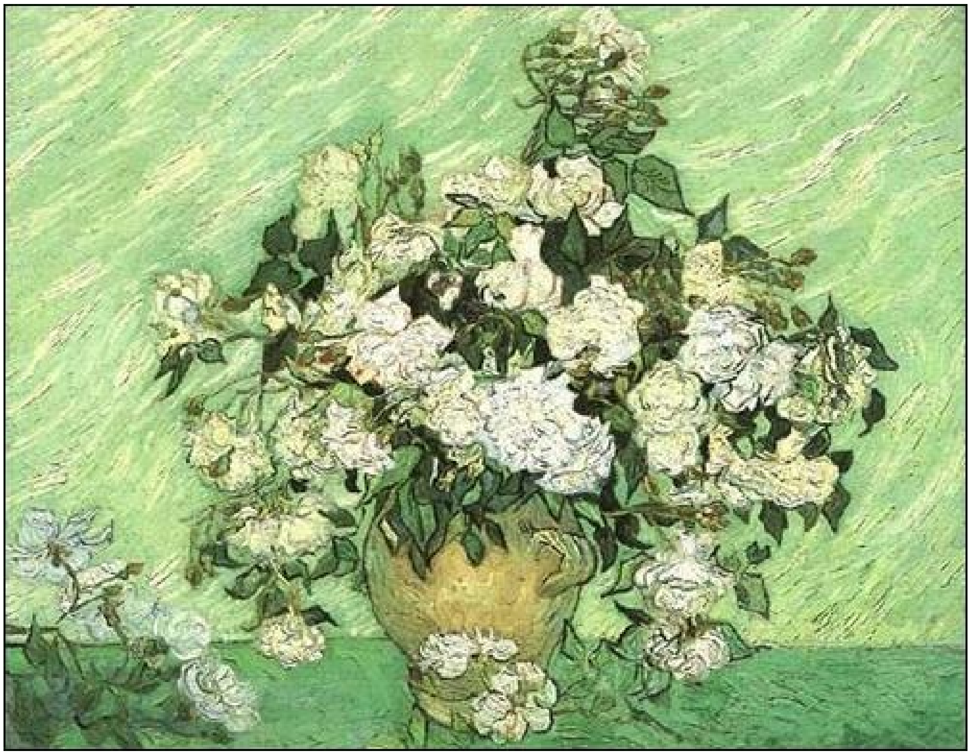


Still Life: Vase with Irises

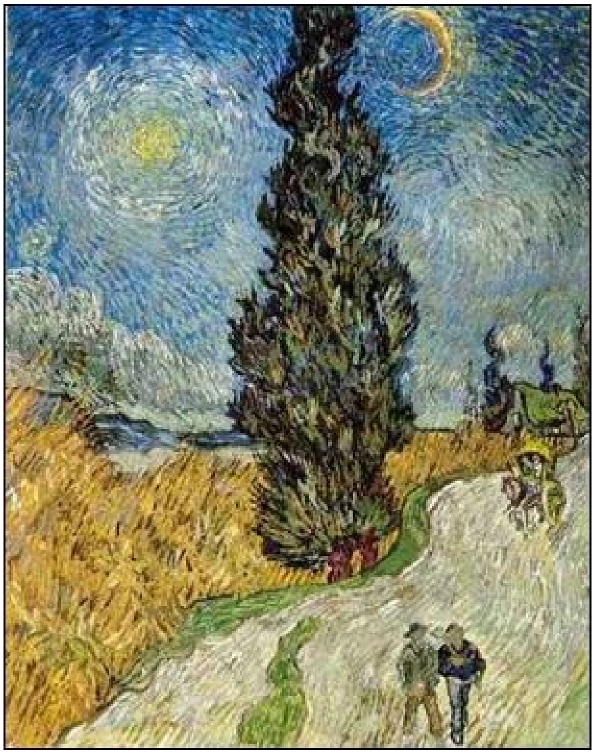
Oil on canvas
73.7 x 92.1 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890



Still Life: Vase with Irises Against a Yellow Background
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.5 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890

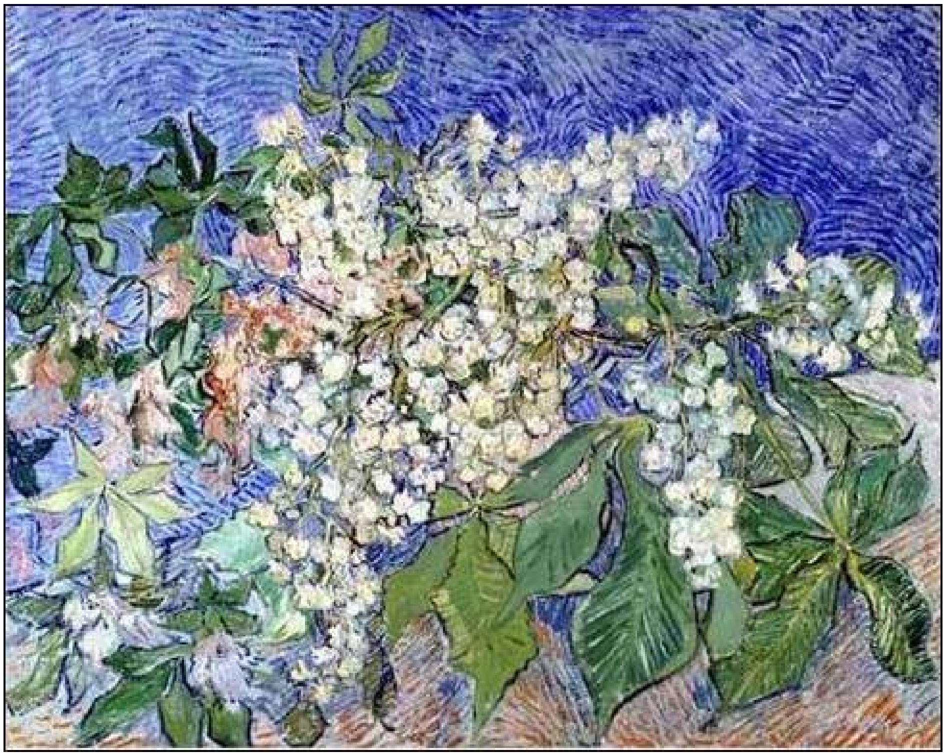


Still Life: Vase with Roses
Oil on canvas
71.0 x 90.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: May, 1890

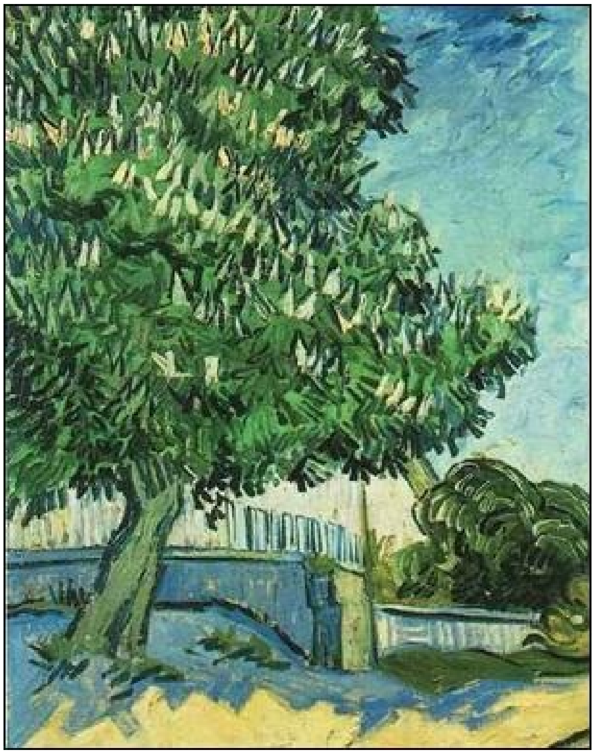


Road with Cypress and Star
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.0 cm.
Saint-Rémy: 12-15 May, 1890

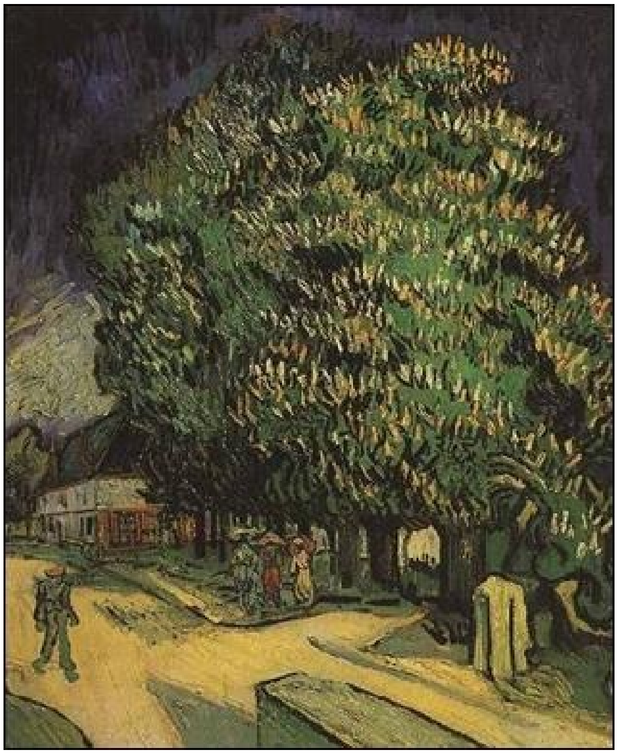
Auvers-sur-Oise Works



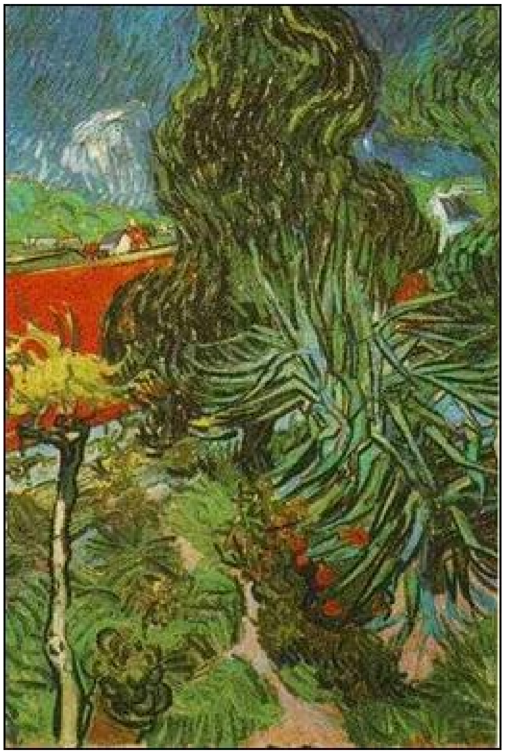
Blossoming Chestnut Branches
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 91.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



Chestnut Tree in Blossom
Oil on canvas
63.0 x 50.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890

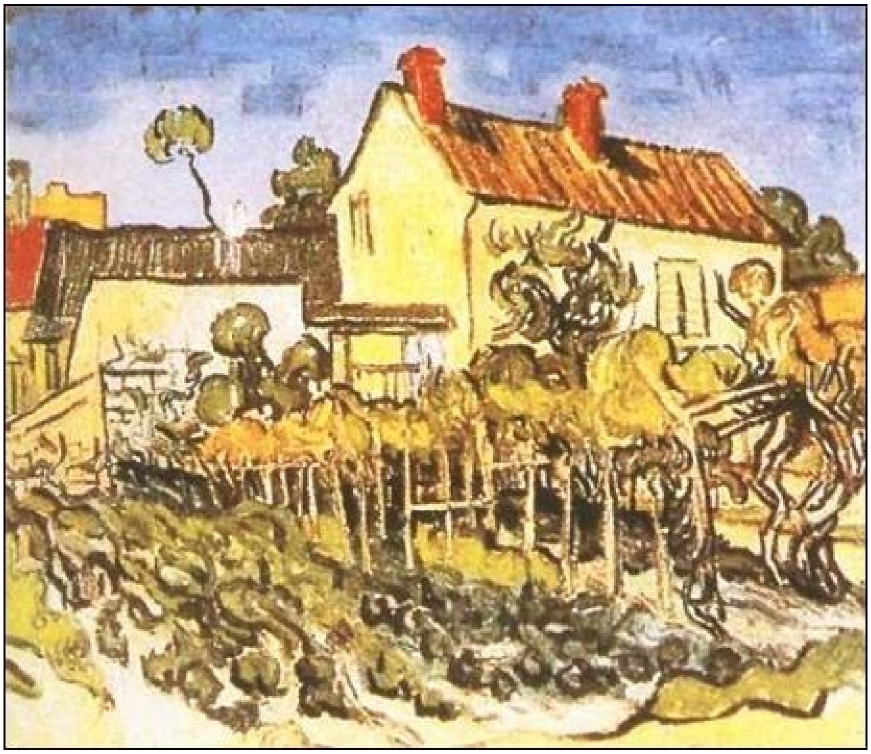


Chestnut Trees in Blossom
Oil on canvas
70.0 x 58.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



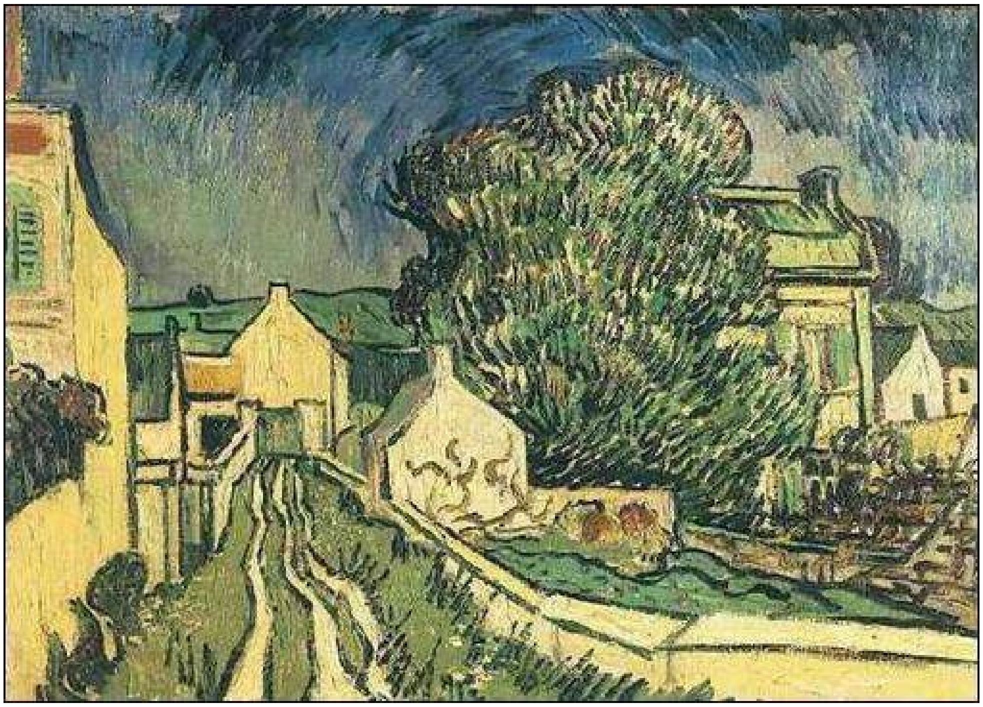
Doctor Gachet's Garden in Auvers

Oil on canvas
73.0 x 51.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890

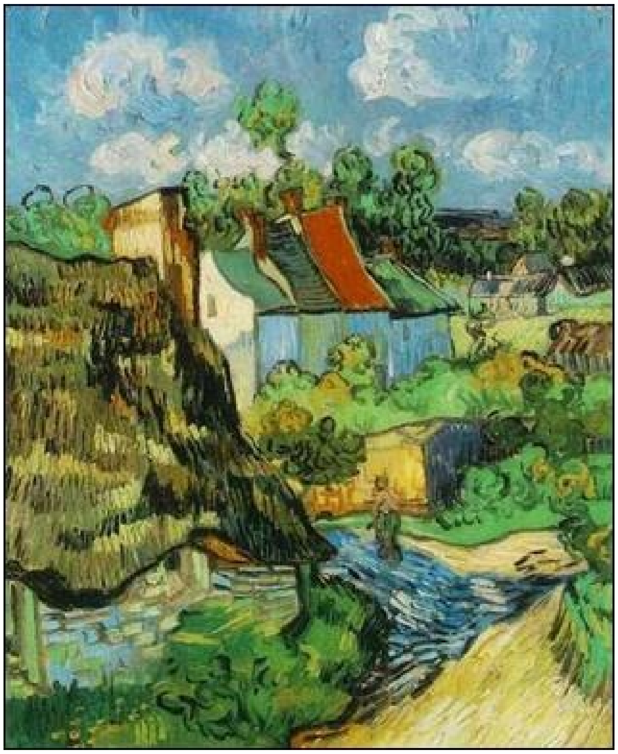


House of Pere Eloi, The

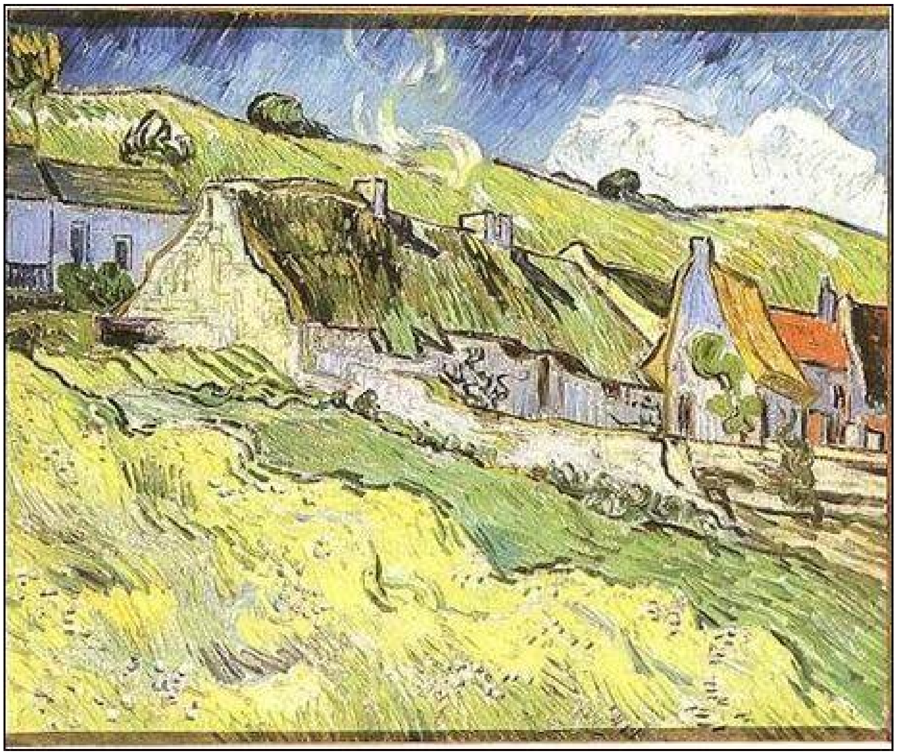
Oil on canvas
51.0 x 58.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



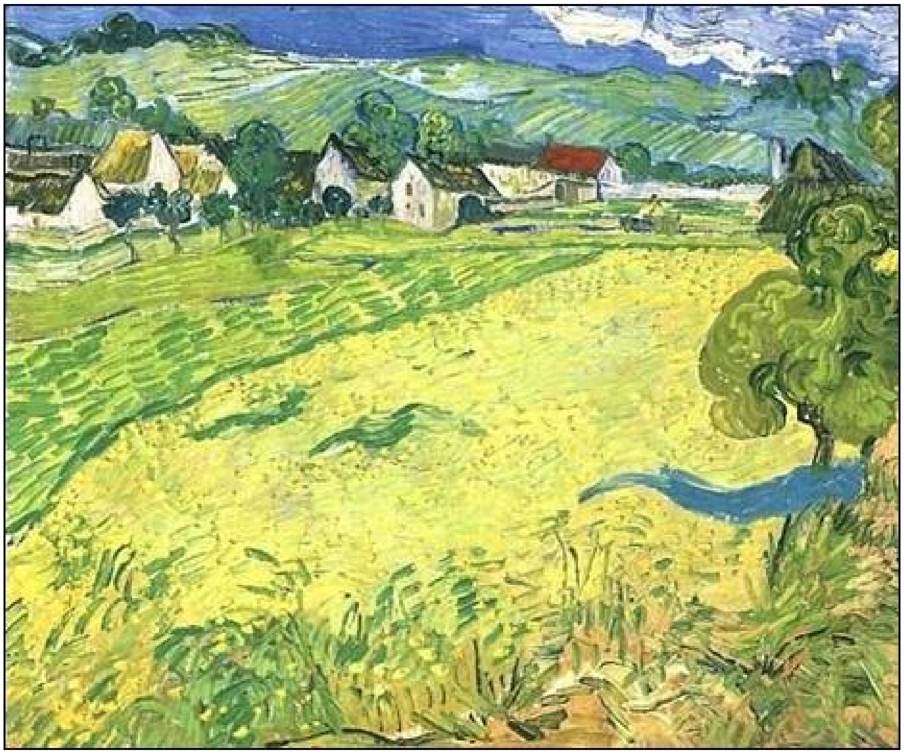
House of Pere Pilon, The
Oil on canvas
49.0 x 70.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



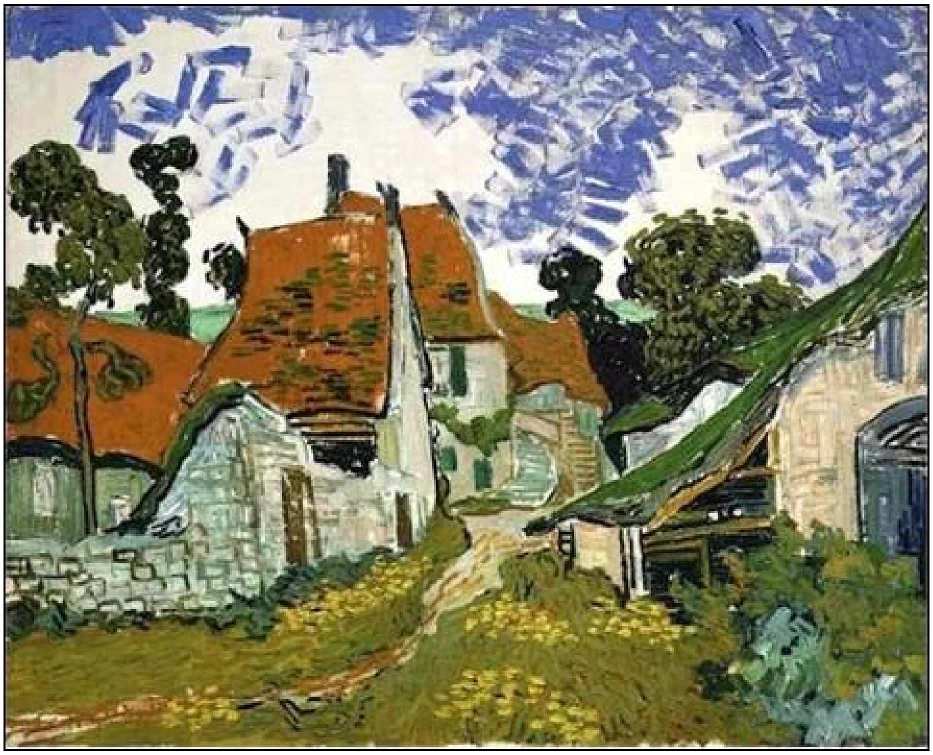
Houses in Auvers
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 60.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



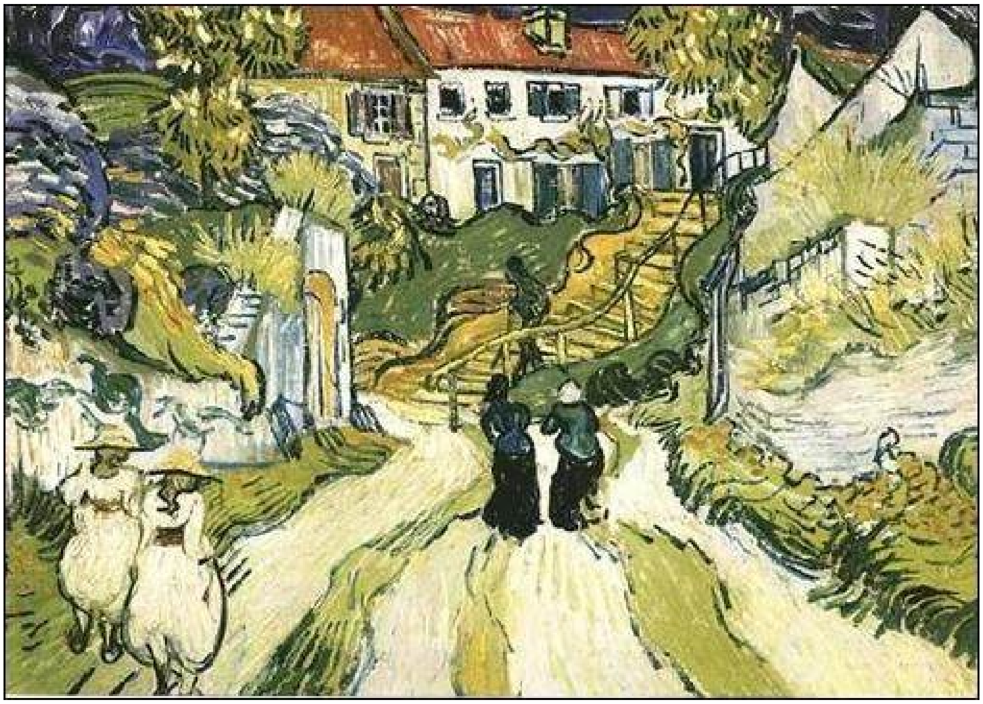
Thatched Cottages
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 73.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



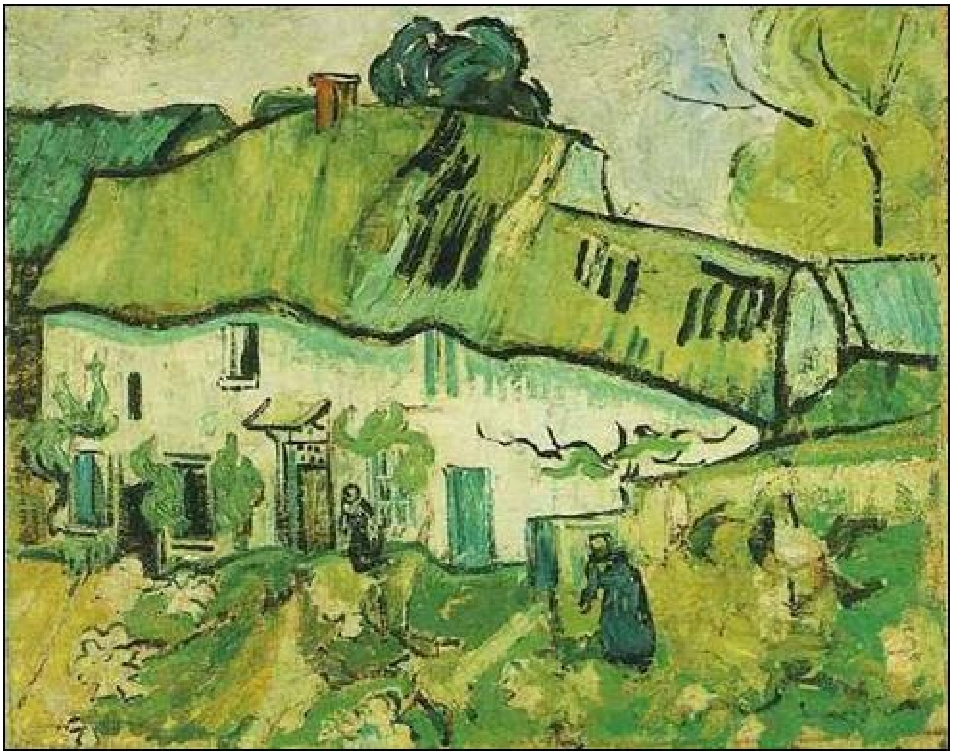
View of Vessenots Near Auvers
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 65.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



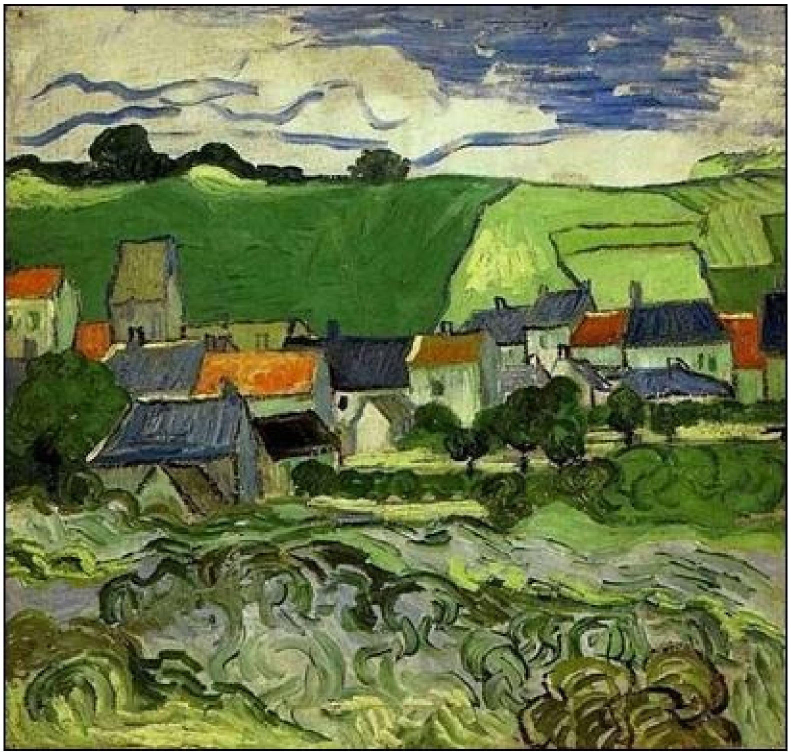
Village Street in Auvers
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May, 1890



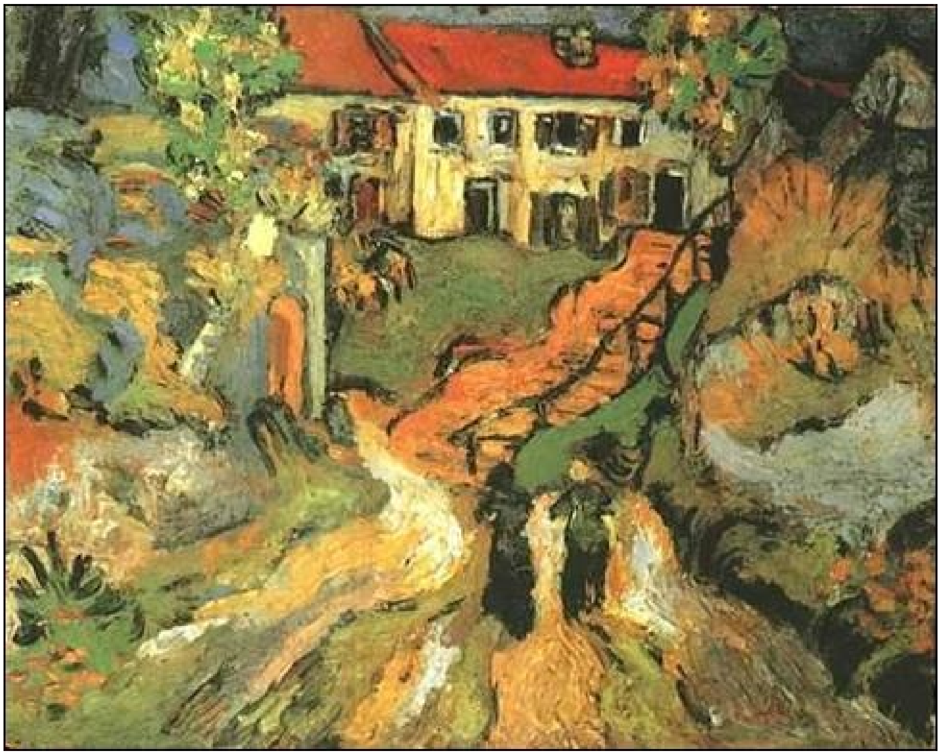
Village Street and Steps in Auvers with Figures
Oil on canvas
49.8 x 70.1 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: late May, 1890



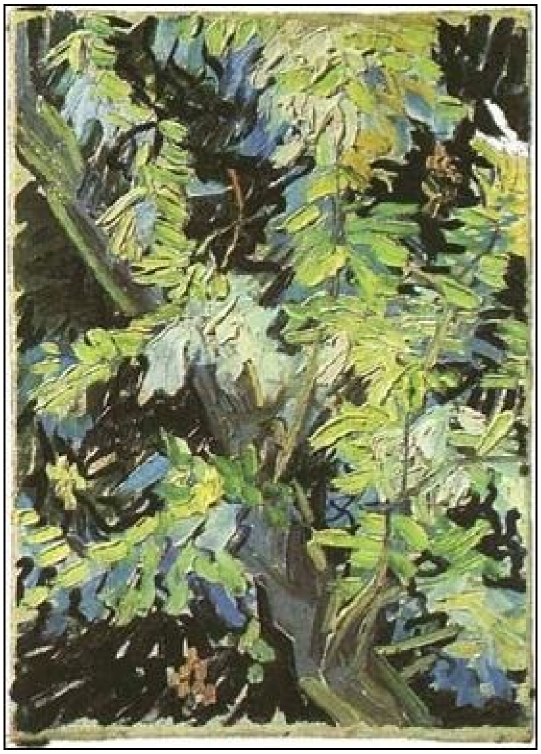
Farmhouse with Two Figures
Oil on canvas
38.0 x 45.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May-June, 1890



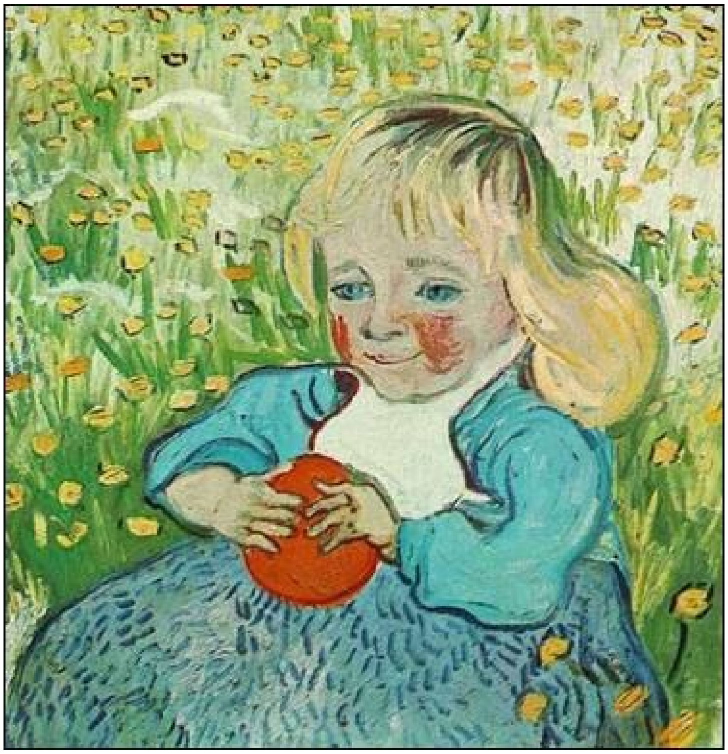
View of Auvers
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 52.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May-June, 1890



Village Street and Steps in Auvers with Two Figures
Oil on canvas
20.5 x 26.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: May-June, 1890

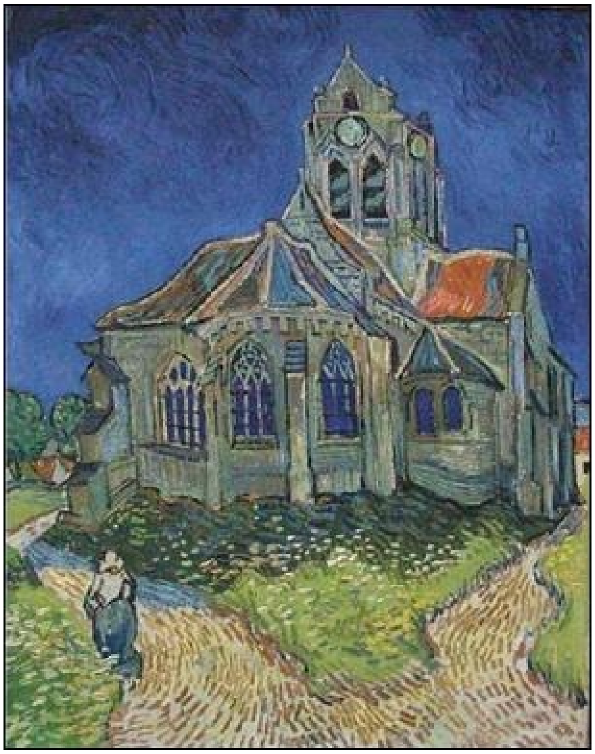


Blossoming Acacia Branches
Oil on canvas
32.5 x 24.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890

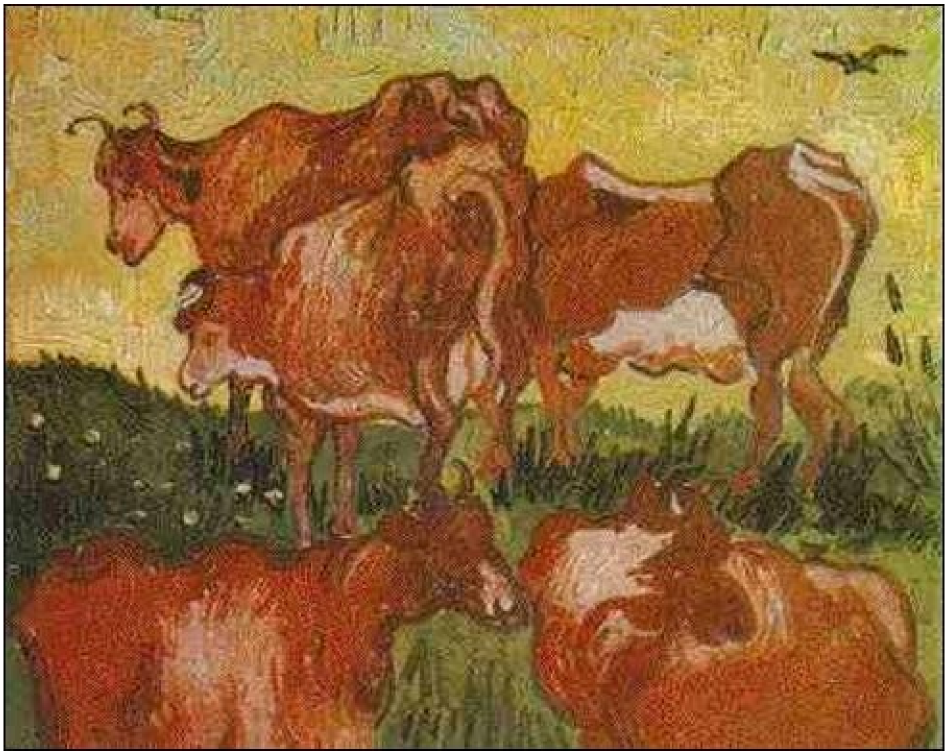


Child with Orange

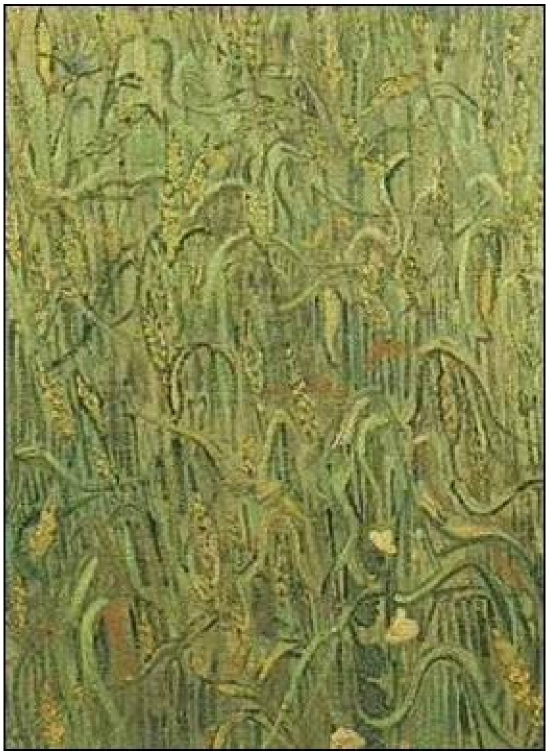
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 51.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



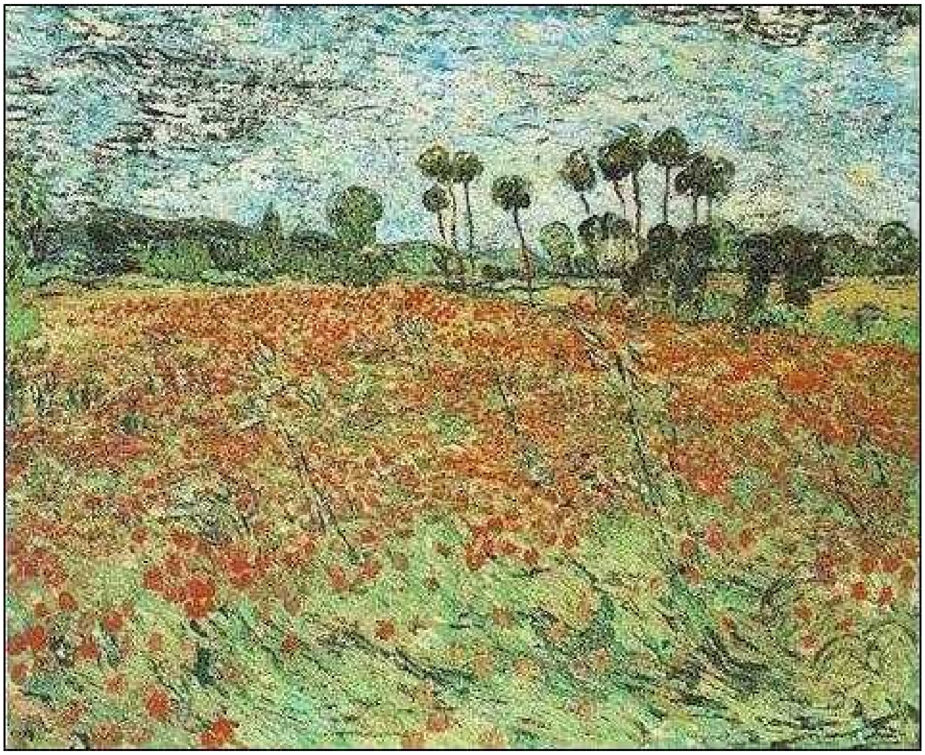
Church at Auvers, The
Oil on canvas
94.0 x 74.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



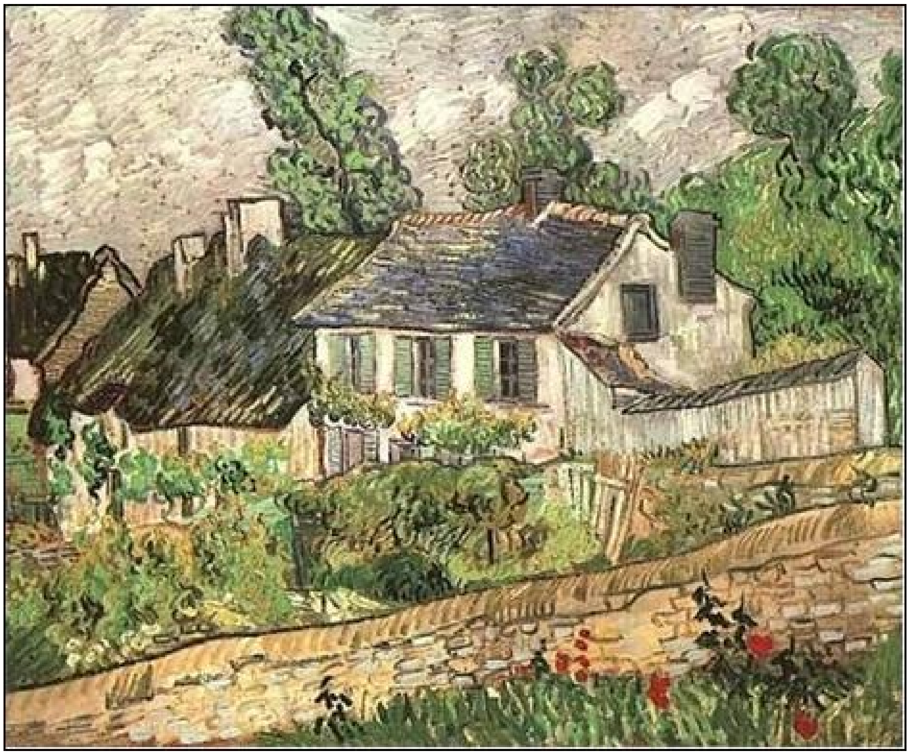
Cows (after Jordaens)
Oil on canvas
55.0 x 65.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



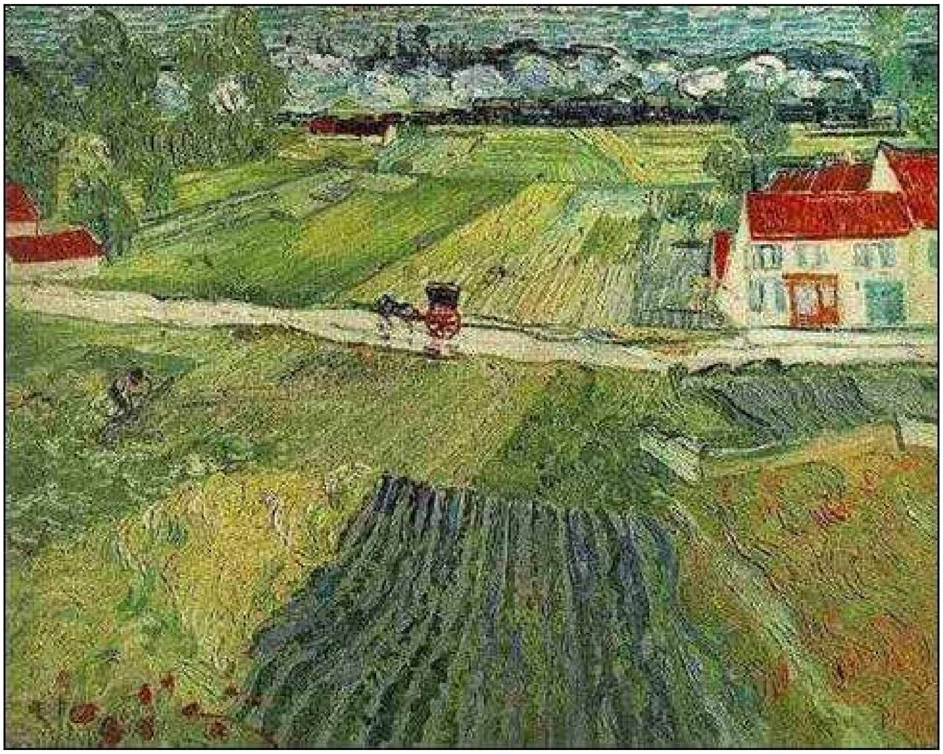
Ears of Wheat
Oil on canvas
64.5 x 48.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



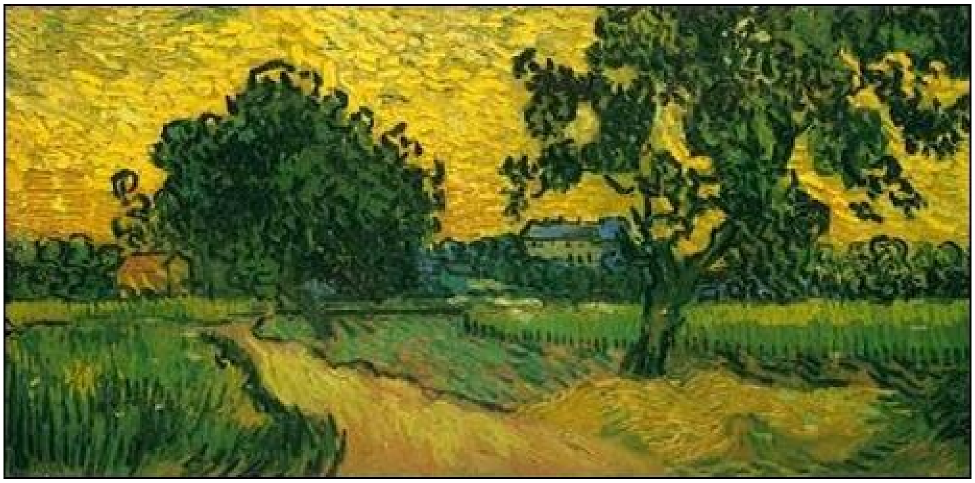
Field with Poppies
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 91.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



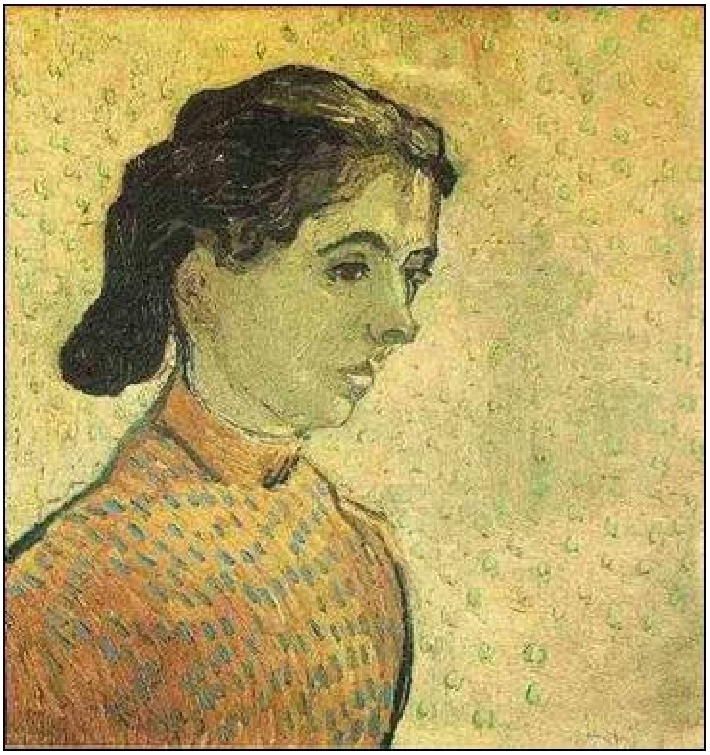
Houses in Auvers
Oil on canvas
60.6 x 73.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



Landscape with Carriage and Train in the Background
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 90.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890

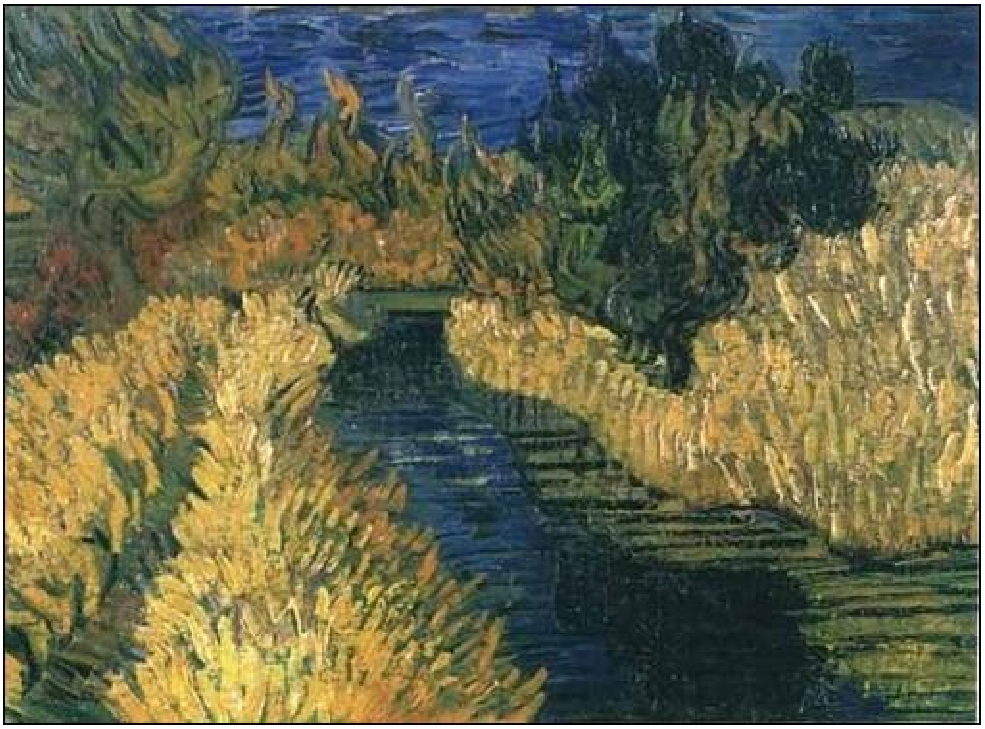


Landscape with the Chateau of Auvers at Sunset
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 101.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



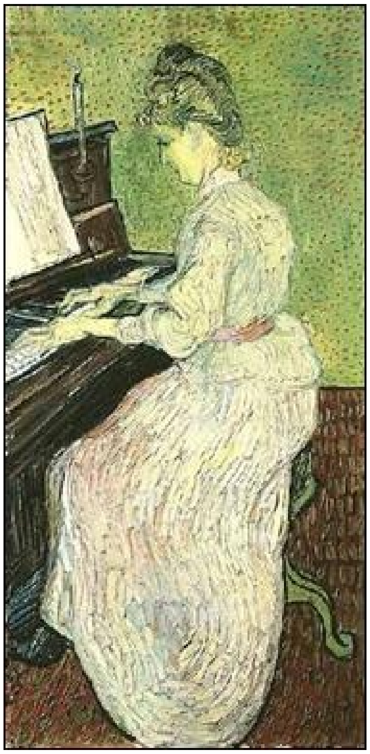
Little Arlesienne, The

Oil on canvas
51.0 x 49.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890

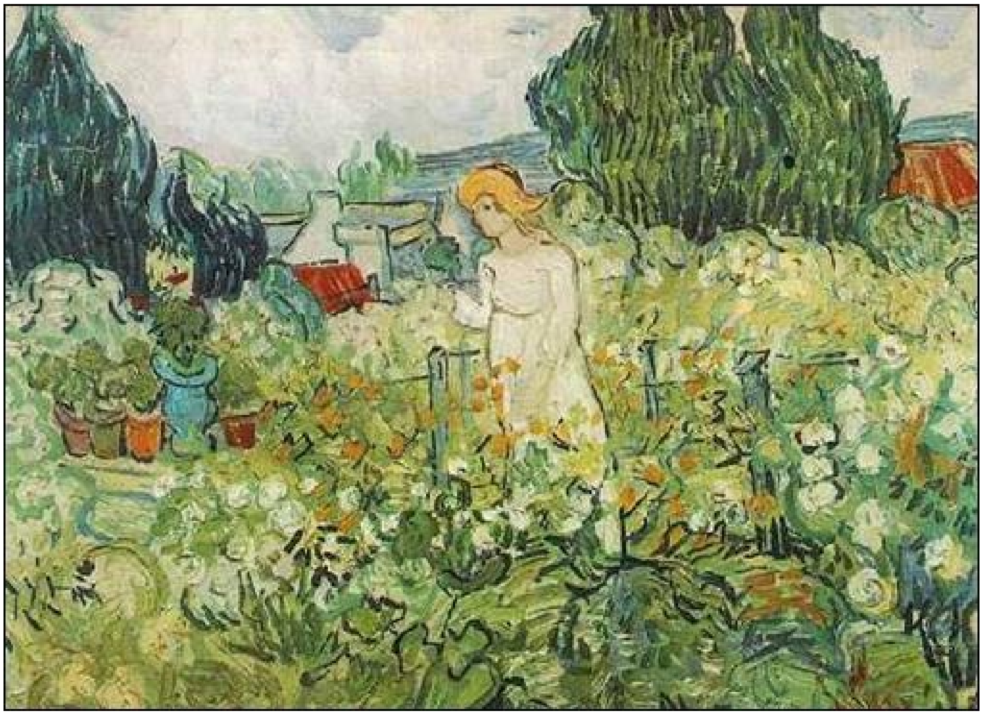


Little Stream, The

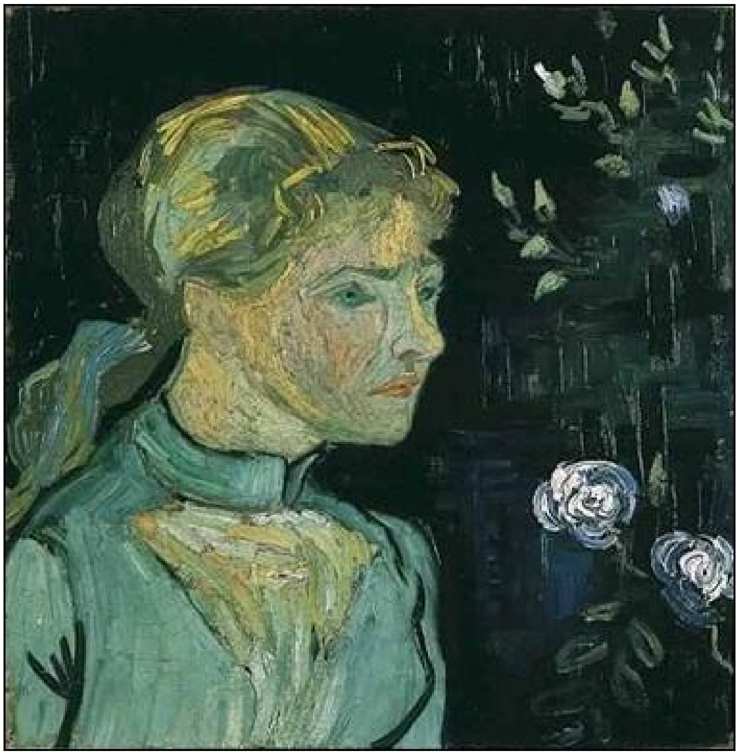
Oil on canvas
25.5 x 40.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



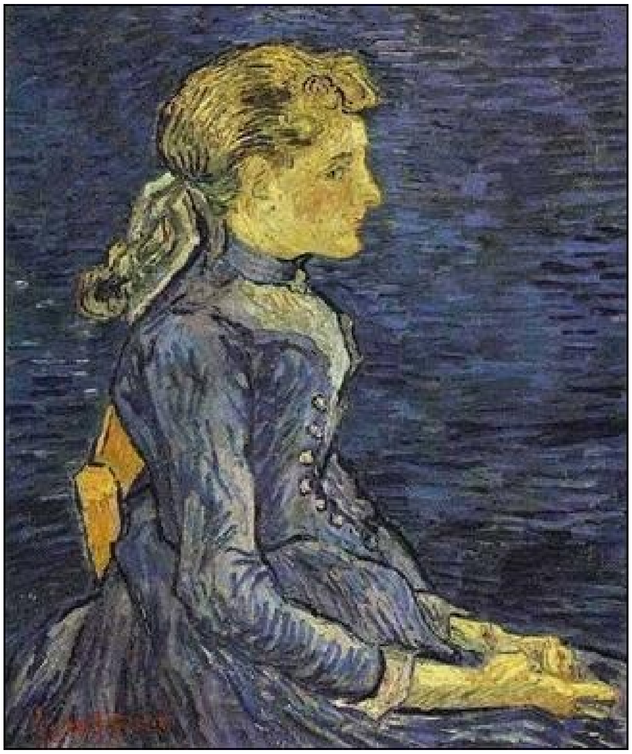
Marguerite Gachet at the Piano
Oil on canvas
102.6 x 50.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



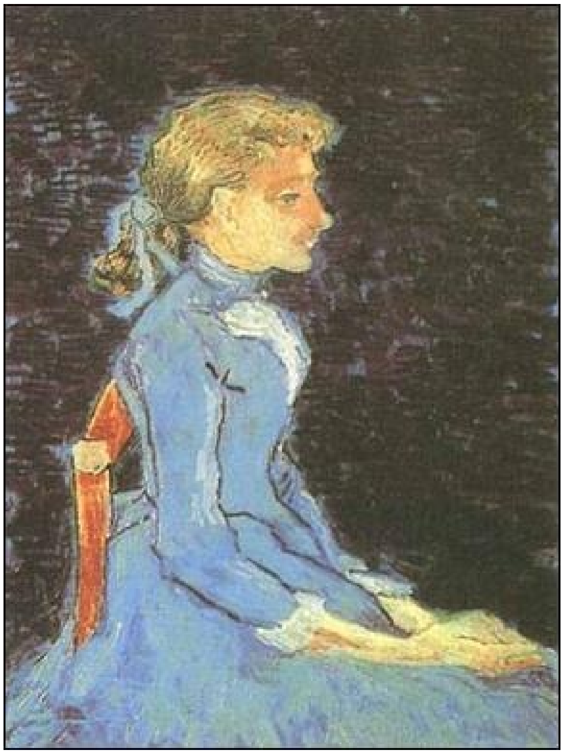
Marguerite Gachet in the Garden
Oil on canvas
46.0 x 55.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



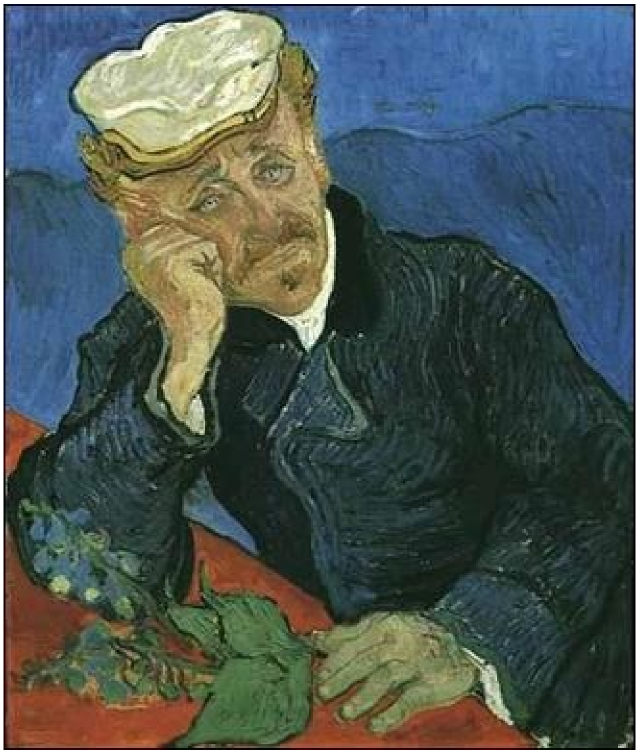
Portrait of Adeline Ravoux
Oil on canvas
52.0 x 52.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



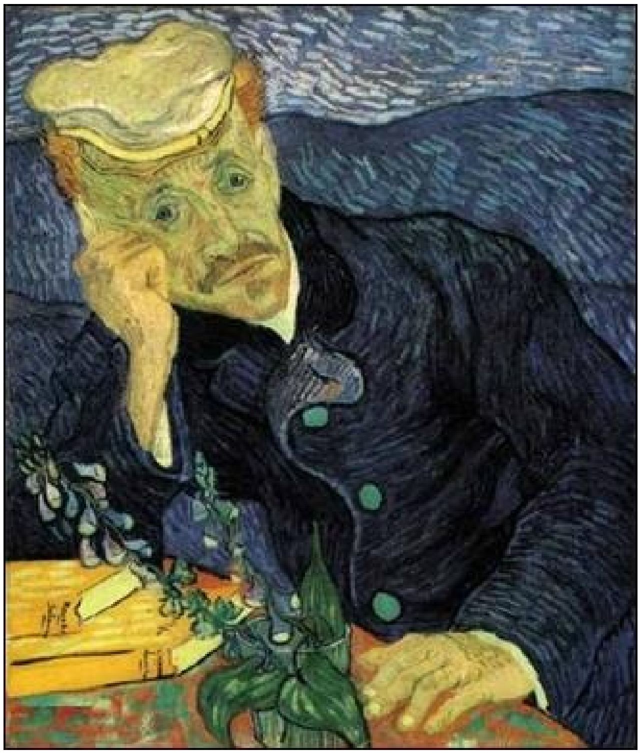
Portrait of Adeline Ravoux
Oil on canvas
67.0 x 55.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



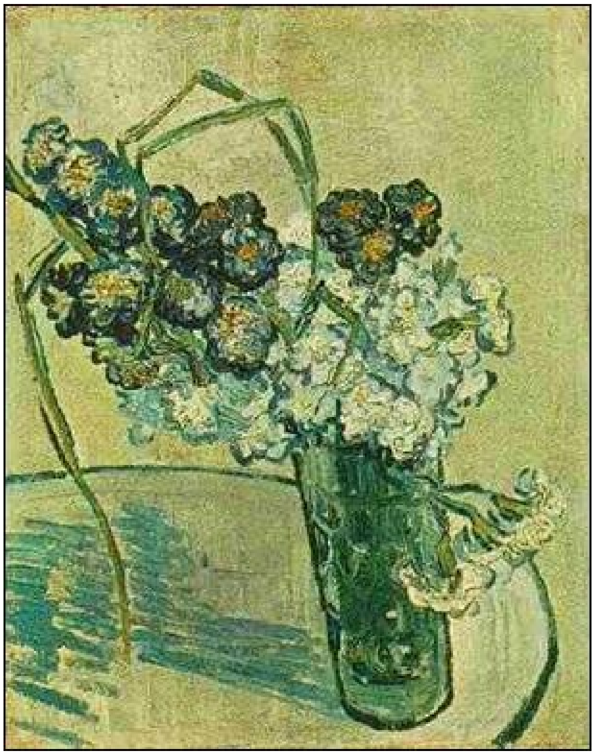
Portrait of Adeline Ravoux
Oil on canvas
73.7 x 54.7 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



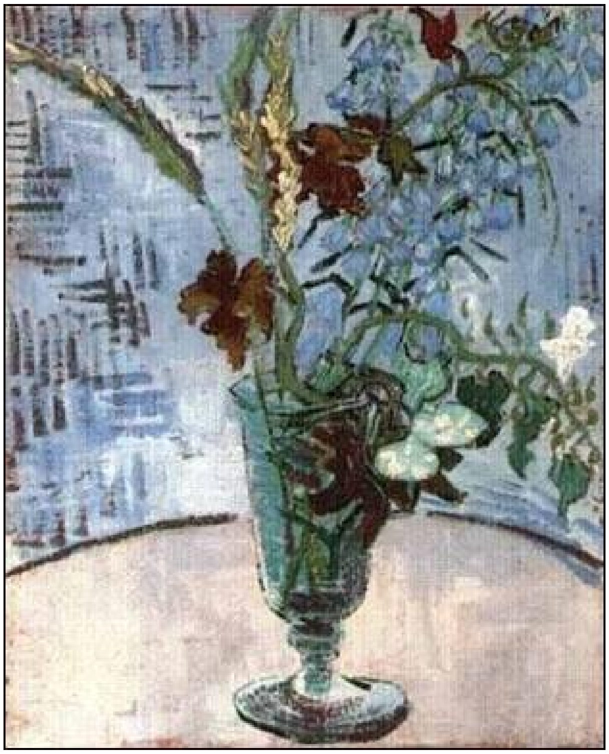
Portrait of Doctor Gachet
Oil on canvas
68.0 x 57.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



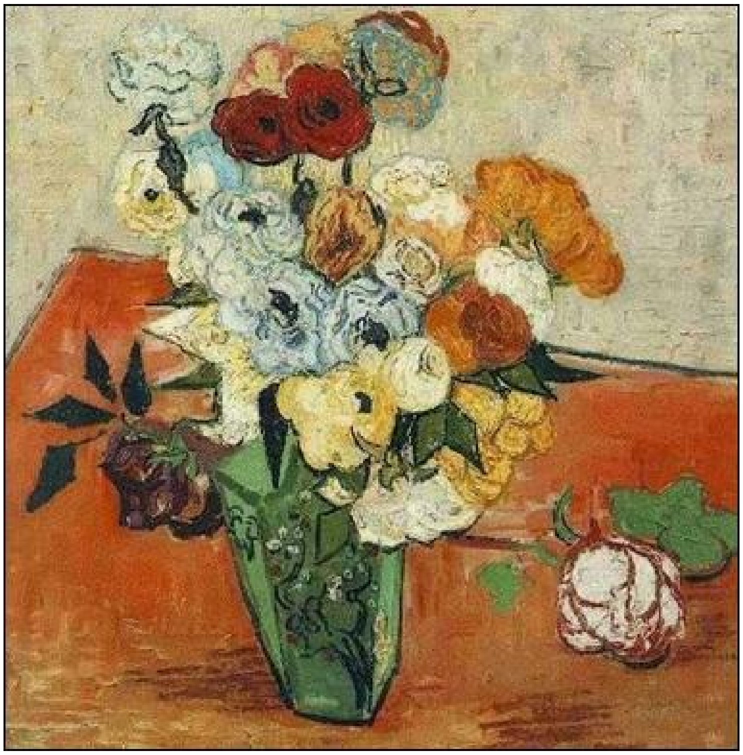
Portrait of Doctor Gachet
Oil on canvas
67.0 x 56.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



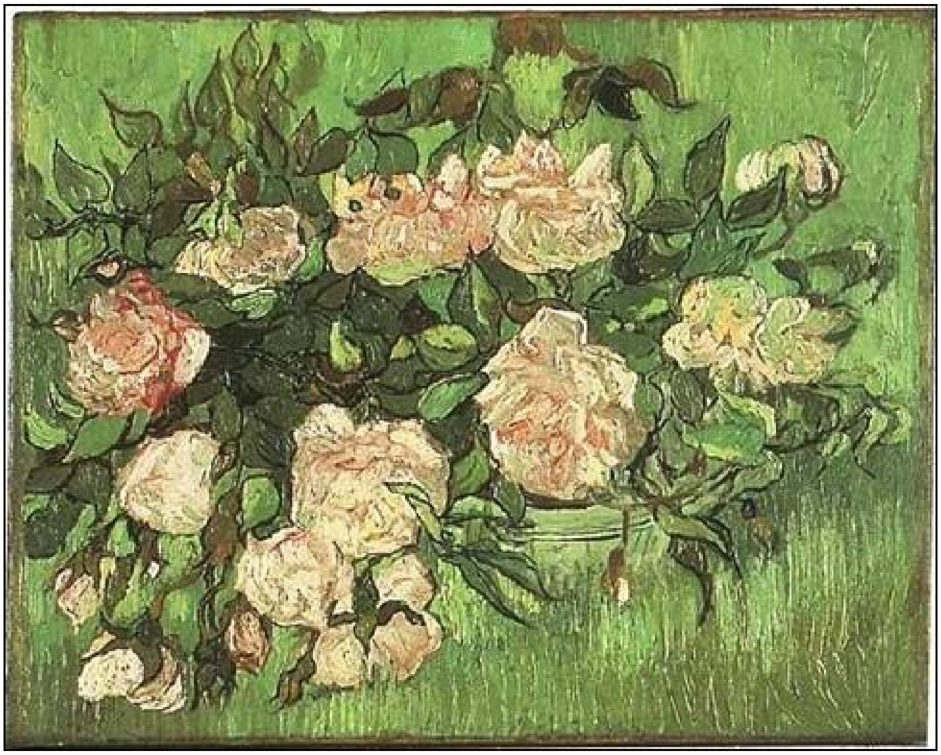
Still Life: Glass with Carnations
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 32.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



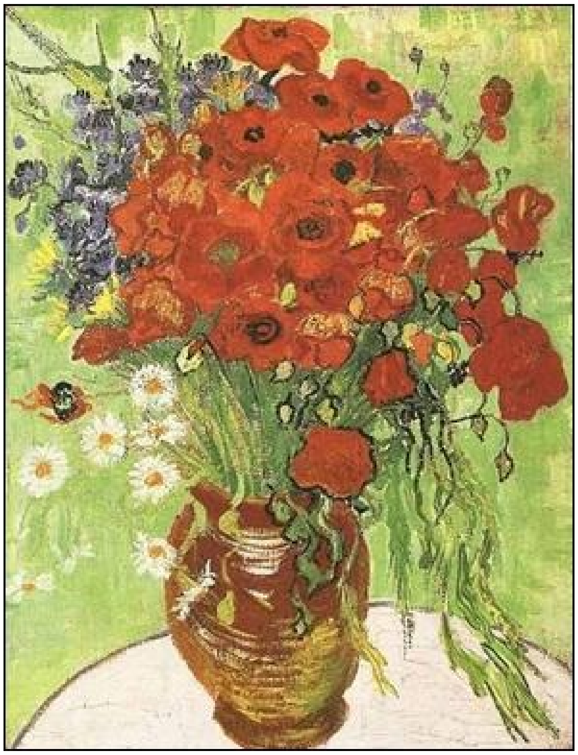
Still Life: Glass with Wild Flowers
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 34.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



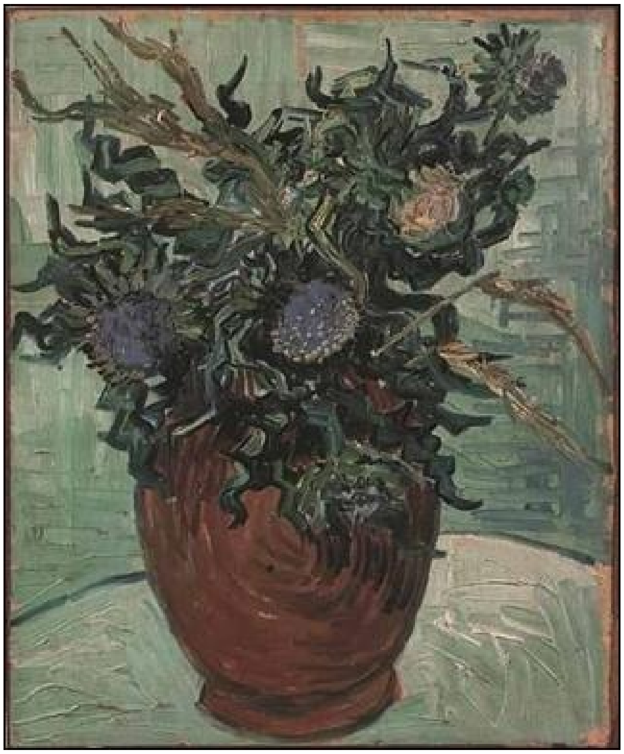
Still Life: Japanese Vase with Roses and Anemones
Oil on canvas
51.0 x 51.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



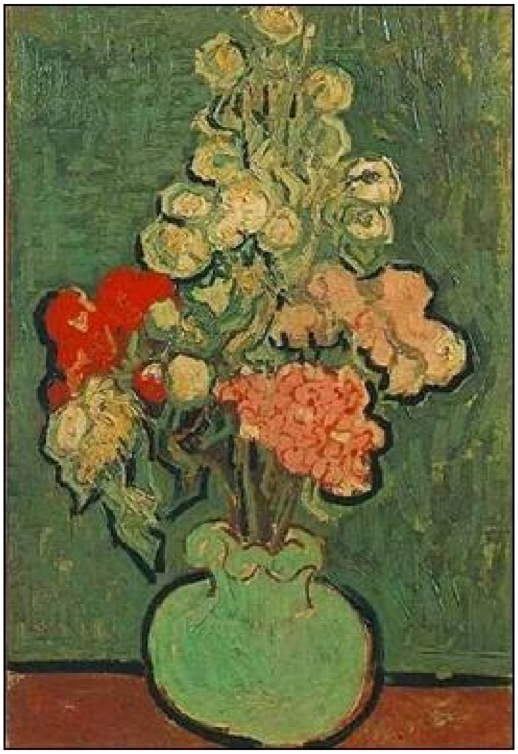
Still Life: Pink Roses
Oil on canvas
32.0 x 40.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



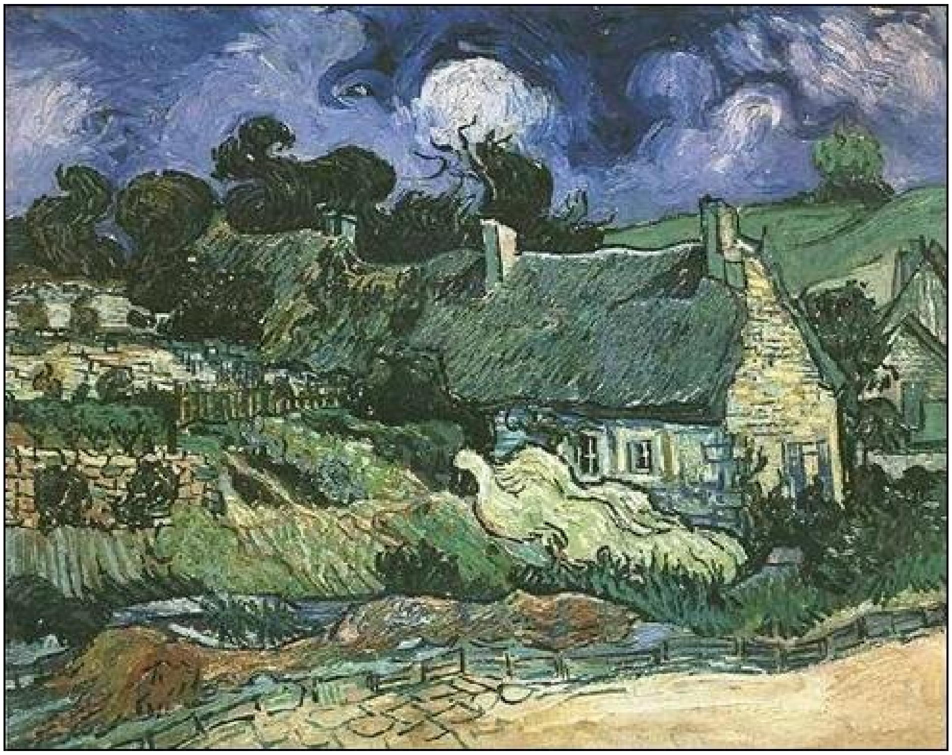
Still Life: Red Poppies and Daisies
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 50.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



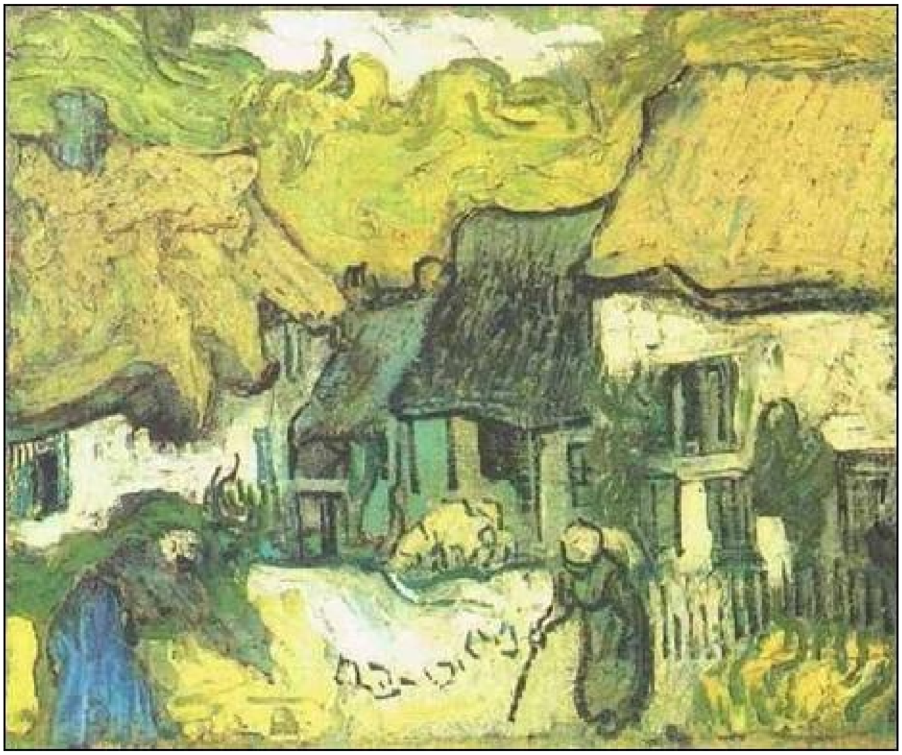
Still Life: Vase with Flower and Thistles
Oil on canvas
41.0 x 34.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



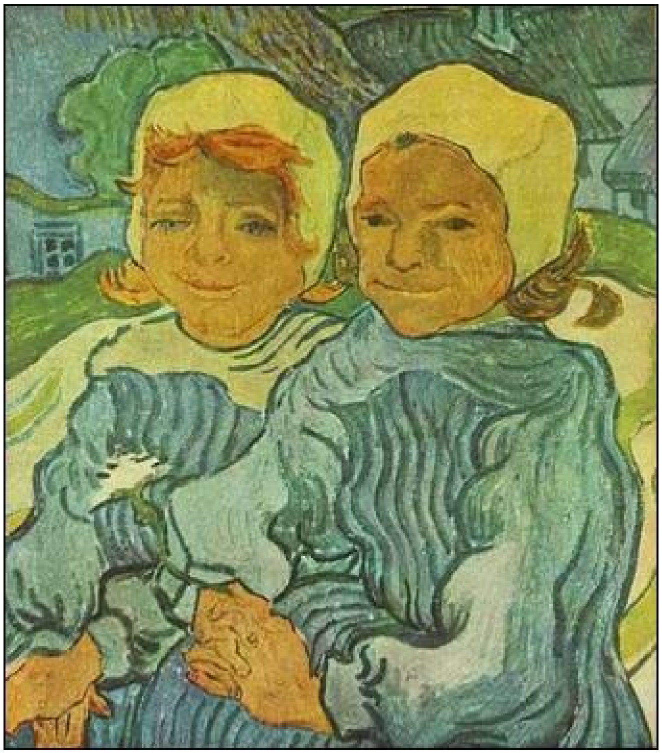
Still Life: Vase with Rose-Mallows
Oil on canvas
42.0 x 29.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



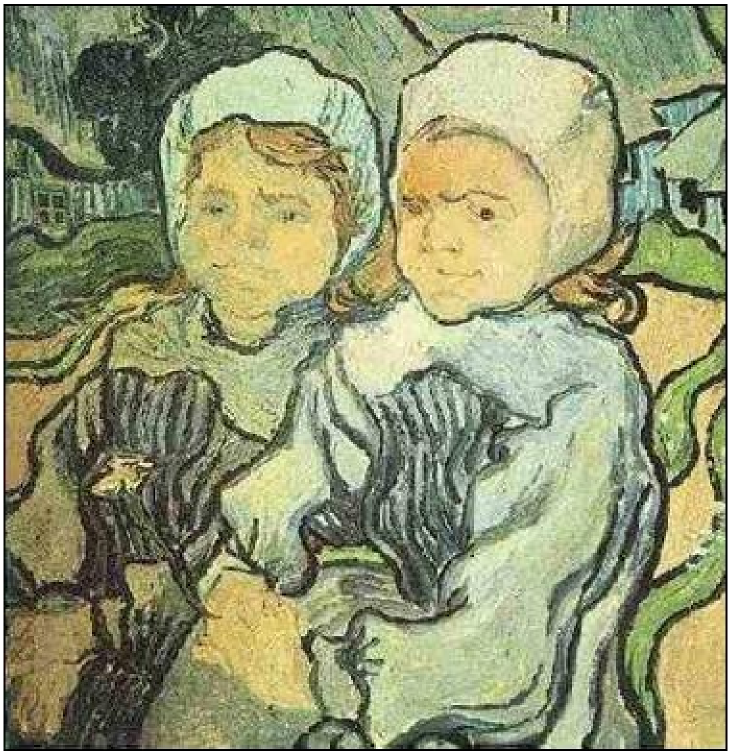
Thatched Cottages at Cordeville
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 91.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



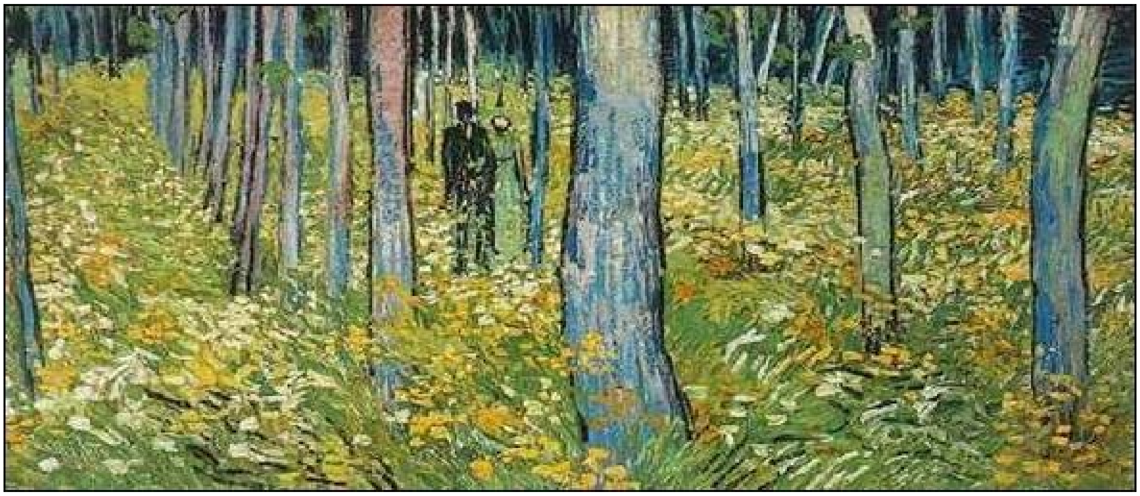
Thatched Cottages in Jorgus
Oil on canvas
33.0 x 40.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



Two Children
Oil on canvas
51.5 x 46.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890

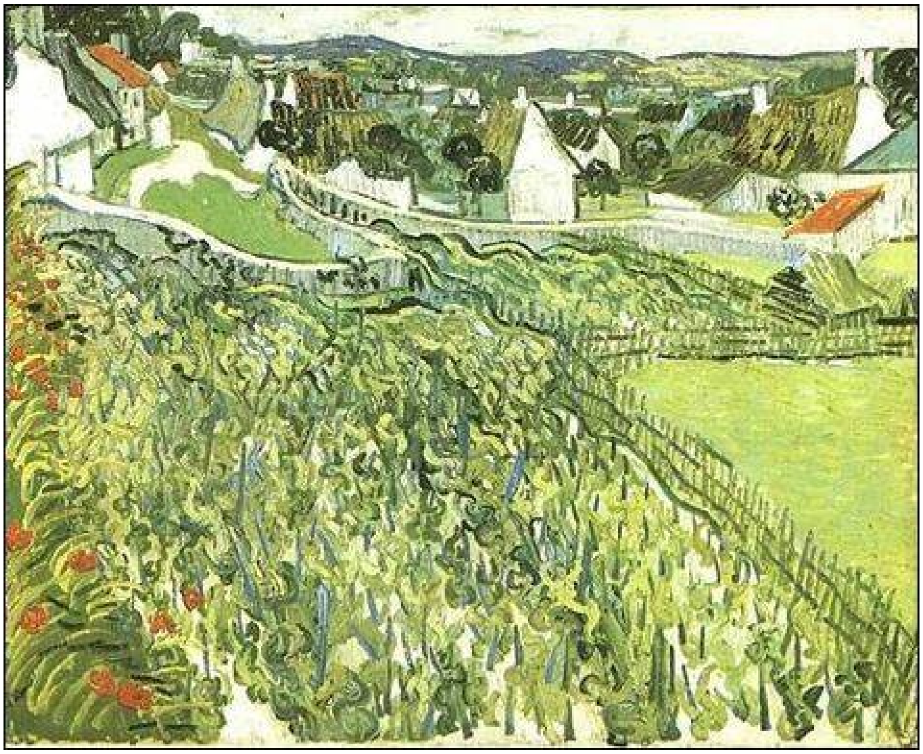


Two Children
Oil on canvas
51.2 x 51.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise, June, 1890

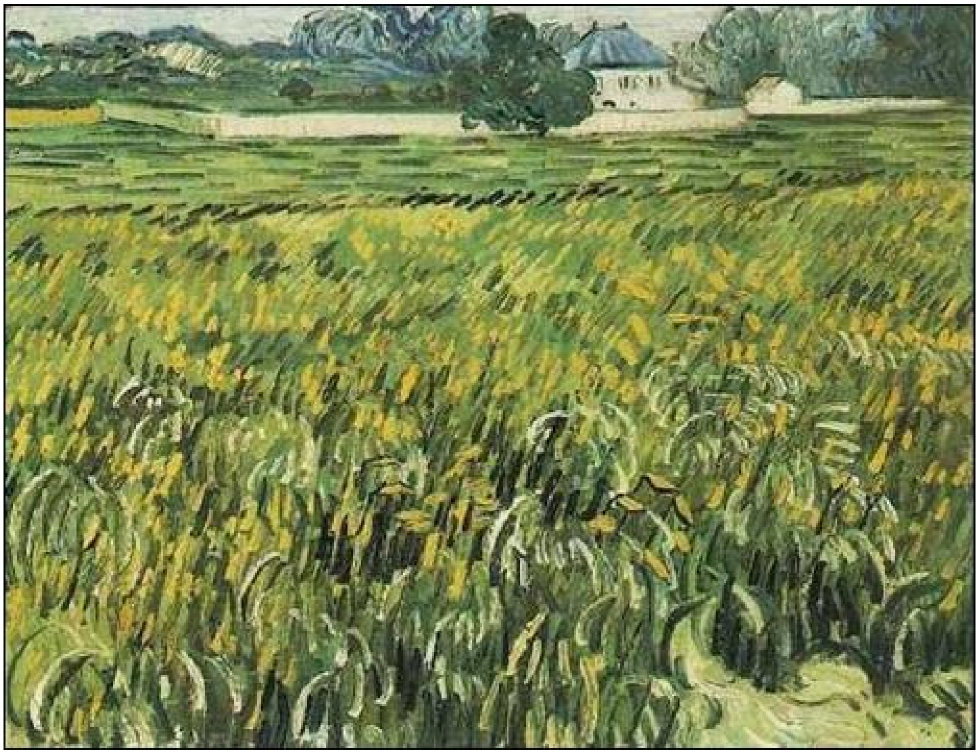


Undergrowth with Two Figures

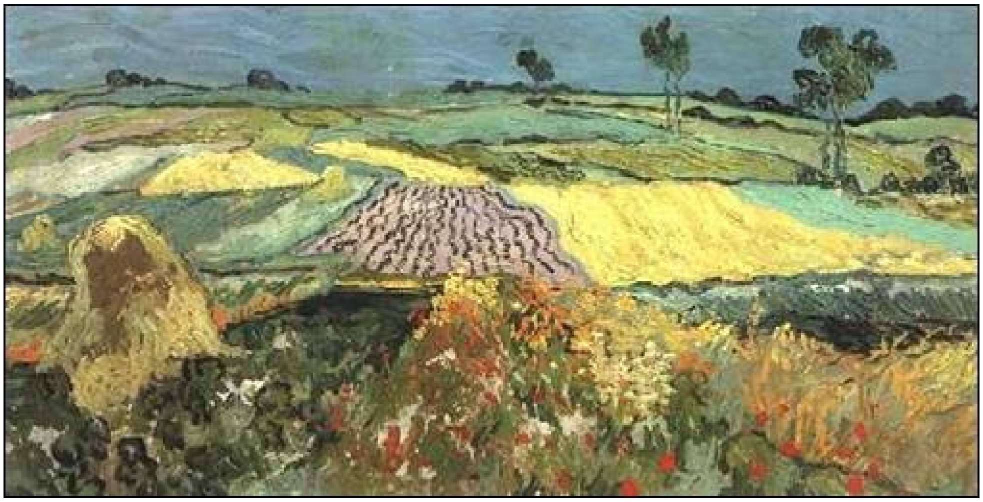
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 100.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



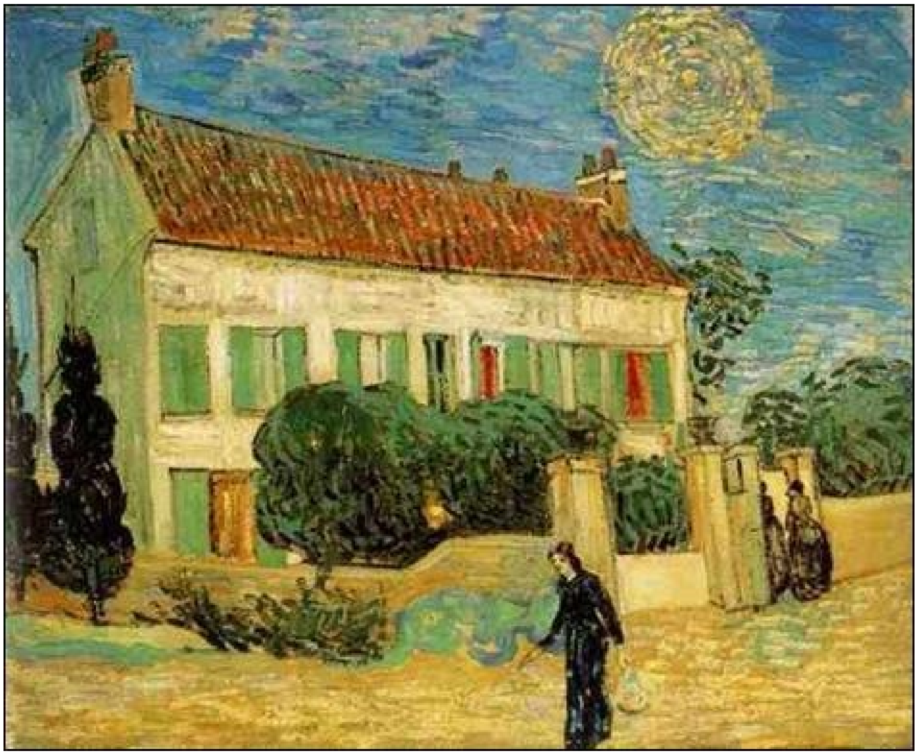
Vineyards with a View of Auvers
Oil on canvas
64.2 x 79.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



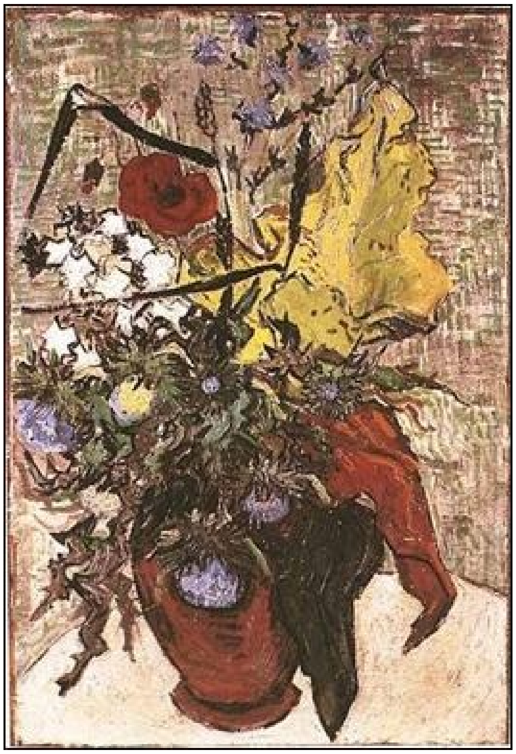
Wheat Field at Auvers with White House
Oil on canvas
48.6 x 83.2 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



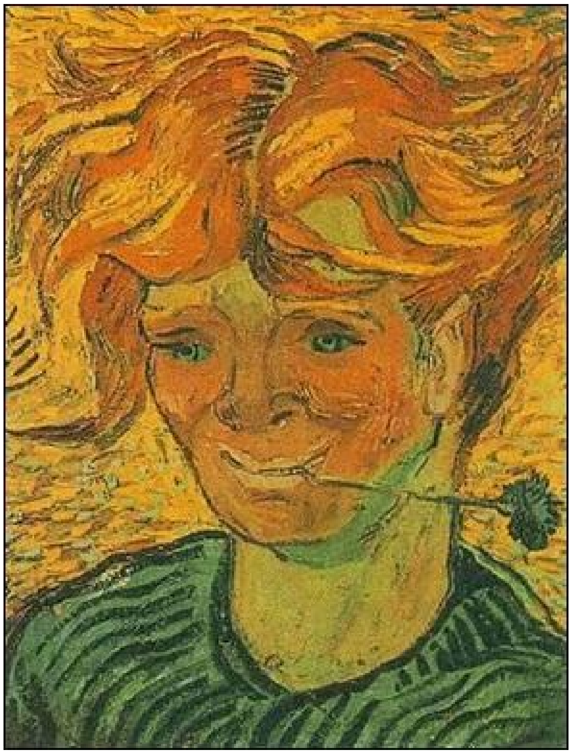
Wheat Fields near Auvers
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 101.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



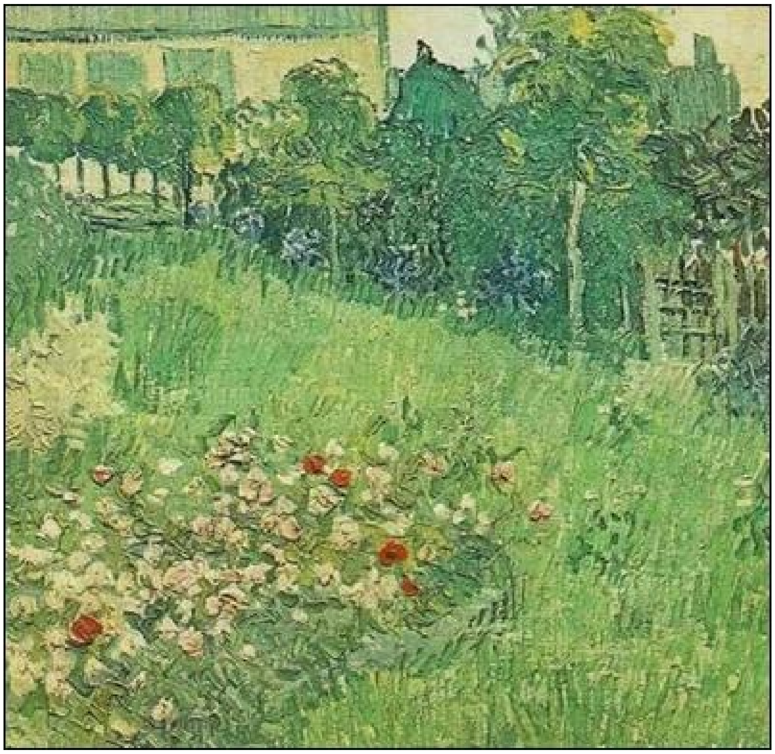
White House at Night, The
Oil on canvas
59.5 x 73.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



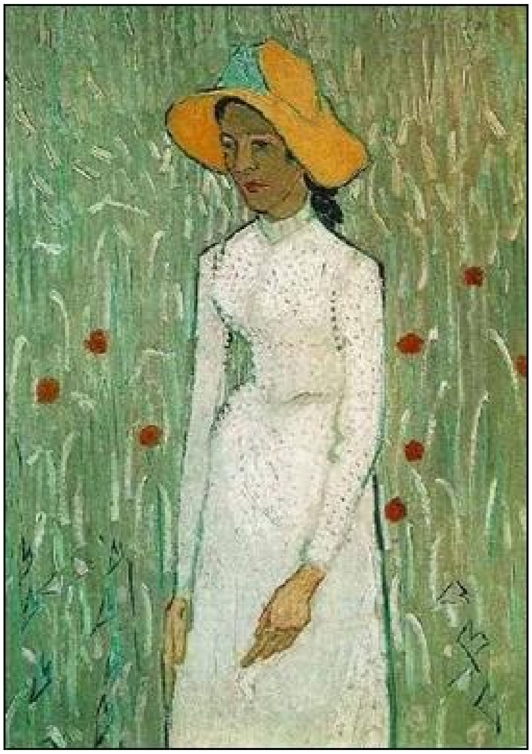
Wild Flowers and Thistles in a Vase
Oil on canvas
67.0 x 47.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



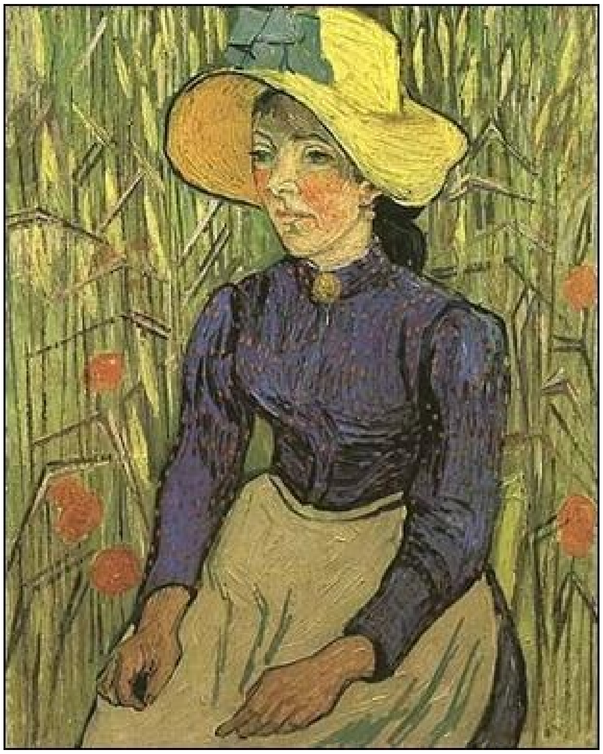
Young Man with Cornflower
Oil on canvas
39.0 x 30.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June, 1890



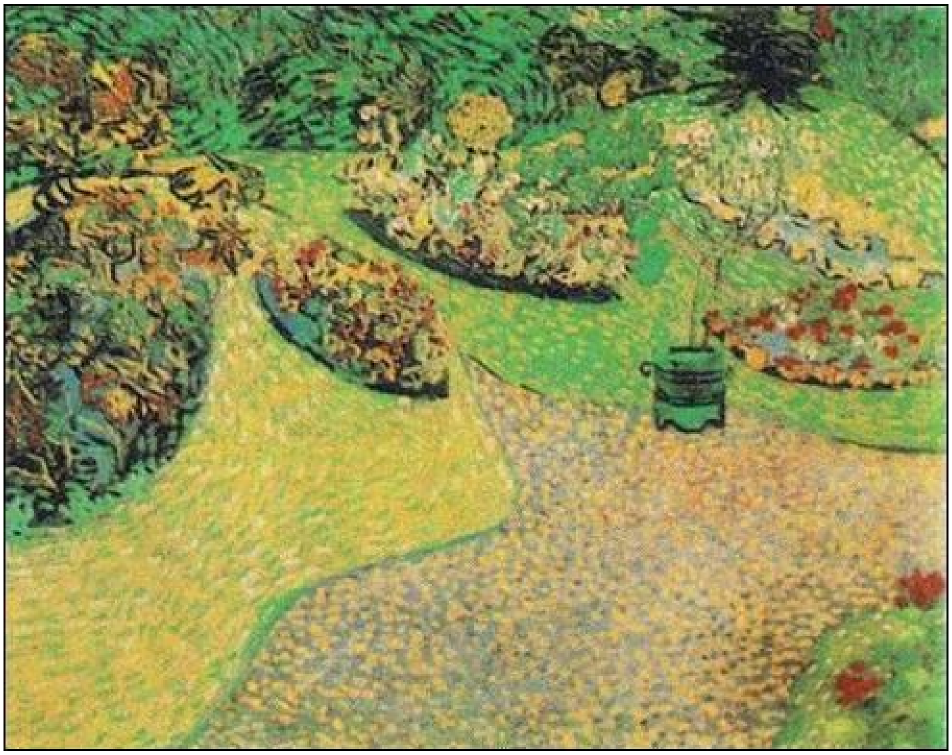
Daubigny's Garden
Oil on canvas
50.7 x 50.7 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: mid-June, 1890
F 765, JH 2029



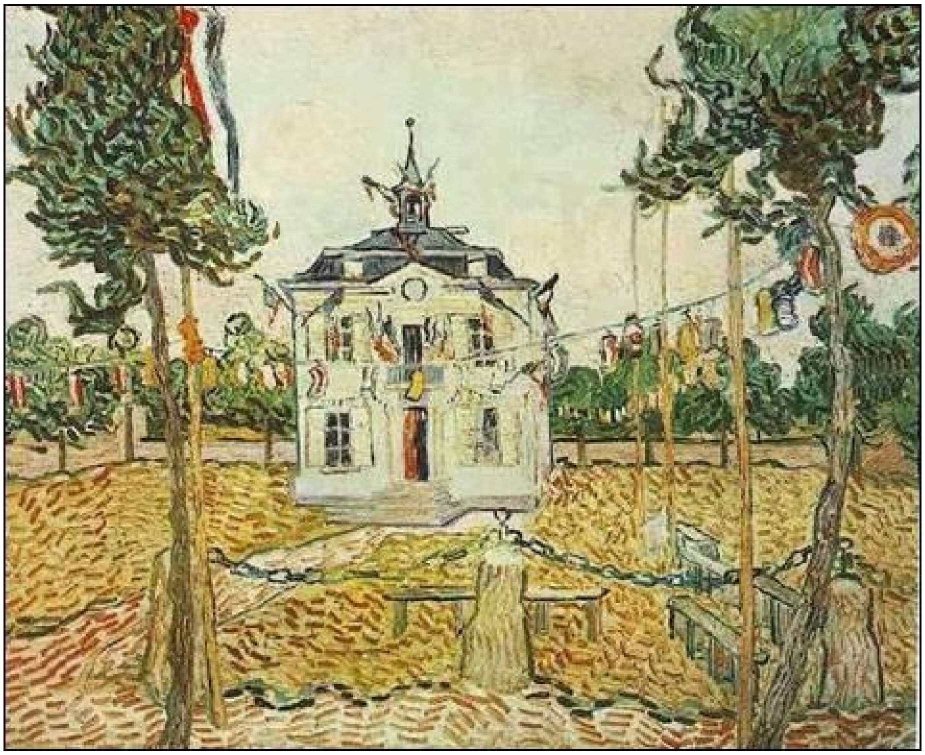
Young Girl Standing Against a Background of Wheat
Oil on canvas
66.0 x 45.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: late June, 1890



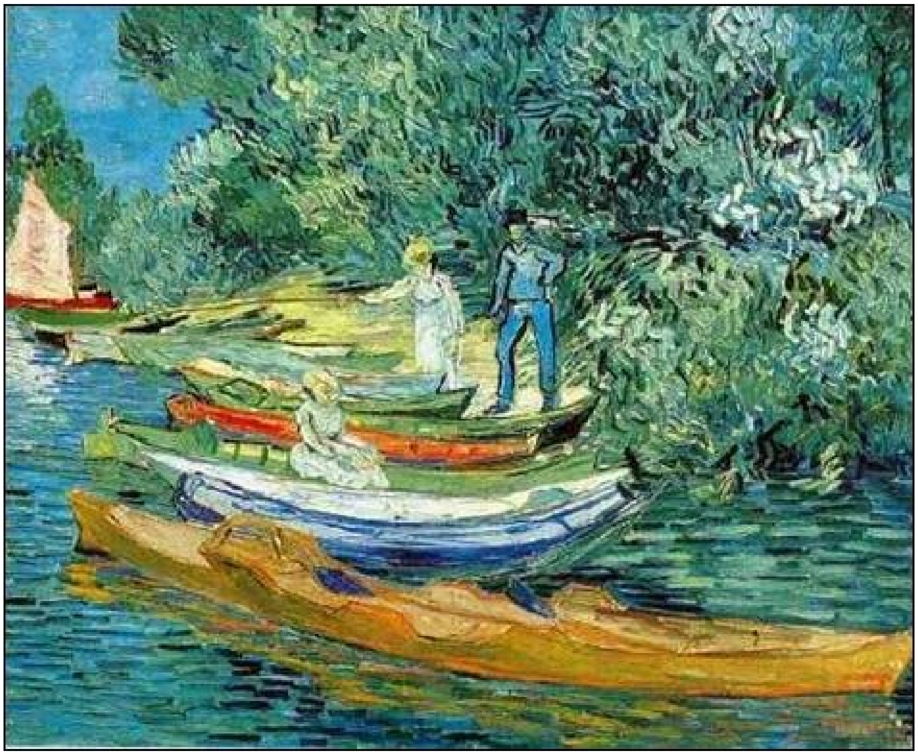
Young Peasant Woman with Straw Hat Sitting in the Wheat
Oil on canvas
92.0 x 73.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: late June, 1890



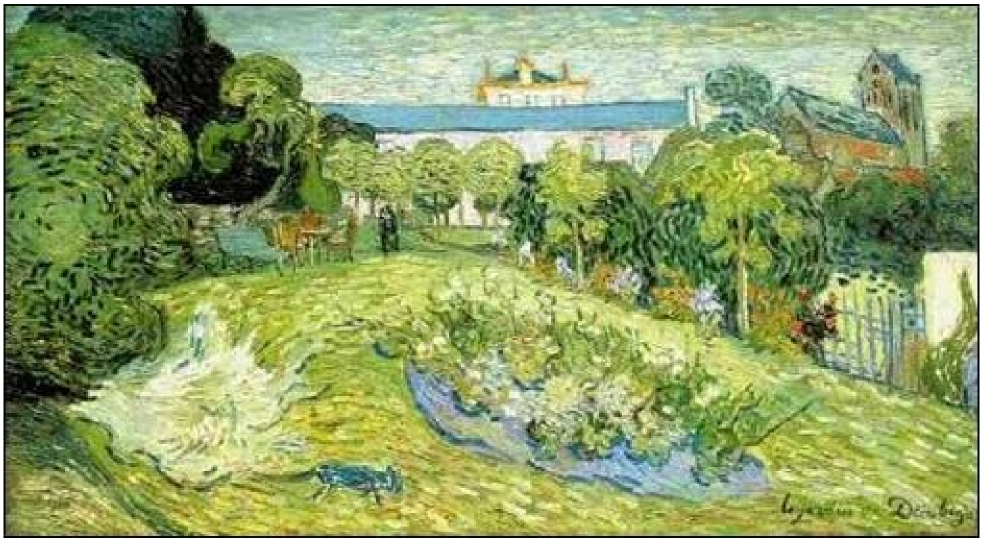
Garden in Auvers
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 80.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: June-July, 1890?



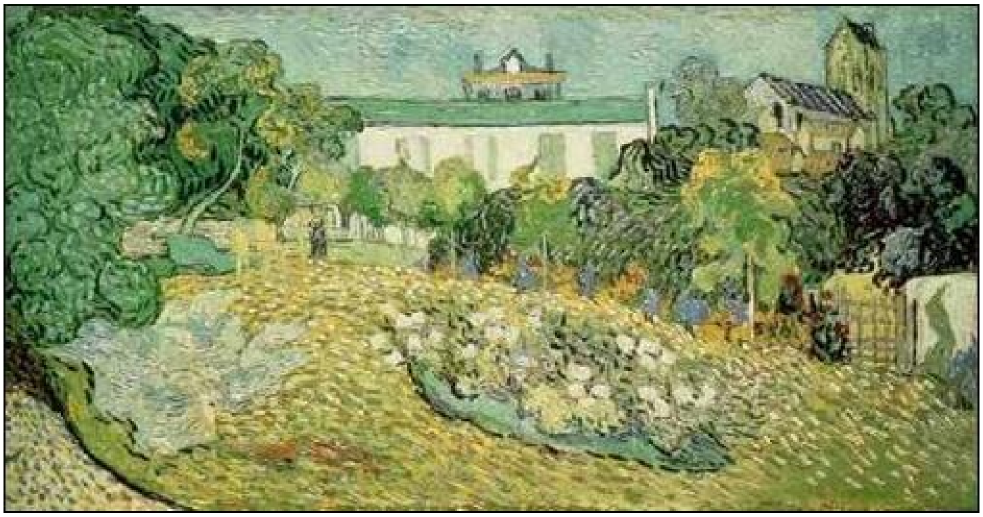
Auvers Town Hall on 14 July 1890
Oil on canvas
72.0 x 93.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



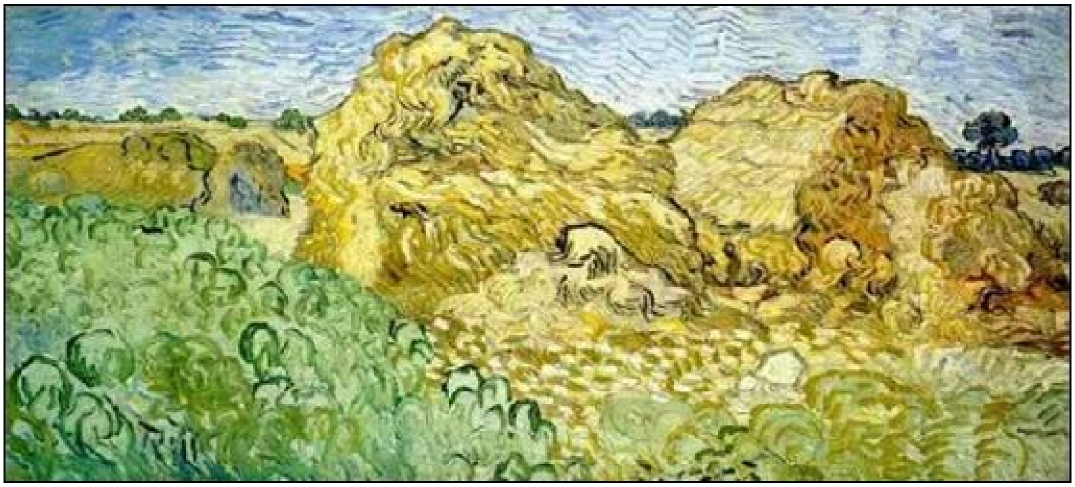
Bank of the Oise at Auvers
Oil on canvas
73.3 x 93.7 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



Daubigny's Garden
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 101.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890

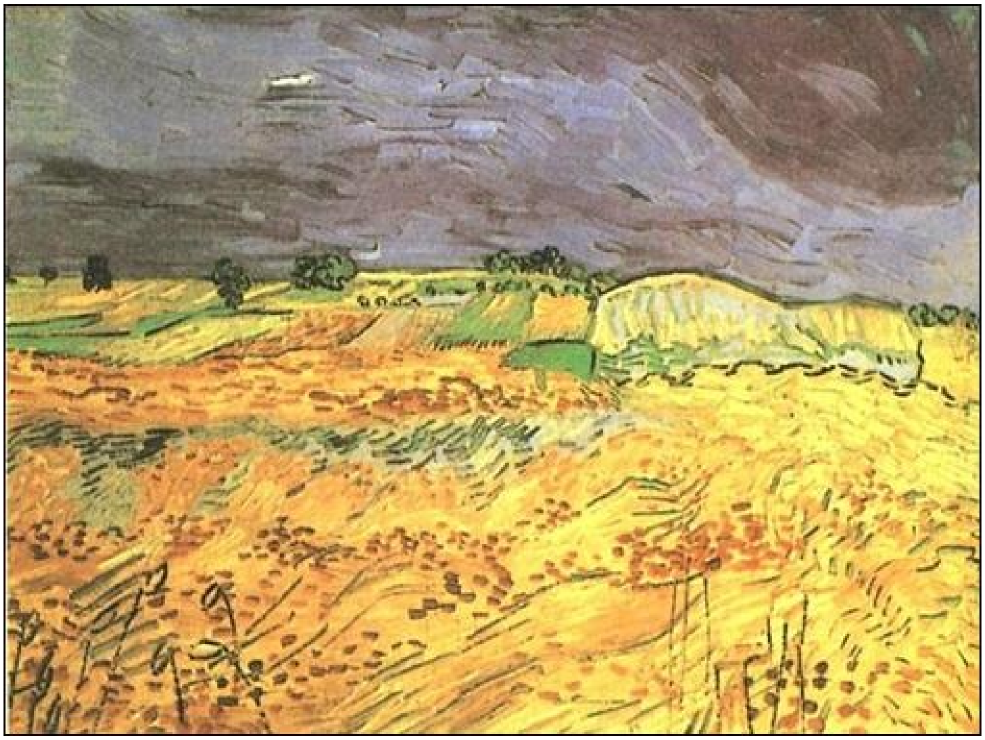


Daubigny's Garden
Oil on canvas
53.0 x 103.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



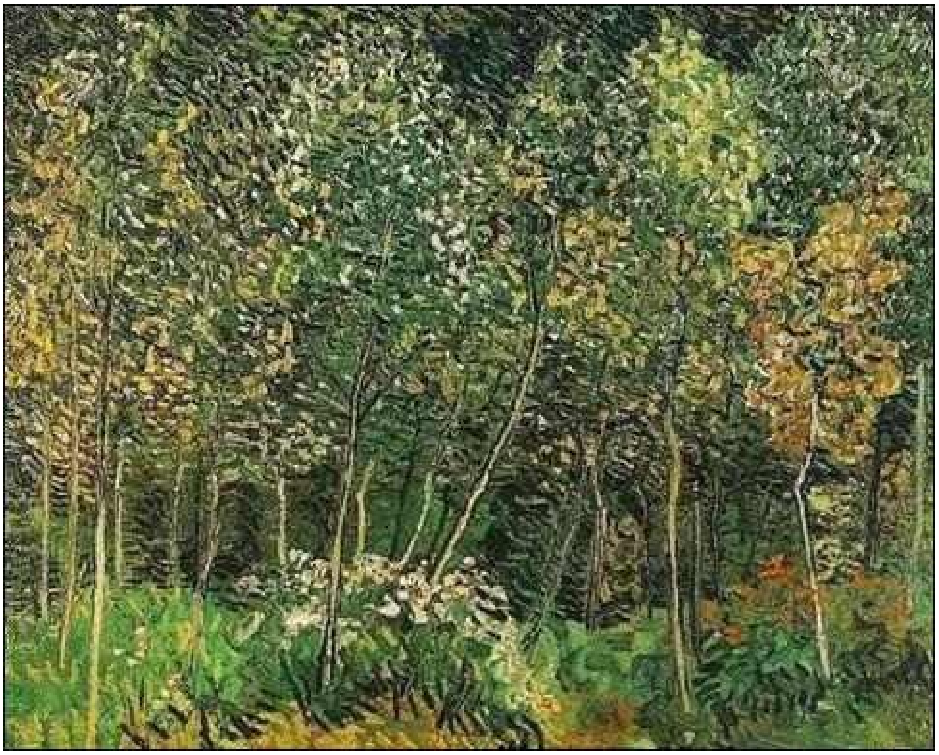
Field with Wheat Stacks

Oil on canvas
50.0 x 100.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890

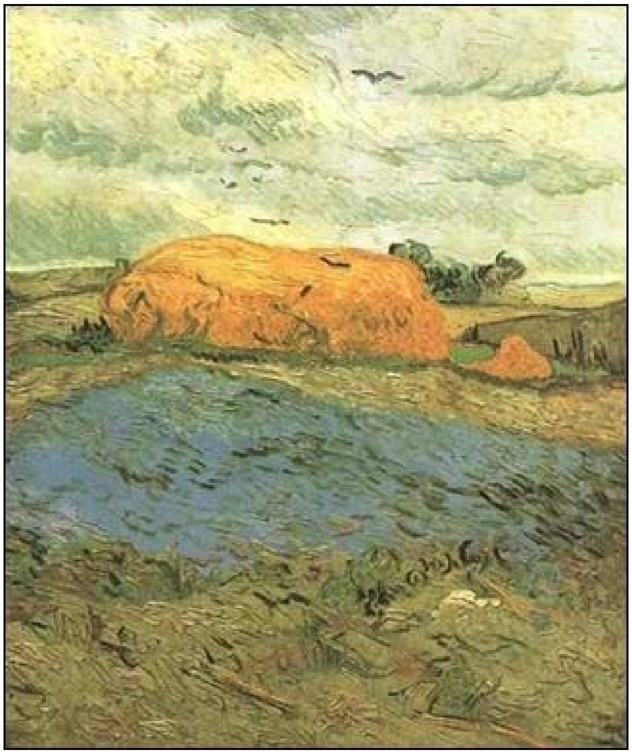


Fields, The

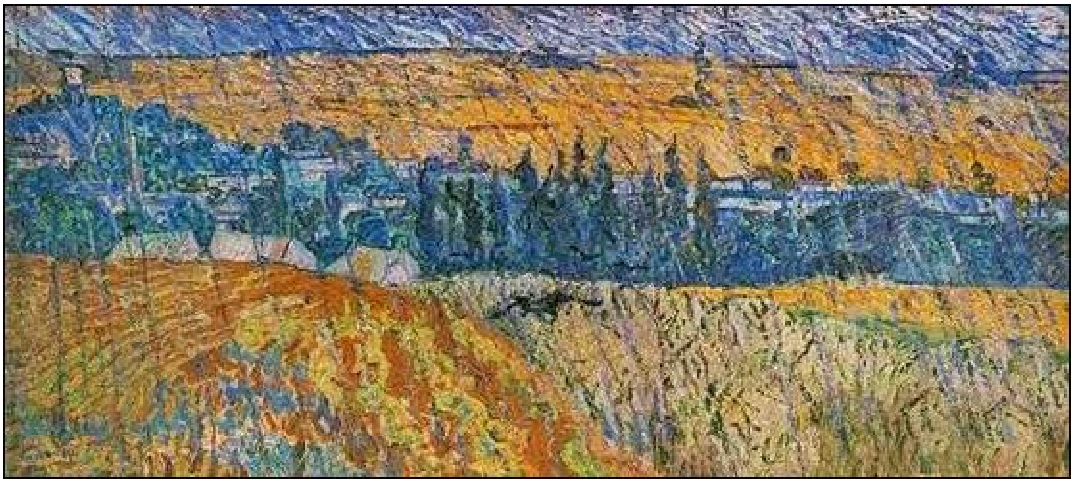
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 65.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



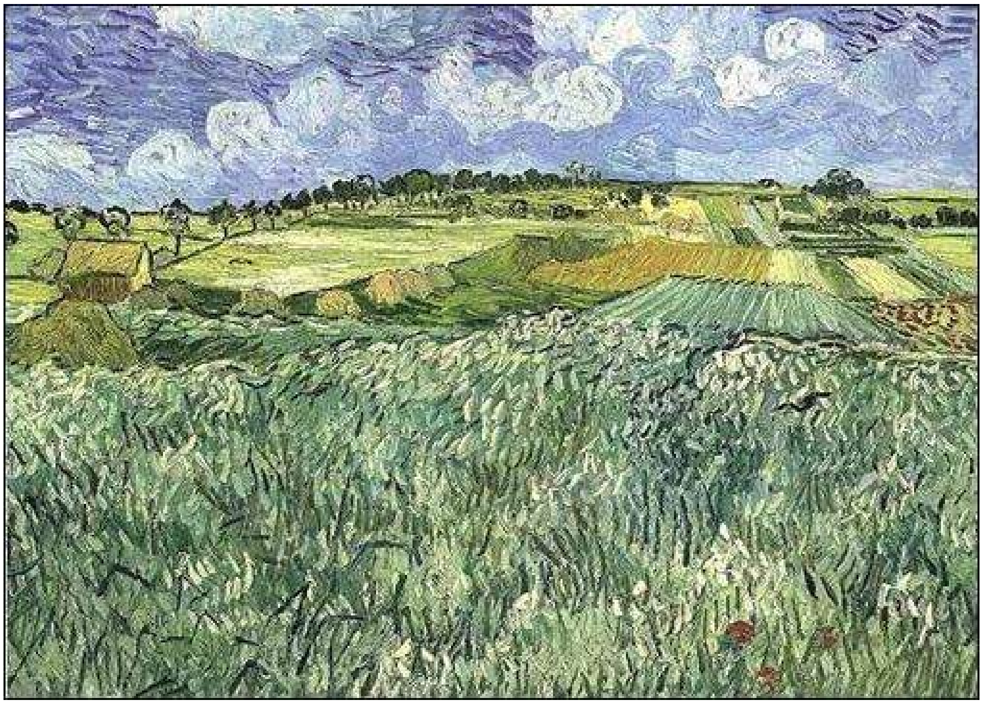
Grove, The
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



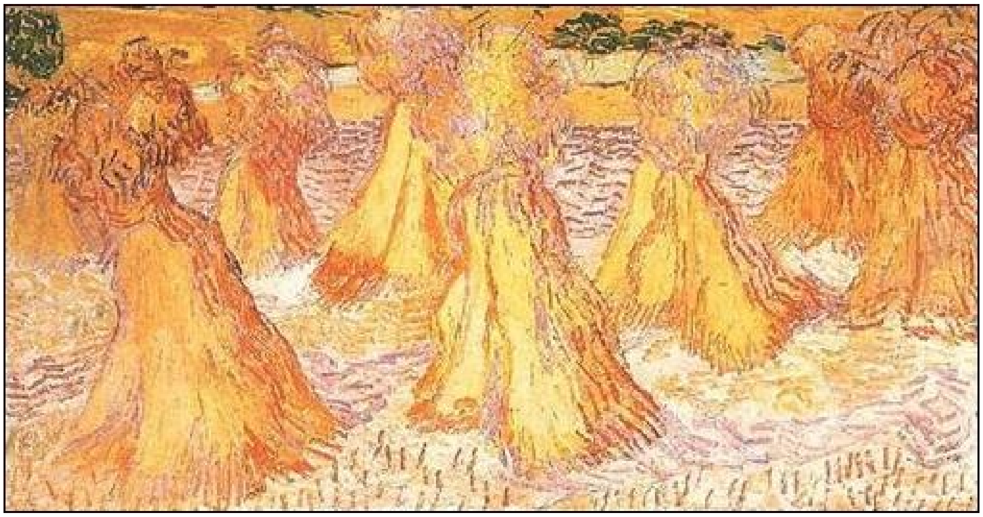
Haystacks under a Rainy Sky
Oil on canvas
64.0 x 52.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



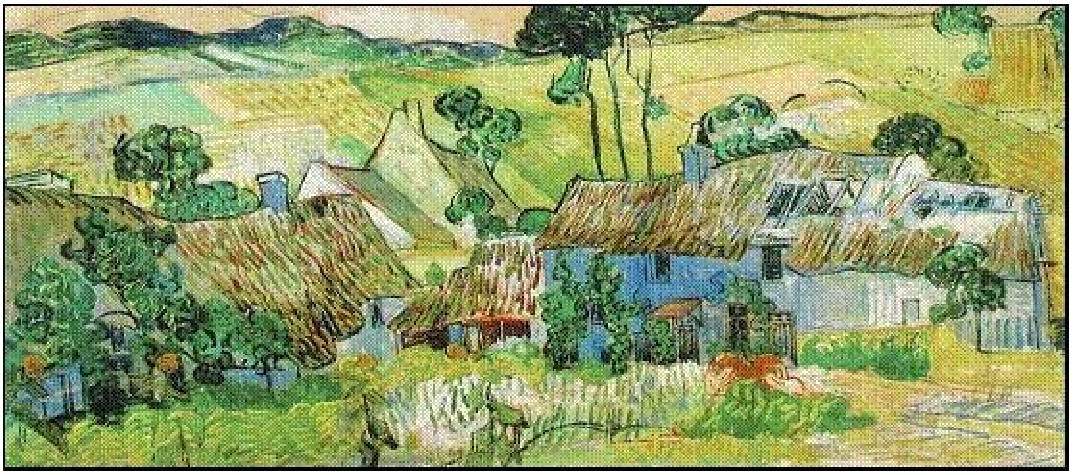
Landscape at Auvers in the Rain
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 100.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



Plain Near Auvers
Oil on canvas
73.3 x 92.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890

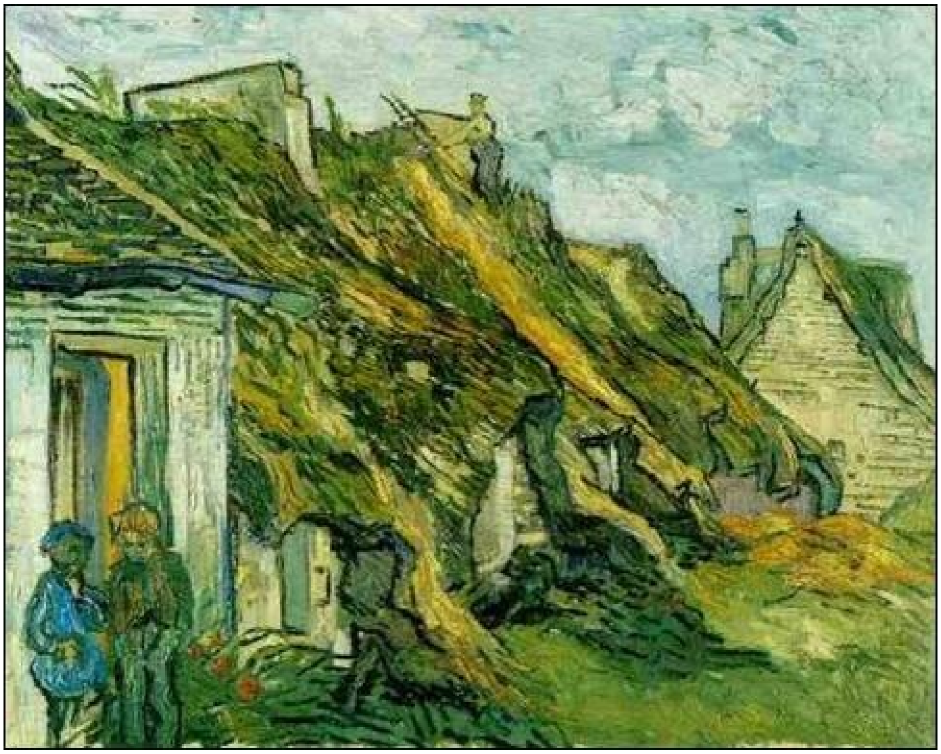


Sheaves of Wheat
Oil on canvas
50.5 x 101.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890

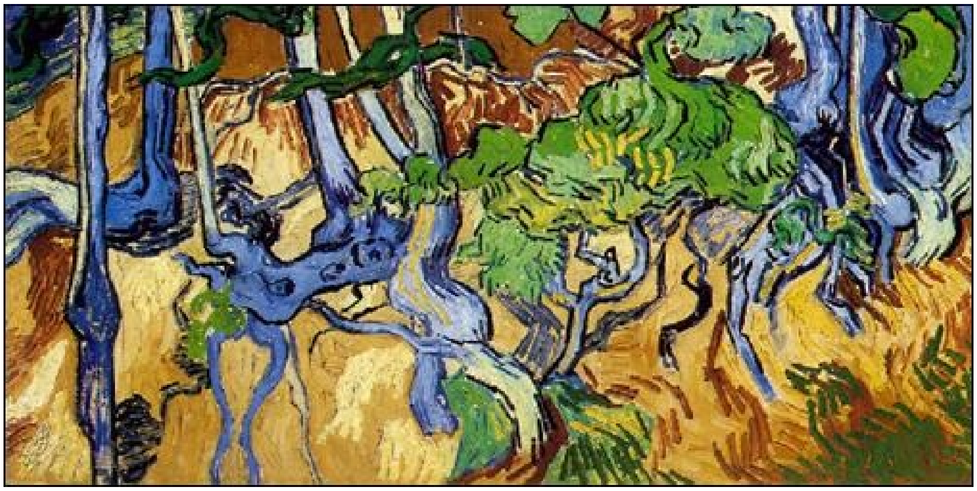


Thatched Cottages by a Hill

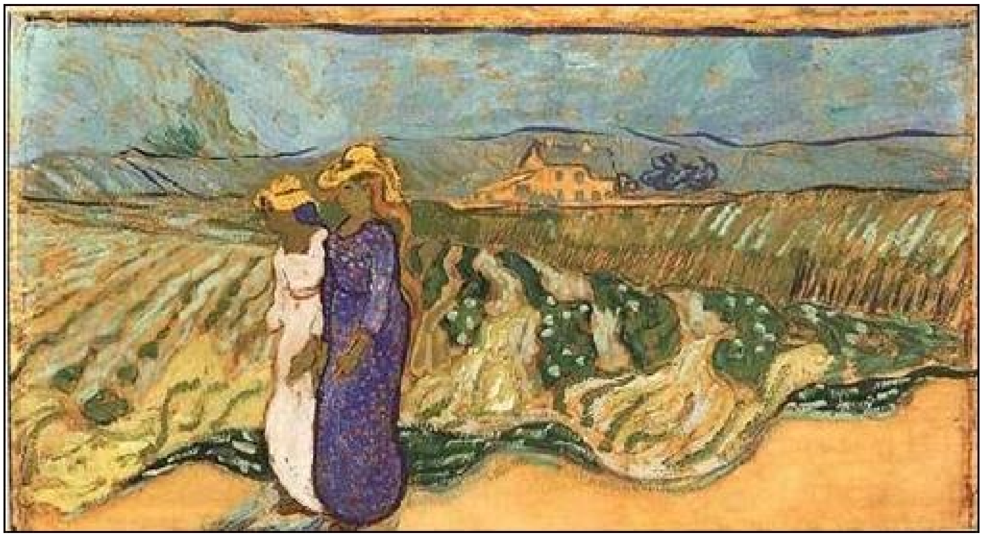
Oil on canvas
50.2 x 100.3 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



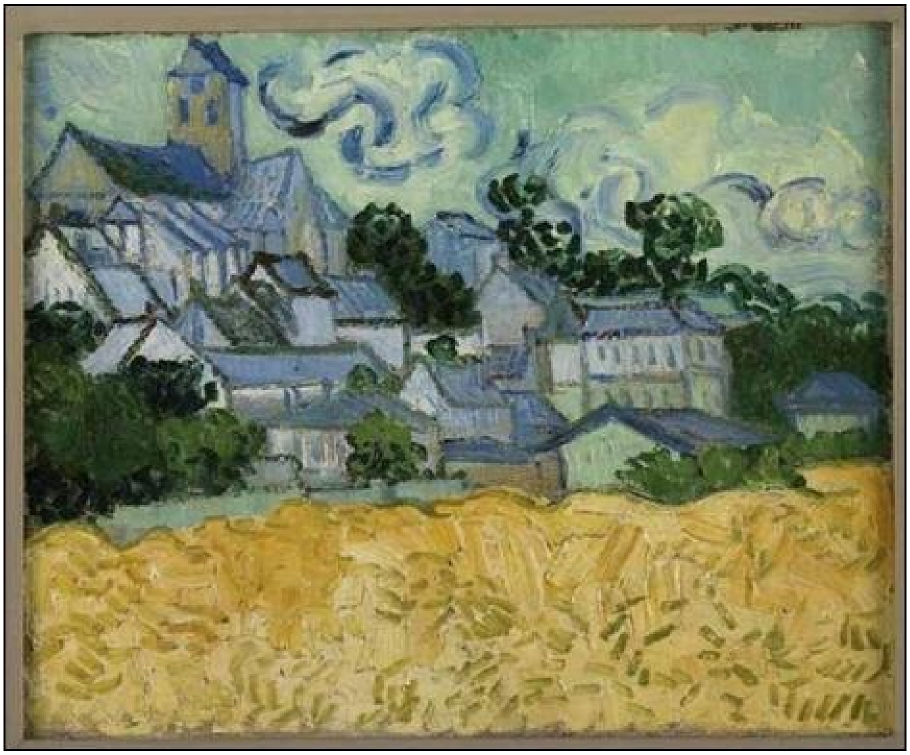
Thatched Sandstone Cottages in Chaponval
Oil on canvas
65.0 x 81.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



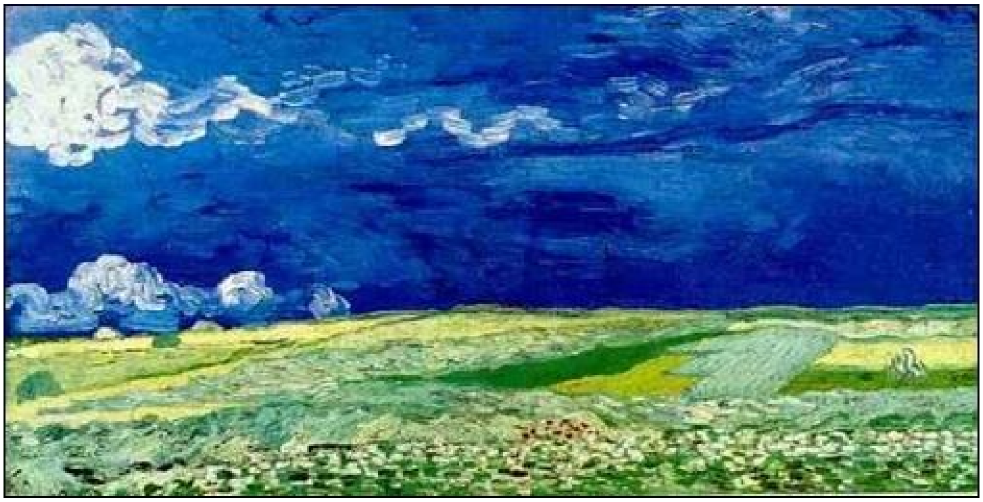
Tree Roots and Trunks
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 100.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



Two Women Crossing the Fields
Oil on paper on canvas
32.0 x 64.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890

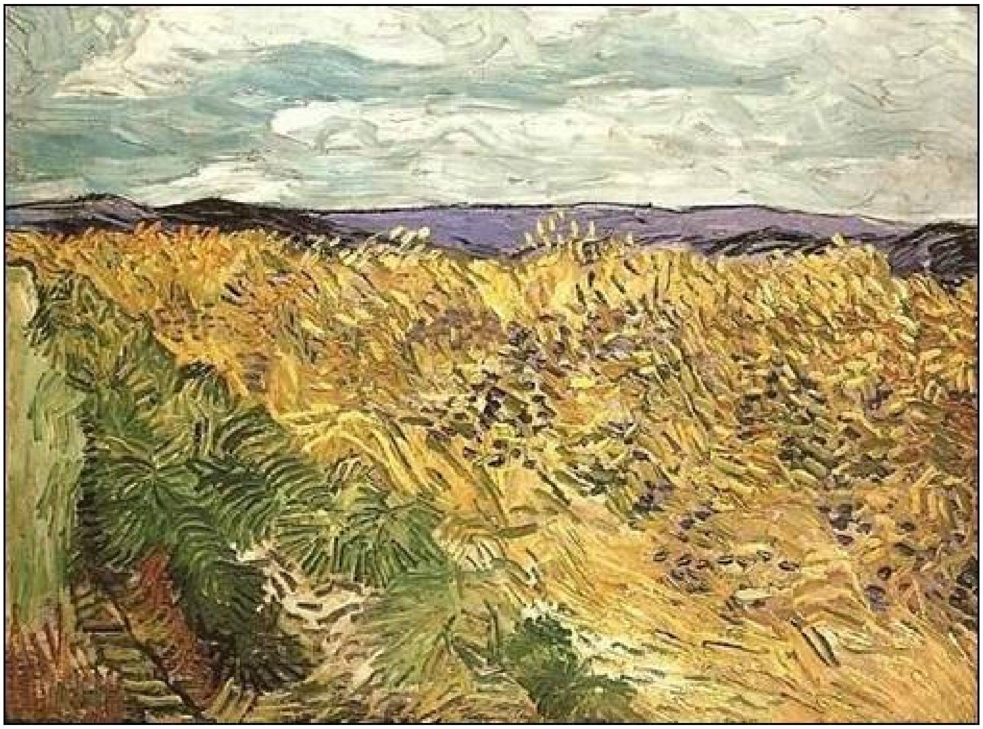


View of Auvers with Church
Oil on canvas
34.0 x 42.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890

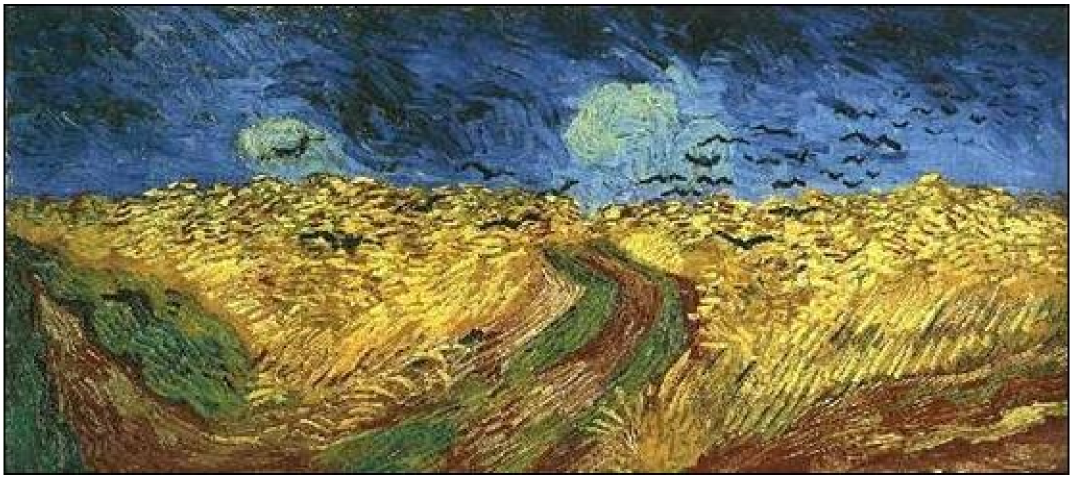


Wheat Field Under Clouded Sky

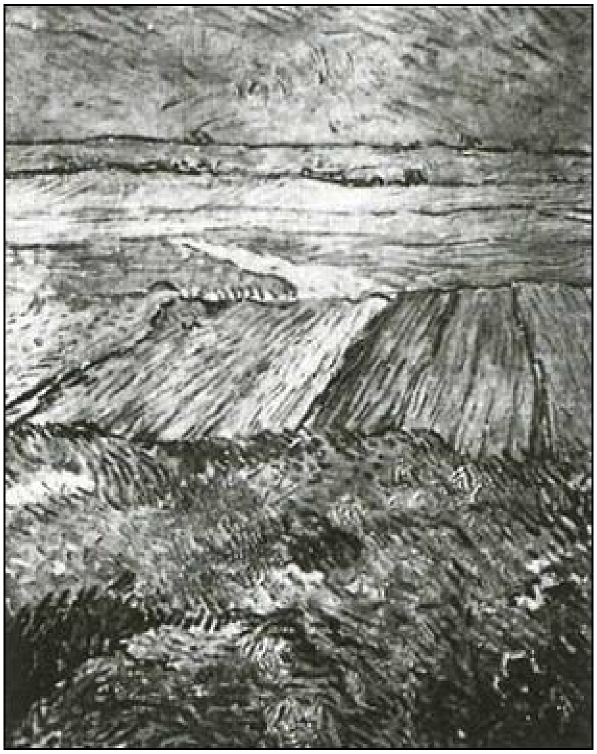
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 100.5 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



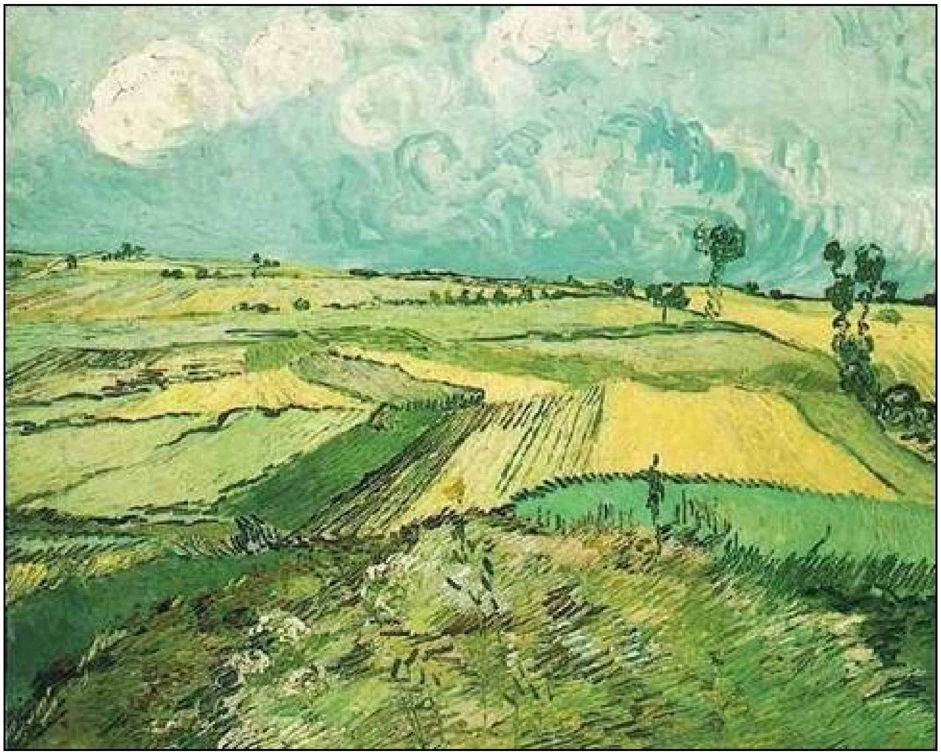
Wheat Field with Cornflowers
Oil on canvas
60.0 x 81.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



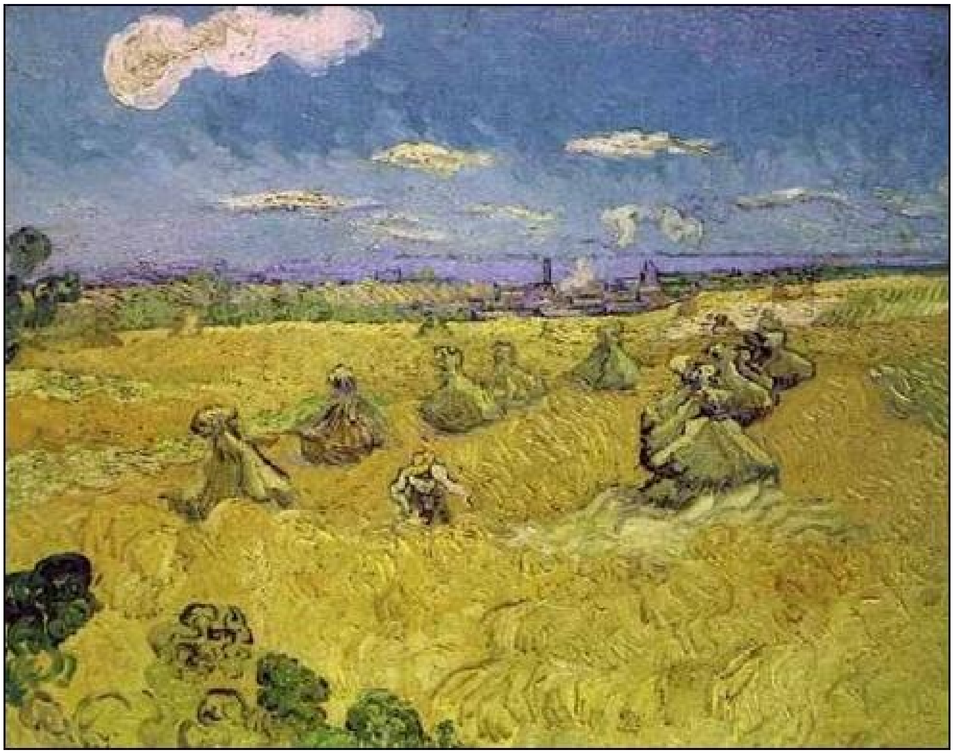
Wheat Field with Crows
Oil on canvas
50.5 x 103.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



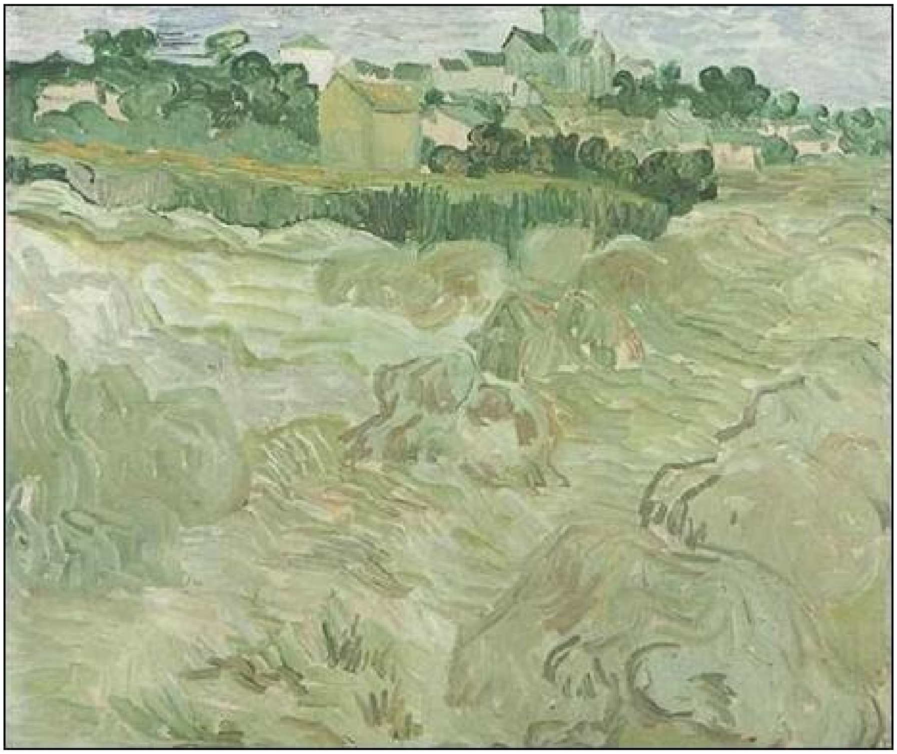
Wheat Fields
Oil on canvas
50.0 x 40.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



Wheat Fields at Auvers Under Clouded Sky
Oil on canvas
73.0 x 92.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



Wheat Stacks with Reaper
Oil on canvas
73.6 x 93.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890



Wheat Fields with Auvers in the Background
Oil on canvas
43.0 x 50.0 cm.
Auvers-sur-Oise: July, 1890

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PAINTINGS

VINS
RESTAURANT

The artist Émile Bernard talking with van Gogh (seen from behind), in a Paris suburb, 1886 — one of the few surviving photographs of van Gogh

Index of Paintings

Please note: each painting is placed *above* its title, so paging back once will be required when using the index.

Agostina Segatori Sitting in the Café du Tambourin
Agostina Segatori Sitting in the Café du Tambourin
Almond Tree in Blossom
Apricot Trees in Blossom
Apricot Trees in Blossom
Arles: View from the Wheat Fields
At the Foot of the Mountains
Autumn Landscape
Autumn Landscape at Dusk
Autumn Landscape with Four Trees
Auvers Town Hall on 14 July 1890
Avenue in Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Avenue of Plane Trees near Arles Station
Avenue of Poplars at Sunset
Avenue of Poplars in Autumn
Baby Marcelle Roulin, The
Baby Marcelle Roulin, The
Baby Marcelle Roulin, The
Backyards of Old Houses in Antwerp in the Snow
Bank of the Oise at Auvers
Banks of the Seine with Boats, The
Banks of the Seine with Pont de Clichy
Banks of the Seine with Pont de Clichy in the Spring
Banks of the Seine, The
Basket of Apples
Basket of Apples
Basket of Potatoes
Basket of Potatoes
Basket of Sprouting Bulbs
Baskets of Potatoes
Bathing Float on the Seine at Asnieres
Beach at Scheveningen in Calm Weather
Bedroom, The
Beer Tankards
Blossoming Acacia Branches
Blossoming Almond Branch in a Glass
Blossoming Almond Branch in a Glass with a Book
Blossoming Almond Tree
Blossoming Chestnut Branches
Blossoming Pear Tree
Bobbin Winder
Bois de Boulogne with People Walking, The
Bois de Boulogne with People Walking, The

Bois de Boulogne with People Walking, The
Boulevard de Clichy
Bowl with Chrysanthemums
Bowl with Daffodils
Bowl with Peonies and Roses
Bowl with Sunflowers, Roses and Other Flowers
Bridge at Trinquetaille, The
Bridges across the Seine at Asnieres
Bulb Fields
Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night, The
Canal with Women Washing
Cart with Black Ox
Cart with Red and White Ox
Chestnut Tree in Blossom
Chestnut Tree in Blossom
Chestnut Trees in Blossom
Child with Orange
Chrysanthemums and Wild Flowers in a Vase
Church at Auvers, The
Cineraria in a Flowerpot
Clumps of Grass
Cluster of Old Houses with the New Church in The Hague
Coal Barges
Coal Barges
Coleus Plant in a Flowerpot
Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen
Corner in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, A
Corner of Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Cottage
Cottage
Cottage and Woman with Goat
Cottage with Decrepit Barn and Stooping Woman
Cottage with Peasant Coming Home
Cottage with Peasant Woman Digging
Cottage with Trees
Cottage with Trees
Cottage with Trees
Cottage with Trees and Peasant Woman
Cottage, The
Cottages
Cottages and Cypresses: Reminiscence of the North
Cottages: Reminiscence of the North
Country Lane with Two Figures
Couples in the Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Courtyard of the Hospital at Arles, The
Cows (after Jordaens)
Cows in the Meadow
Crab on Its Back
Cypresses
Cypresses and Two Women

Cypresses with Two Female Figures
Dance Hall in Arles, The
Daubigny's Garden
Daubigny's Garden
Daubigny's Garden
De Ruijterkade in Amsterdam, The
Doctor Gachet's Garden in Auvers
Drinkers, The
Dunes
Dunes with Figures
Ears of Wheat
Edge of a Wheatfield with Poppies
Edge of a Wood
Encampment of Gypsies with Caravans
Enclosed Field with Ploughman
Enclosed Field with Rising Sun
Enclosed Wheat Field with Peasant
Entrance of Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnières
Entrance to a Quarry
Entrance to a Quarry near Saint-Rémy
Entrance to the Public Park in Arles
Evening Landscape with Rising Moon
Evening: The End of the Day (after Millet)
Evening: The Watch (after Millet)
Exterior of a Restaurant at Asnieres
Factories at Asnieres Seen from the Quai de Clichy
Factories Seen from a Hillside in Moonlight
Factory at Asnieres, The
Farm with Stacks of Peat
Farmers Planting Potatoes
Farmhouse in a Wheat Field
Farmhouse in Provence
Farmhouse with Two Figures
Farmhouses Among Trees
Farmhouses in a Wheat Field Near Arles
Farmhouses in Loosduinen near The Hague at Twilight
Field of Spring Wheat at Sunrise
Field of Yellow Flowers, A
Field with Ploughman and Mill
Field with Poppies
Field with Poppies
Field with Two Rabbits
Field with Wheat Stacks
Fields, The
First Steps (after Millet)
Fisherman on the Beach
Fisherman's Wife on the Beach
Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries
Fishing in Spring
Flowering Garden

Flowering Garden with Path
Flowerpot with Chives
Flowers in a Blue Vase
Flying Fox
Footbridge across a Ditch
Four Cut Sunflowers
Fourteenth of July Celebration in Paris, The
Fritillaries
Fritillaries in a Copper Vase
Garden Behind a House
Garden in Auvers
Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital with Figure, The
Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Garden with Sunflowers
Geranium in a Flowerpot
Ginger Jar Filled with Chrysanthemums
Girl in the Street, Two Coaches in the Background, A
Girl in the Woods
Girl in White in the Woods
Girl with Ruffled Hair (“The Mudlark”)
Glass with Hellebores
Glass with Roses
Gleize Bridge over the Vigueirat Canal, The
Good Samaritan (after Delacroix), The
Gordina de Groot, Head
Gordina de Groot, Head
Grass and Butterflies
Great Peacock Moth
Green Ears of Wheat
Green Parrot, The
Green Vineyard, The
Green Wheat Field
Green Wheat Field with Cypress
Green Wheat Fields
Grove, The
Half Figure of an Angel (after Rembrandt)
Harvest at La Crau, with Montmajour in the Background
Harvest in Provence
Haystacks in Provence
Haystacks under a Rainy Sky
Head of a Brabant Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Man
Head of a Man
Head of a Peasant
Head of a Peasant with a Pipe
Head of a Peasant with Cap

Head of a Peasant with Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman
Head of a Peasant Woman
Head of a Peasant Woman in a Green Shawl
Head of a Peasant Woman with Brownish Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with Greenish Lace Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman
Head of a Woman with her Hair Loose
Head of a Young Peasant in a Peaked Cap
Head of a Young Peasant in a Peaked Cap
Head of a Young Peasant Woman with Dark Cap
Head of an Old Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of an Old Peasant Woman with White Cap
Head of an Old Woman with White Cap
Hill of Montmartre with Quarry, The
House of Pere Eloi, The
House of Pere Pilon, The
House with Sunflowers
Houses in Auvers
Houses in Auvers
Interior of a Restaurant
Interior of a Restaurant in Arles
Interior of the Restaurant Carrel in Arles

Iris, The
Irises
Italian Woman (Agostina Segatori?)
Japonaiserie: Bridge in the Rain (after Hiroshige)
Japonaiserie: Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)
Japonaiserie: Oiran 105.0 x 60.5 cm. Paris: September-October, 1887
Kingfisher, The
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)
La Crau with Peach Trees in Blossom
La Mousmé, Sitting
Landscape at Auvers in the Rain
Landscape at Dusk
Landscape at Sunset
Landscape in the Neighbourhood of Saint-Rémy
Landscape Under a Stormy Sky
Landscape with a Church at Twilight
Landscape with Carriage and Train in the Background
Landscape with Couple Walking and Crescent Moon
Landscape with Dunes
Landscape with Olive Tree and Mountains in the Background
Landscape with Pollard Willows
Landscape with Snow
Landscape with the Chateau of Auvers at Sunset
Landscape with Trees and Figures
Landscape with Windblown Trees
Lane at the Jardin du Luxembourg
Lane in Autumn
Lane in the Public Garden at Arles, A
Lane in Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Lane in Voyer d'Argenson Park at Asnieres
Lane near Arles, A
Lane with Poplars
Langlois Bridge at Arles with Road Alongside the Canal, The
Langlois Bridge at Arles with Women Washing, The
Langlois Bridge at Arles, The
Langlois Bridge at Arles, The
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
L'Arlesienne (Madame Ginoux)
L'Arlesienne: Madame Ginoux with Books
L'Arlesienne: Madame Ginoux with Gloves and Umbrella
Le Blute-Fin Mill
Le Mont Gaussier with the Mas de Saint-Paul
Le Moulin de Blute-Fin
Le Moulin de la Galette
Le Moulin de la Galette

Le Moulin de la Galette
Le Moulin de la Galette
Le Moulin de la Galette
Le Moulin de la Galette
Le Moulin de la Galette
Les Alyscamps
Les Alyscamps
Les Alyscamps
Les Alyscamps: Falling Autumn Leaves
Les Peiroulets Ravine
Les Peiroulets Ravine
Les Peiroulets Ravine
Lilacs
Lilacs
Little Arlesienne, The
Little Stream, The
Lovers: The Poet's Garden IV, The
Lying Cow
Lying Cow
Madame Roulin Rocking the Cradle (La Berceuse)
Man is at Sea (after Demont-Breton), The
Man Stooping with Stick or Spade
Marguerite Gachet at the Piano
Marguerite Gachet in the Garden
Marshy Landscape
Meadow in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Meadow in the Mountains: Le Mas de Saint-Paul, A
Memory of the Garden at Etten
Montmartre
Montmartre Path with Sunflowers
Montmartre: Quarry, the Mills
Morning: Peasant Couple Going to Work
Mother Roulin with Her Baby
Mother Roulin with Her Baby
Mountainous Landscape Behind Saint-Paul Hospital
Mountains at Saint-Rémy with Dark Cottage
Noon: Rest from Work (after Millet)
Novel Reader, The
Nude Study of a Little Girl, Seated
Nude Woman on a Bed
Nude Woman Reclining
Nude Woman Reclining, Seen from the Back
Old Cemetery Tower at Nuenen in the Snow, The
Old Church Tower at Nuenen
Old Church Tower at Nuenen, The
Old Man in Sorrow (On the Threshold of Eternity)
Old Mill, The
Old Station at Eindhoven, The
Old Tower at Nuenen with a Ploughman, The
Old Tower in the Fields, The

Old Tower of Nuenen with People Walking, The
Old Woman of Arles, An
Olive Grove
Olive Grove
Olive Grove
Olive Grove with Picking Figures
Olive Grove: Bright Blue Sky
Olive Grove: Orange Sky
Olive Grove: Pale Blue Sky
Olive Picking
Olive Picking
Olive Picking
Olive Trees
Olive Trees against a Slope of a Hill
Olive Trees with the Alpilles in the Background
Olive Trees with Yellow Sky and Sun
Olive Trees: Bright Blue Sky
On the Outskirts of Paris
Orchard in Blossom
Orchard in Blossom
Orchard in Blossom
Orchard in Blossom (Plum Trees)
Orchard in Blossom with View of Arles
Orchard in Blossom, Bordered by Cypresses
Orchard in Blossom, Bordered by Cypresses
Orchard with Blossoming Apricot Trees
Orchard with Peach Trees in Blossom
Outskirts of Paris
Outskirts of Paris: Road with Peasant Shouldering a Spade
Painter on His Way to Work, The
Pair of Leather Clogs, A
Pair of Shoes, A
Pair of Shoes, A
Pair of Shoes, A
Pair of Shoes, A
Pair of Shoes, A
Park at Arles with the Entrance Seen through the Trees, The
Park at Asnieres in Spring
Parsonage at Nuenen by Moonlight, The
Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in the Snow, The
Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in the Snow, The
Parsonage Garden at Nuenen with Pond and Figures, The
Parsonage Garden at Nuenen, The
Pasture in Bloom
Path in the Woods
Path Through a Field with Willows
Paul Gauguin's Armchair
Peach Tree in Blossom
Peasant and Peasant Woman Planting Potatoes
Peasant Burning Weeds

Peasant Digging
Peasant Making a Basket
Peasant Making a Basket
Peasant Sitting at a Table
Peasant Woman Binding Sheaves (after Millet)
Peasant Woman by the Fireplace
Peasant Woman by the Fireplace
Peasant Woman Cutting Straw (after Millet)
Peasant Woman Darning Stockings
Peasant Woman Digging
Peasant Woman Digging
Peasant Woman Digging
Peasant Woman Digging in Front of Her Cottage
Peasant Woman Digging Up Potatoes
Peasant Woman Laundering
Peasant Woman Peeling Potatoes
Peasant Woman Raking
Peasant Woman Seated before an Open Door, Peeling Potatoes
Peasant Woman Sewing
Peasant Woman Sitting on a Chair
Peasant Woman Standing Indoors
Peasant Woman Sweeping the Floor
Peasant Woman Taking her Meal
Peasant Woman with a Rake (after Millet)
Peasant Woman with Child on Her Lap
Peasant Woman, Peeling Potatoes
Peasant Woman, Seated (Half-Figure)
Peasant Woman, Seated with White Cap
Peasant Woman, Seated, with White Cap
Peasant Woman, Seen against the Window
Peasants Lifting Potatoes
Peat Boat with Two Figures
Pietà (after Delacroix)
Pietà (after Delacroix), The

Pine Trees against a Red Sky with Setting Sun
Pine Trees and Dandelions in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Pine Trees with Figure in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Pink Peach Tree in Blossom
Plain Near Auvers
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Plaster Statuette of a Female Torso
Plaster Statuette of a Horse
Plaster Statuette of a Male Torso
Plough and the Harrow (after Millet), The
Ploughed Field
Poet's Garden, The
Pollard Willows
Pont du Carrousel and the Louvre, The
Poppies and Butterflies
Pork-Butcher's Shop Seen from a Window, A
Portrait of a Man with a Moustache
Portrait of a Man with a Skull Cap
Portrait of a One-Eyed Man
Portrait of a Patient in Saint-Paul Hospital
Portrait of a Woman (Madame Tanguy?)
Portrait of a Woman Seated
Portrait of a Woman with Hat
Portrait of a Woman with Red Ribbon
Portrait of a Woman, Facing Right
Portrait of a Young Peasant
Portrait of Adeline Ravoux
Portrait of Adeline Ravoux
Portrait of Adeline Ravoux
Portrait of an Old Man with Beard
Portrait of Armand Roulin
Portrait of Armand Roulin
Portrait of Camille Roulin
Portrait of Camille Roulin
Portrait of Doctor Felix Rey
Portrait of Doctor Gachet
Portrait of Doctor Gachet
Portrait of Eugene Boch
Portrait of Joseph-Michel Ginoux
Portrait of Madame Augustine Roulin
Portrait of Madame Trabuc
Portrait of Milliet, Second Lieutenant of the Zouaves
Portrait of Patience Escalier
Portrait of Patience Escalier, Shepherd in Provence
Portrait of Père Tanguy

Portrait of Père Tanguy
Portrait of Père Tanguy
Portrait of the Art Dealer Alexander Reid
Portrait of the Art Dealer Alexander Reid, Sitting in an Easy Chair
Portrait of the Artist's Mother
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin
Portrait of Theo van Gogh
Portrait of Trabuc, an Attendant at Saint-Paul Hospital
Portrait of Woman in Blue
Potato Digging
Potato Eaters, The
Potato Planting
Prisoners Exercising (after Doré)
Public Garden with Couple and Blue Fir Tree: The Poet's Garden III
Public Park at Arles, The
Quay with Men Unloading Sand Barges
Railway Bridge over Avenue Montmajour, Arles, The
Railway Carriages
Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt), The
Reaper with Sickle (after Millet)
Red Chestnuts in the Public Park at Arles
Restaurant de la Sirène at Asnières
Restaurant de la Sirene at Asnières, The
Rispal Restaurant at Asnières, The
Road at Saint-Remy with Female Figure, A
Road Menders, The
Road Menders, The
Road with Cypress and Star
Roadway with Underpass (The Viaduct)
Rocks with Oak Tree
Rosebush in Blossom
Roses and Beetle
Schoolboy (Camille Roulin), The
Seascape at Saintes-Maries
Seascape at Saintes-Maries
Seated Zouave, The
Seine Bridge at Asnieres, The
Seine with a Rowing Boat, The
Seine with the Pont de Clichy, The
Seine with the Pont de la Grande Jette, The
Self-Portrait
Self-portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait

Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait
Self-Portrait (Dedicated to Gauguin)
Self-Portrait in Front of the Easel
Self-Portrait with a Japanese Print
Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear
Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe
Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat
Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat at the Easel
Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat
Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat
Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat
Self-Portrait with Pipe
Self-Portrait with Pipe
Self-Portrait with Pipe and Glass
Self-Portrait with Pipe and Straw Hat
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat
Self-Portrait with Straw Hat and Pipe
Sheaf-Binder, The (after Millet)
Sheaves of Wheat
Sheaves of Wheat in a Field
Sheep-Shearers, The (after Millet)
Shepherd with a Flock of Sheep
Shepherdess, The (after Millet)
Skull
Skull
Skull with Burning Cigarette
Sloping Path in Montmartre
Smoker, The
Snowy Landscape with Arles in the Background
Sower (study), The
Sower, The
Sower, The
Sower, The
Sower, The
Sower, The (after Millet)
Sower, The (after Millet)
Sower: Outskirts of Arles in the Background, The
Spectators in the Arena at Arles

Starry Night
Starry Night Over the Rhone
Still Life with a Basket of Apples
Still Life with a Basket of Apples and Two Pumpkins
Still Life with a Basket of Crocuses
Still Life with a Basket of Potatoes, Surrounded by Autumn Leaves and Vegetables
Still Life with a Basket of Vegetables
Still Life with Absinthe
Still Life with an Earthen Bowl and Pears
Still Life with an Earthen Bowl and Potatoes
Still Life with Apples
Still Life with Apples, Pears, Lemons and Grapes
Still Life with Basket and Six Oranges
Still Life with Basket of Apples
Still Life with Basket of Apples (to Lucien Pissarro)
Still Life with Bible
Still Life with Birds' Nests
Still Life with Birds' Nests
Still Life with Bloaters
Still Life with Bloaters
Still Life with Bloaters and Garlic
Still Life with Bottles and a Cowrie Shell
Still Life with Bottles and Earthenware
Still Life with Brass Cauldron and Jug
Still Life with Cabbage and Clogs
Still Life with Clogs and Pots
Still Life with Coffee Mill, Pipe Case and Jug
Still Life with Copper Coffeepot and Two White Bowls
Still Life with Decanter and Lemons on a Plate
Still Life with Earthenware, Bottle and Clogs
Still Life with Earthenware and Bottles
Still Life with Five Bottles
Still Life with Four Stone Bottles, Flask and White Cup
Still Life with French Novels and a Rose
Still Life with Ginger Jar and Apples
Still Life with Ginger Jar and Onions
Still Life with Grapes
Still Life with Grapes, Pears and Lemons
Still Life with Lemons on a Plate
Still Life with Meat, Vegetables and Pottery
Still Life with Mussels and Shrimps
Still Life with Oranges, Lemons and Blue Gloves
Still Life with Paintbrushes in a Pot
Still Life with Plaster Statuette, a Rose and Two Novels
Still Life with Pots, Jar and Bottles
Still Life with Pottery and Two Bottles
Still Life with Pottery, Beer Glass and Bottle
Still Life with Quince Pears
Still Life with Red Cabbages and Onions
Still Life with Scabiosa and Ranunculus

Still Life with Three Birds' Nests
Still Life with Three Birds' Nests
Still Life with Three Birds' Nests
Still Life with Three Books
Still Life with Two Herrings, a Cloth and a Glass
Still Life with Two Jars and Two Pumpkins
Still Life with Two Sacks and a Bottle
Still Life with Vegetables and Fruit
Still Life with Yellow Straw Hat
Still Life: Bloaters on a Piece of Yellow Paper
Still Life: Blue Enamel Coffeepot, Earthenware and Fruit
Still Life: Bottle, Lemons and Oranges
Still Life: Bowl with Daisies
Still Life: Drawing Board, Pipe, Onions and Sealing-Wax
Still Life: French Novels
Still Life: Glass with Carnations
Still Life: Glass with Wild Flowers
Still Life: Japanese Vase with Roses and Anemones
Still Life: Majolica Jug with Wildflowers
Still Life: Pink Roses
Still Life: Pink Roses in a Vase
Still Life: Potatoes in a Yellow Dish
Still Life: Red Poppies and Daisies
Still Life: Two Red Herrings
Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers
Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers
Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers
Still Life: Vase with Five Sunflowers
Still Life: Vase with Flower and Thistles
Still Life: Vase with Irises
Still Life: Vase with Irises Against a Yellow Background
Still Life: Vase with Oleanders
Still Life: Vase with Oleanders and Books
Still Life: Vase with Rose-Mallows
Still Life: Vase with Roses
Still Life: Vase with Twelve Sunflowers
Still Life: Vase with Twelve Sunflowers
Still Life: Vase with Zinnias
Stone Bench in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital, The
Street in Saintes-Maries
Street Scene in Montmartre
Street Scene in Montmartre: Le Moulin a Poivre
Study for 'The Potato Eaters'
Study of Pine Trees
Sunny Lawn in a Public Park
Sunset: Wheat Fields Near Arles
Tambourine with Pansies
Tarascon Diligence
Terrace of a Café on Montmartre (La Guinguette)
Thatched Cottages

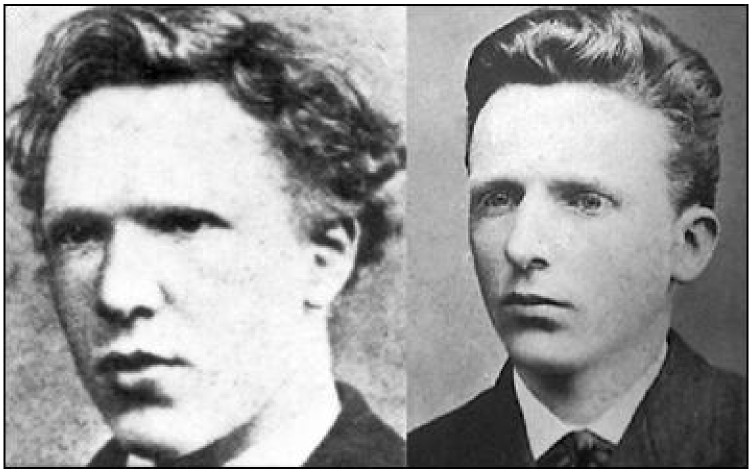
Thatched Cottages at Cordeville
Thatched Cottages by a Hill
Thatched Cottages in Jorgus
Thatched Cottages in the Sunshine: Reminiscence of the North
Thatched Sandstone Cottages in Chaponval
The Brothel
The Mulberry Tree
The Night Café in the Place Lamartine in Arles
The Potato Eaters
The Red Vineyard
The Spinner
Thistles
Three Figures near a Canal with Windmill
Three Pairs of Shoes
Three Sunflowers in a Vase
Three White Cottages in Saintes-Maries
Thresher (after Millet), The
Tree Roots and Trunks
Tree Trunks with Ivy
Tree Trunks with Ivy
Trees and Undergrowth
Trees and Undergrowth
Trees in a Field on a Sunny Day
Trees in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Trees in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Trees in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital
Trinquetaille Bridge, The
Trunk of an Old Yew Tree
Twilight, before the Storm: Montmartre
Two Children
Two Children
Two Crabs
Two Cut Sunflowers
Two Cut Sunflowers
Two Cut Sunflowers
Two Diggers Among Trees
Two Hands
Two Lovers (Fragment)
Two Peasant Women Digging
Two Peasant Women Digging in Field with Snow
Two Peasant Women Digging Potatoes
Two Peasants Digging
Two Poplars on a Road Through the Hills
Two Rats
Two Thistles
Two White Butterflies
Two Women Crossing the Fields
Two Women in the Moor
Two Women in the Woods
Undergrowth

Undergrowth
Undergrowth with Ivy
Undergrowth with Two Figures
Valley with Ploughman Seen from Above
Vase with Asters and Phlox
Vase with Asters, Salvia and Other Flowers
Vase with Carnations
Vase with Carnations
Vase with Carnations
Vase with Carnations and Other Flowers
Vase with Carnations and Zinnias
Vase with Cornflowers and Poppies
Vase with Daisies
Vase with Daisies and Anemones
Vase with Dead Leaves
Vase with Flowers
Vase with Gladioli
Vase with Gladioli and Carnations
Vase with Gladioli and Carnations
Vase with Gladioli and Lilac
Vase with Hollyhocks
Vase with Honesty
Vase with Lilacs, Daisies and Anemones
Vase with Myosotis and Peonies
Vase with Peonies
Vase with Red Gladioli
Vase with Red Gladioli
Vase with Red Gladioli
Vase with Red Poppies
Vase with Viscaria
Vase with White and Red Carnations
Vase with Zinnias
Vase with Zinnias and Geraniums
Vase with Zinnias and Other Flowers
Vegetable Garden in Montmartre
Vegetable Gardens at Montmartre
Vegetable Gardens in Montmartre: La Butte Montmartre
Vicarage at Nuenen, The
View of a River with Rowing Boats
View of a Town with Drawbridge
View of Amsterdam from Central Station
View of Arles with Irises in the Foreground
View of Arles with Trees in Blossom
View of Auvers
View of Auvers with Church
View of Montmartre with Windmills
View of Paris from Montmartre
View of Paris from near Montmartre
View of Paris from Vincent's Room in the Rue Lepic
View of Paris from Vincent's Room in the Rue Lepic

View of Roofs and Backs of Houses
View of Saintes-Maries
View of the Church of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole
View of the Roofs of Paris
View of the Sea at Scheveningen
View of Vessenots Near Auvers
Village at Sunset
Village Street and Steps in Auvers with Figures
Village Street and Steps in Auvers with Two Figures
Village Street in Auvers
Vincent's Bedroom in Arles
Vincent's Bedroom in Arles
Vincent's House in Arles (The Yellow House)
Vineyards with a View of Auvers
Walk Along the Banks of the Seine Near Asnières
Walk: Falling Leaves, The
Ward in the Hospital in Arles
Water Mill at Gennep
Water Mill at Gennep
Water Mill at Gennep
Water Mill at Kollen Near Nuenen
Water Mill at Opwetten
Weaver Arranging Threads
Weaver Arranging Threads
Weaver Facing Left with Spinning Wheel
Weaver Facing Right
Weaver Facing Right (Half-Figure)
Weaver Near an Open Window
Weaver Standing in Front of a Loom
Weaver, Interior with Three Small Windows
Weaver, Seen from the Front
Weaver, Seen from the Front
Wheat Field
Wheat Field at Auvers with White House
Wheat Field Behind Saint-Paul Hospital
Wheat Field Behind Saint-Paul Hospital with a Reaper
Wheat Field in Rain
Wheat Field Under Clouded Sky
Wheat Field with a Partridge
Wheat Field with Cornflowers
Wheat Field with Crows
Wheat Field with Cypresses
Wheat Field with Cypresses
Wheat Field with Cypresses at the Haute Galline Near Eygalieres
Wheat Field with Reaper and Sun
Wheat Field with Sheaves
Wheat Field with the Alpilles Foothills in the Background
Wheat Fields
Wheat Fields at Auvers Under Clouded Sky
Wheat Fields near Auvers

Wheat Fields with Auvers in the Background
Wheat Fields with Reaper at Sunrise
Wheat Fields with Stacks
Wheat Stacks with Reaper
White Cottage Among the Olive Trees, The
White House at Night, The
White Orchard, The
White Vase with Roses and Other Flowers
Wild Flowers and Thistles in a Vase
Wild Roses
Willow, The
Willows at Sunset
Wind-Beaten Tree, A
Windmill on Montmartre
Woman Lifting Potatoes
Woman Sewing
Woman Sitting by a Cradle
Woman Sitting in the Grass
Woman Walking in a Garden, A
Woman Winding Yarn
Woman with a Mourning Shawl
Women Mending Nets in the Dunes
Wood Gatherers in the Snow
Woodcutter (after Millet), The
Wooden Sheds
Young Girl Standing Against a Background of Wheat
Young Man with a Cap
Young Man with Cornflower
Young Peasant Woman with Straw Hat Sitting in the Wheat
Zouave (Half Length), The

The Letters


Vincent and Theo

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF VINCENT VAN GOGH

Translated by Johanna van Gogh-Bonger

This collection of van Gogh’s correspondence contains over 800 letters, three-quarters of which are from Vincent to his brother Theo. There are also surviving letters to his sister Wil, as well as those to artist friends and other family members. These letters are the most comprehensive primary source for the understanding of van Gogh, laying the foundations of the thoughts and beliefs of the troubled, but gifted artist.

Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, Theo’s wife, spent many years after her husband's death in 1891 compiling the letters, which were first published in 1914.

Johanna Gogh-Bonger, Vincent's sister-in-law

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF VINCENT VAN GOGH

To aid your browsing of the letters, they are grouped in chronological order and organised into year sections.

CONTENTS

1872
1873
1874
1875
1876
1877
1878
1879
1880
1881
1882
1883
1884
1885
1886
1887
1888
1889

1872

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, August 1872

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter, I was glad to hear you arrived home safely. I missed you the first few days and it felt strange not to find you there when I came home in the afternoons.

We have had some enjoyable days together, and managed to take a few walks and see one or two sights between the spots of rain.

What dreadful weather! You must have *sweltered* from the heat on your walks to Oisterwijk. There was harness racing yesterday for the Exhibition; but the illuminations and the fireworks were put off because of the bad weather, so it's just as well you didn't stay on to see them. Regards from the Haanebeek and Roos families.

Always your loving Vincent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 13 December 1872

Dear Theo,

What good news I've just read in Father's letter. I wish you luck with all my heart. I'm sure you will like it there, it's such a fine firm. It will be quite a change for you.

I am so glad that both of us are now to be in the same profession and in the same firm. We must be sure to write to each other regularly.

I hope that I'll see you before you leave, we still have a lot to talk about. I believe that Brussels is a very pleasant city, but it's bound to feel strange for you in the beginning. Write to me soon in any case. Well, goodbye for now, this is just a brief note dashed off in haste, but I had to tell you how delighted I am at the news. Best wishes, and believe me, always,

Your loving brother,

Vincent

I don't envy you having to walk to Oisterwijk every day in this awful weather. Regards from the Roos family.

1873

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, January 1873

My dear Theo,
I heard from home that you arrived safe and sound at Brussels and that your first impression was good.
I know so well how strange you must feel in the beginning, but don't lose courage, you'll get on all right.

You must soon write me how you are getting along and how you like your boardinghouse. I hope it will be satisfactory. Father wrote me that you are on good terms with Mr. Schmidt; that is right - I think he is a good fellow from whom you can learn a great deal.

What happy days we spent together at Christmas! I think of them so often. You will also remember them a long time, as they were the last days you spent at home. Don't forget to tell me what pictures you see and which you like best.

I am very busy just now at the beginning of the year.

My New Year began well; they have granted me an increase of ten guilders (I therefore earn fifty guilders per month), and they have given me a bonus of fifty guilders as a present. Isn't that splendid? I hope to be able to shift for myself now.

I am very happy that you work in the same firm. It is such a splendid house; the more one works there, the more ambition it gives you.

The beginning is perhaps more difficult than anything else, but keep heart, it will turn out all right.

Will you ask Schmidt what the price of the Album Corot, lithographs by Émile Vernier is? Somebody asked for it at the store, and I know they have it in Brussels. Next time I write, I'll send you my picture, which I had taken last Sunday. Have you already been to the Palace Ducal? Don't fail to go there when you have a chance.

Well, boy, keep your courage up. All the friends send you their compliments and good wishes. Give my regards to Schmidt and Eduard and write to me soon. Adieu.

Your loving brother, Vincent.

You know my address is,
Lange Beestenmarkt, 32
Or Goupil & Co., Plaats

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 28 January 1873

Dear Theo,

I was glad you answered me so soon and that you like Brussels and have found a nice boarding-house. Don't lose heart if it is very difficult at times, everything will come out all right and nobody can in the beginning do as he wishes.

How I pity Uncle Hein, I heartily hope he will recover, but, Theo, I fear he will not. Last summer he was still full of enthusiasm and had so many plans and told me that business was flourishing. It's very sad. Last Sunday I was at Uncle Cor's and spent a very pleasant day there as you can imagine, and saw so many beautiful things. As you know, Uncle has just come back from Paris and brought some beautiful pictures and drawings with him. I remained in Amsterdam till Monday morning and went to see the museums again. Do you know that they are going to build a large new museum in Amsterdam, instead of the Trippenhuis? I think it is right, for the Trippenhuis is small and many pictures are hung so that they can hardly be seen.

How I should have liked to see that picture by Cluysenaer, I have only seen a few pictures of his and those I liked very much. Tell me if that other picture is by *“Alfred”* Stevens, or else what the first name is. I know the photograph after the Rotta and have even seen the picture at the Exhibition in Brussels. Be sure to let me know what pictures you see, I am always glad to know. The album of which you gave me the title is not the one I meant, which is *only* lithographs after Corot. But I thank you for the trouble you have taken. I hope to get a letter from sister Anna soon, she is rather laggard about writing of late. Do surprise her with a letter, that would be such a pleasure to her. I suppose you are very busy, but that is not bad. It is cold here and they are skating already. I walk as much as I can. I wonder if you will have any chance to skate. Enclosed you will find my photograph, but if you write home don't mention it, as you know it is for father's birthday. I have already sent you my congratulations upon that day. My best compliments to Uncle and Aunt, also to Mr. Schmidt and Eduard. Always

Your loving brother, Vincent.

Kind regards from everybody at Haanebeek's, Aunt Fie and Roos.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 17 March 1873

Dear Theo,
It is time for you to hear from me again. I am longing to hear how you and Uncle Hein are, so I hope that you will be able to find time to write me.

I suppose you have heard that I am going to London, probably very soon. I do hope that we shall see each other before then. If there is any chance, I shall go to Helvoirt at Easter, but that depends on Iterson, who is away on business. I cannot go away before he comes back.

It will be quite a different life for me in London, as I shall probably have to live alone in rooms. I'll have to take care of many things I don't have to worry about now.

I am looking forward very much to seeing London, as you can imagine, but still I am sorry to leave here. Now that it has been decided that I shall go away, I feel how strongly I am attached to The Hague. Well, it can't be helped, and I intend not to take things too hard. It will be splendid for my English - I can understand it well enough, but I cannot speak it as well as I would wish.

I heard from Anna that you had your picture taken. If you have one to spare, don't forget me.

How is Uncle Hein? Not better, I am afraid. And how is Aunt? Can Uncle keep himself busy, and does he suffer much pain? Give him my warmest regards. I think of him so often. How is business? I think you must be rushed with work; we certainly are here. You must feel at home in the business by this time.

How is your boardinghouse - does it still please you? That's an important thing. *Be sure to tell me more about the pictures you see.* A fortnight ago I was in Amsterdam to see an exhibition of the pictures that are going from here to Vienna. It was very interesting, and I am curious to know what impression the Dutch artists will make in Vienna. I am also curious to see the English painters; we see so little of them because almost everything remains in England.

In London Goupil has no gallery, but sells only directly to art dealers. Uncle Vincent will be here at the end of this month, and I am looking forward to hearing more particulars from him.

The Haanebeeks and Aunt Fie always ask how you are and send you their best wishes. What delightful weather we are having! I enjoy it as much as I can; last

Sunday I went out boating with Willem. How I should have liked to stay here this summer, but we must take things as they are. And now adieu. Best wishes and write to me soon. Say goodbye for me to Uncle and Aunt, Mr. Schmidt and Eduard. I am looking forward to Easter.

Always your loving brother, Vincent.

Theo, I strongly advise you to smoke a pipe; it is a remedy for the blues, which I happen to have had now and then lately. I just received your letter, many thanks. I like the photograph very much, it is a good likeness. I will let you know as soon as I know something more about my going to Helvoirt; it would be nice if you could come on the same day. Adieu.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 24 March 1873

Dear Theo,

Would you please find out if there is still a painting by Schotel in Brussels?

It was sent from here on commission May 6, 1870. Perhaps Uncle has already sent it back to Paris.

But if not, please have it returned here *immediately*. We have a chance of selling it, but it is urgent. Last summer I saw it at your gallery, so I think it may still be there.

Give my compliments to Uncle and Aunt, Mr. Schmidt and Eduard.

I suppose you have got my letter already. Adieu and best wishes.

Vincent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5 May 1873

Dear Theo,
You must forgive me for having forgotten your birthday. My best wishes. I hope this year will be a happy one for you, and that you will like your work more and more.

My time here is almost up. Next Saturday I go home to say goodbye, and then on to Paris on Sunday. I fear, however, that it will be Monday before I can start, and that I shall have to stay over in Helvoirt on Sunday. I hope that I shall be able to write you when I'll be passing through Brussels in time. I may not be able to, as I do not know for sure when I have to be in Paris.

How are Uncle and Aunt - have they moved already? You must write me about this soon, my address is below. I am writing in a hurry; as you can imagine, I am very busy. Adieu, best wishes. Compliments to Uncle, Aunt, Mr. Schmidt and Eduard.

Always your loving Vincent.
V. W. van Gogh
C/o Messrs. Goupil & Co.,

17 Southampton Street, Strand, London

Don't forget to write *V. W. van Gogh*; otherwise it might be confused with Uncle Vincent's mail, he is only called *V.*, you know.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 9 May 1873

The Hague, 9th May 1873
Dear Theo,
Monday morning I leave Helvoirt for Paris, and shall pass Brussels at 2.07 P. M. Come to the station if you can, I should be so glad to see you.

I must not forget to tell you that I showed your photograph to Mrs. Tersteeg, and she would like very much to have one. Is there a chance of your having another and sending it to me? If not now, maybe another time.

Theo, you have no idea how kind everybody here is to me, and you can imagine how sorry I am to have to leave so many friends.

Adieu, boy. Compliments to Uncle and Aunt, hope to see you soon.

Vincent.

Inquire if you have to be at the north or the south station.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 13 June 1873

Dear Theo,
My address is c/o Messrs. Goupil & Co., 17 Southampton Street, Strand, London. You must be eager to hear from me, so I will not keep you waiting any longer for a letter.

I hear from home that you are living with Mr. Schmidt now and that Father has been to see you. I certainly hope this will please you better than your former boardinghouse, and I'm sure it will.

I am very anxious for a letter; write me soon, and tell me how you spend your day, *etc.* You must tell me especially what pictures you have seen lately, and also if any new etchings or lithographs have been published. Let me know as much as you can about these things, for I do not see much of them here as it is only a wholesale house.

Considering the circumstances, I am doing pretty well. So far the boardinghouse where I am staying pleases me. There are also three German boarders who are very fond of music, they play the piano and sing, so we spend very pleasant evenings together. I am not so busy here as I was in The Hague; I work only from nine in the morning to six in the evening, and on Saturdays we close at four o'clock. I live in one of the suburbs of London, where it is relatively quiet. It reminds me of Tilburg or some such place.

I spent some very pleasant days in Paris, and, as you can imagine, I enjoyed all the beautiful things I saw at the exhibition and in the Louvre and the Luxembourg. The house in Paris is splendid and much bigger than I had thought, especially the one in the Place de l'Opera.

Life is very expensive here, my accommodation alone costs me eighteen shillings by week, washing excepted, and then I still have to take my dinner in the city. Last Sunday I went to the country with Mr. Obach, my principal, to Boxhill; it is a high hill about six hours by road from London, partially chalky and overgrown with box and on one side a wood of high oak trees. The country is beautiful here, quite different from Holland or Belgium. Everywhere you see charming parks with high trees and shrubs. Everyone is allowed to walk there. At Easter, I made an interesting excursion with the Germans, but these gentlemen spend a great deal of money and I shall not go out with them in the future.

I was glad to hear from home that Uncle Hein's health is good. Give him and Aunt my best and tell them something about me. Give my compliments to Mr. Schmidt and Eduard and write to me soon. À Dieu, best wishes,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to

London, 2 July 1873

[Letter to The Van Stockum - Haanebeek family; the envelope is addressed to W. J. van Stockum, Esq., Varkensmarkt, The Hague.]

Dear friends,

I should have liked to write sooner, and now I will not postpone it any longer. How are you? I heard that your house has been smartened up, and that all is well with you. I hope very much you will drop me a line when you have a moment to spare.

All is well with me. I see much that is new and beautiful, and have been fortunate in finding a good boardinghouse, so that on the whole I feel quite at home already. Yet I do not forget The Hague, and should very, very much like to spend an evening in the Poten, and look in on you, too.

The business here is only a stockroom, and our work is quite different from what it is in The Hague; but I shall probably get used to it. At six o'clock my work is already done for the day, so that I have a nice bit of time for myself, which I spend pleasantly - taking walks, reading and letter writing.

The neighbourhood where I live is quite beautiful, and so quiet and intimate that you almost forget you are in London. In front of every house there is a small garden with flowers or a few trees, and many houses are built very tastefully in a sort of Gothic style. Still, I have a good half-hour's walk to get to the country.

We have a piano in the sitting room, and there are also three Germans living here who are very fond of music, which is very pleasant.

One of the finest sights I have seen is Rotten Row in Hyde Park, where hundreds of ladies and gentlemen ride on horseback.

In all parts of the town there are beautiful parks with a wealth of flowers such as I have never seen anywhere else.

Enclosed I am sending you a copy of a poem by Van Beers, which you possibly do not know. Our Elisabeth copied it for me on my last evening in Helvoirt because she knew I thought so much of it. It is genuine Brabant: I thought you would read it with pleasure, and therefore I copied it for you.

It was very considerate of your sister Marie to send me the announcement. I long to hear something of the wedding, and I congratulate you all.

Will you kindly let me have a list of your birthdays some time? I did have one, but lost it.

And now good-by; remember me to everybody in the Poten, and good luck to you all. Excuse the bad handwriting; it is late and time to go to bed.

Sleep well.

Vincent

DE AVONDSTOND

Langzaam galmde `t gesamp der beelok over de velden,
Die, volzalig, in `t goud van de avondzonne zich baadden…

[Literal translation]

THE EVENING HOUR

The toll of the curfew calling to prayer resounded lazily across the fields,
Which blissfully lay bathed in the gold of the evening sun.
Right in front of him lay the village, with hills to the north and to the south,
between whose ridges the sun, sinking in the west with a crimson blush,
poured forth its whole wealth of colours and the magic of its rays.
Now the little bell in the grey steeple veiled in dark green
was silent. The brown sails of the mills, on yonder height,
hung motionless; the foliage was still; and over the cottages
little puffs of peat-smoke, tinged with blue, rose so straight
from the chimneys that they too seemed to hang motionless in the tingling air.
After the sun's good night kiss it was as if this hamlet, this field, these hills,
everything around, silent and grateful, once more recalled
the richness and peace they had enjoyed,
before wrapping themselves in the cloak of evening dew to sleep.
Farther on…but just beside the narrow footpath
followed by the Painter, the sudden loud peal of cheering met his ears.
Swaying to and fro, a wagon came rumbling toward him,
piled high with the harvest of buckwheat.
Horse and freight were decked with fluttering ribbons and flowering branches;
children, each with a wreath of flowers around his little flaxen head,
sat atop it, brandishing alder twigs,
or raining down a shower of leaves and flowers,
whilst below, around the wagon, a crowd of servant lads and lasses
leaped and sang, so as to startle the whole slumbering plain.
Behind the shrubs, the silently smiling Painter watched

the noisy throng wind its way along the bumpy road.
And thus, pondering the calm and deep delight the soul
savours in the country, or with his artist's mind reconstructing
in silent rapture the whole glorious scene of a short while ago,
he came, without perceiving it himself, sauntering into the hamlet.
In the west the purple and yellow had already faded to grey;
and in the east, quite close to the little church, the full copper-coloured
disk of the moon, lightly shrouded in the haze of the gloaming, had risen
when he entered “The Swan,” the inn where he was lodging.
- Jan Van Beers, “The Pauper”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 20 July 1873

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter, which was very welcome. I am glad you are doing well and that you like living with Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Obach was very pleased to have met you. I hope that in the future we shall do much business with each other. That picture of Linder's is very beautiful.

As to the photo engravings, I have never seen them being made; I know a little about how they are done, but not enough to explain.

At first English art did not appeal to me; one must get used to it. But there are clever painters here, among others, Millais, who has painted: “The Huguenot,” “Ophelia,” etc., of which I think you know the engravings; his things are beautiful. Then there is Boughton, whose “Puritans Going to Church” is in our Galerie Photographique; I have seen wonderful things by him. Among the old painters, Constable was a landscape painter who lived about thirty years ago; he is splendid - his work reminds me of Diaz and Daubigny. Then there are Reynolds and Gainsborough, whose forte was very beautiful ladies' portraits, and Turner, whose engravings you must have seen.

Some good French painters live here, including Tissot, of whose work there are several photographs in our Galerie Photographique; and Otto Weber and Heilbuth. The latter is at present painting exquisitely beautiful pictures in the manner of Linder.

Sometime you must write me if there are any photographs of Wauters's work other than “Hugo Van der Goes” and “Mary of Burgundy,” and if you know about any photographs of pictures by Lagye and De Braekeleer. I don't mean the elder Braekeleer, but, I think, a son of his who had three beautiful pictures called “Antwerp,” “The School” and “The Atlas” at the last exhibition in Brussels.

I am quite contented here; I walk a lot and the neighborhood where I live is quiet, pleasant and fresh - I was really very lucky to find it. Still, I often think with regret of the delightful Sundays at Scheveningen and other things, but what's the use of worrying?

Thanks for what you wrote me about pictures. If you happen to see anything by Lagye, De Braekeleer, Wauters, Maris, Tissot, George Saal, Jundt, Zeim, or Mauve, you must not forget to tell me; those are the painters I am very fond of, and whose work you will probably see something of.

Enclosed is a copy of the poem about the painter who “entered `The Swan,' the inn where he was lodging,” which I am sure you remember. It is typical Brabant, and I am fond of it. L. copied it for me the last evening I was home.

How I should like to have you here. What pleasant days we spent together at The Hague; I think so often of that walk on the Rijswijk road, when we drank milk at the mill after the rain. When we send back the pictures we have from you, I will send you a picture of that mill by Weissenbruch; perhaps you remember him, his nickname is Merry Weiss. *That Rijswijk road holds memories for me which are perhaps the most beautiful I have. If we meet again, maybe we shall talk about them once more.*

And now, boy, I wish you well. Think of me from time to time and write me soon, it is such a delight to get a letter.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to

London, 7 August 1873

[Letter to the Van Stockum - Haanebeek family]
Dear friends,
It was a pleasant surprise to me to receive Carolien's letter. Thanks. With all my heart I hope she is quite well again; a good thing it is over now!

In your next letter I should like to hear more about that last play you wrote. I was really amazed: for ten characters - it must be the biggest you have done.

These last days I have greatly enjoyed reading the poems of John Keats; he is a poet who, I think, is not very well known in Holland. He is the favourite of all the painters here, and so I started reading him. Here is something by him. His best-known piece is “The Eve of St. Agnes,” but it is a bit too long to copy.

I have visited neither Crystal Palace nor the Tower yet, nor Tussod ; I am not in a hurry to see everything. For the present I am quite satisfied with the museums, parks, etc.; they interest me more.

Last Monday I had a nice day. The first Monday in August is a holiday here. I went with one of the Germans to Dulwich, an hour and a half outside L., to see the museum there, and after that we took about an hour's walk to another village.

The country is so beautiful here; many people who have their businesses in London live in some village outside L. and go to town by train every day; perhaps I shall do the same shortly, if I can find a cheap room somewhere. But moving is so horrible that I shall stop here as long as possible, although everything is not so beautiful as it seemed to me in the beginning. Perhaps it is my own fault, so I shall bear with it a little longer.

Pardon me if this letter is not as I should like it to be, for I am writing in a hurry. I wanted to congratulate you on Willem's birthday and wish you many happy returns.

I was most pleased to learn that you have renewed your acquaintance with the Tersteeg family. I have been hoping you would for a long time.

When you have a chance, please let me know what photographs you have received - I am curious to know. I have had a letter from Marinus, from which I learned that he is going to Amsterdam. This will mean a great change for him; I hope he will do well. I was very glad he wrote me.

A few days ago a brother of Iterson's paid me a call, and for the first time since May I had a chance to speak Dutch. We live far apart, much to my regret.

Good luck to you. Remember me to all in the Poten. Good luck!
Yours truly, Vincent
Gladden my heart with a letter as soon as you can find time.
[Enclosed]

THE EVE OF SAINT MARK (Unfinished)

Upon a Sabbath-day it fell;
Twice holy was the Sabbath-bell,
That call'd the folk to evening prayer;
The chilly sunset faintly told
Of unmatur'd green vallies cold,
Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,
Of rivers new with spring-time sedge,
Of primroses by shelter'd rills,
Of daisies on the aguish hill.
Bertha was a maiden fair,
Dwelling in the old Minister-square;
From her fire-side she could see,
Sidelong its rich antiquity,
Far as the bishop's garden-wall;
Where sycamores and elm-trees tall,
Full-leav'd, the forest had outstript,
By no sharp north-wind ever nipt,
So shelter'd by the mighty pile.
All was silent, all was gloom,
Abroad and in the homely room;
Down she sat, poor cheated soul!
And struck a lamp from dismal coal;
Lean'd forward, with bright drooping hair,
And slant book, full against the glare.
Untir'd she read, her shadow still
Glower'd about, as it would fill
The room with wildest forms and shades,
As though some ghostly queen of spades
Had come to mock behind her back,
And dance, and ruffle her garments black;
Untir'd she read the legend page,
Of Holy Mark, from youth to age,
On land, on sea, in pagan chains,
Rejoicing for his many pains…

JOHN KEATS (1818)

The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream: “He awoke and found it truth.”

[Written on the back of the same page]

AUTUMN

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend to the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.
Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, -
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue…

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 13 September 1873

Dear Theo,
In my letter to Uncle Hein I enclose a little note for you. I wonder if you were in Helvoirt for Mother's birthday and how you enjoyed it.

Did you get my letter and the lithograph after Weissenbruch which I put in the box with the pictures? Oh! Old man, I so want that you come here to see my new lodgings, the one I have already spoken about to you. I now have a bedroom such as I always longed for, without a sloping ceiling and without blue wallpaper with green fringes. I lodge with some charming people now; they keep a school for little boys.

One Saturday some time ago, I went boating on the Thames, in the company of two Englishmen. It was glorious.

Yesterday I saw an exhibition of Belgian art, where I noticed many of the same pictures that were at the Brussels exhibition. There were several beautiful things by Alb. and Julien de Vriendt, Cluysenaer, Wauters, Coosemans, Gabriel, De Schampheleer, *etc.* Have you ever seen anything by Terlinden? If so, tell me about it. It was a real pleasure to see those Belgian pictures; the English ones are with a few exceptions very bad and uninteresting. Some time ago I saw one which represented a kind of fish or dragon, six yards long. It was awful. And then a little man, who came to kill the above-mentioned dragon. I think the whole represented “The Archangel Michael, Killing Satan.”

Adieu, boy, best wishes and write soon,

Vincent

Another English picture is “Satan Possessing the Herd of Swine at the Lake of Gadarena.” It represented about fifty black pigs and swine running helter-skelter down the mountain, and skipping over one another into the sea. But there was a very clever picture by Prinsep.

I just received your letter. Going to The Hague will be a great change for you. I imagine it will be hard to leave beautiful, pleasant Brussels, but you will enjoy The Hague, too. Thanks for what you wrote me about the pictures. That picture by Millet must have been splendid. À Dieu, I will write soon again.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to

London, October 1873

[Letter to the Van Stockum-Haanebeek family]
London, October 1873
Dear Carolien and Willem,

Many thanks for your letter of this morning, it was a delightful surprise. I am glad you are doing so well.

Our Anna has passed her English and her needlework examinations; you can imagine how delighted she is, as are we all. Pa and Mother have proposed that she stay at school until next April, and then try French; but she doesn't have to if she doesn't want to. I should like so much to find something for her here; you know we have occasionally spoken about it.

You have already heard that Theo is going to The Hague. I believe it will be a change for the better, though he will find it hard to leave that beautiful, pleasant Brussels.

Some time ago I received a letter from your Pa, also, to which I have replied, and so you will probably have heard that all is still going well with me here, and some particulars about my new lodgings.

What you say about winter is quite right; I completely agree. For myself, I can hardly decide which season I like best; I believe I like them all equally. It is worth noting that the old painters hardly ever painted autumn, and that the modern ones have a predilection for it.

Enclosed are a few small photographs, which I hope you will like. Here you see hardly any albums like those in Holland, but so-called scrapbooks into which you put photographs like the ones in this letter (that is why we have the photographs unmounted here). The advantage is that you can arrange your photographs on the same page any way you like. I advise you to get a sort of copybook with white paper, and begin by putting these in it.

“A Baptism” is after Anker, a Swiss who has painted a variety of subjects, all equally intimate and delicate of feeling. “Puritans Going to Church” is after Boughton, one of the best painters here. An American, he likes Longfellow very much, and rightly so; I know three pictures by him inspired by The Courtship of Miles Standish. Seeing these pictures has induced me to read Miles Standish and Evangeline again; I don't know why, but I never realized these poems were *so* fine as I think them now.

“Le bon frére” is after Van Muyden, a Swiss painter, “encore plus de modestie que de talent” [more modesty than talent as yet]. Mr. Post in The Hague has this picture. If you should ever come to our shop, ask them to show you his (Van Muyden's) “Refectoire.” There are no more than four or five copies of this photograph in existence, as the negative is broken. Show it to Mr. Tersteeg some time.

The “Lune de Miel” [The Honeymoon] is after Eugene Feyen, one of the few painters who pictures intimate modern life as it really is, and does not turn it into fashion plates.

I know the photograph “Der Wirthin Töchterlein” [The Landlady's Little Daughter], and I admire it very much. It is a good thing you appreciate Bourguereau. Not everybody is capable of perceiving the good and the beautiful as keenly as you do.

And now I am going to stop; I enclose another picture of autumn, this one by Michelet.

I hope you will be able to read this; I have written on without considering that one must take care a letter is intelligible. À Dieu; the best of luck to you all; many kind regards to all at the Poten, and any other friends you may meet.

Vincent

[Enclosure]

Je vois d'ici une dame, je la vois marcher pensive dans un jardin peu étendu, et défleuri de bonne heure, mais abrité, comme on en voit derrière nos falaises en France, ou les dunes de la Hollande. Les arbustes exotiques cont déjà rentrés dans la serre. Les feuilles tombées dévoilent quelques statues. Luxe d'art qui contraste un peu avec la très-simple toilette de la dame, modeste, grave, où la soie noire (ou grise) s'égaye à peine d'un simple ruban lilas…

Mais ne l'ai-je pas vue déjà aux musées d'Amsterdam ou de La Haye? Elle me rapelle une dame de Phillipe de Champagne (n.v. au Louvres) qui m'était entrée dans le coeur, si candide, si honnête, suffisamment intelligente, siimple pourtant, sans finesse pour se démêler des ruses du monde. Cette femme m'est restée trente années, me revenant obstinément, m'inquiétant, me faisant dire “Mais comment se nommait elle? Qui lui est-il arrivé? A-t-elle eu un peu de bonheur? Et comment se nommmait s'est elle tirée de la vie?”

[From here I see a lady, I see her walk pensively in a not very large garden, bereft of its flowers early in the season, but sheltered, as you see them behind our cliffs in France or the dunes of Holland. The exotic shrubs have already been put back in the conservatory. The fallen leaves reveal a number of statues. An artistic luxury which contrasts with the lady's very simple, modest, dignified dress, of which the black (or grey) silk is almost imperceptibly brightened by a lilac ribbon.

But haven't I seen her already in the museums of Amsterdam or The Hague? She reminds me of the lady by Philippe de Champagne (N.B. in the Louvre), who took my heart, so candid, so honest, sufficiently intelligent, yet simple, without the cunning to extricate herself from the ruses of the world. This woman has remained in my mind for thirty years, persistently coming back to me, making me say: “But what was she called? What has happened to her? Has she known some happiness? And how has she overcome the difficulties of the world?”]

- JULES MICHELET, “Les aspirations de l'autonne”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 19 November 1873

Dear Theo,
I want to be sure you hear from me soon after your arrival at The Hague. I am eager to hear what your first impressions were of your new position and home. I heard that Mr. Schmidt gave you such a beautiful souvenir. That proves you have been very satisfactory in every respect. I am glad that we now work in the same house of Goupil. Lately we have had many pictures and drawings here; we sold a great many, but not enough yet - it must become something more established and solid. I think there is still much work to do in England, but it will not be successful at once. Of course, the first thing necessary is to have good pictures, and that will be very difficult. Well, we must take things as they are and make the best of it.

How is business in Holland? Here the ordinary engravings after Brochard do not sell at all, the good burin engravings sell pretty well. From the “Venus Anadyomene” after Ingres we have already sold twenty épreuves d'artiste. It is a pleasure to see how well the photographs sell, especially the coloured ones, and there is a big profit in them. We sell the Musée Goupil & Co. photographs only en papillottes, on an average of a hundred a day.

I think you will like the work at the house at The Hague as soon as you have got used to it. I am sure you will like your home with the Roos family. Walk as much as your time will allow. Give my best love to everybody at Roos's.

You must write me sometime whom you like best among the older painters as well as among the moderns. Don't forget, as I am curious to know. Go to the museum as often as you can; it is a good thing to know the old painters also. If you have the chance, read about art, especially art magazines, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, *etc.* As soon as I have the opportunity, I will send you a book by Burger about the museums at The Hague and Amsterdam. Please send it back when you have read it.

Ask Iterson to write me when he has time, and especially to send me a list of the painters who have won awards at the Paris exhibition. Is Somerwill still in the office or did he leave when you arrived?

I am all right. I have a pleasant home, and although the house here is not so interesting as the one in The Hague, it is perhaps well that I am here. Later on, especially when the sale of pictures grows more important, I shall perhaps be of use. And then, I cannot tell you how interesting it is to see London and English business and the way of life, which differs so much from ours.

You must have had pleasant days at home; how I should like to see them all again. Give my compliments to everybody who inquires after me, especially at Tersteeg's, Haanebeek, Auntie Fie, Stockum and Roos; and tell Betsy Tersteeg something about me when you see her. And now, boy, good luck to you, write to me soon.

Vincent

Do you have my room at Roos's or the one you slept in last summer?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to

London, 20 November 1873

Dear Carolien,
Hearty congratulations on your birthday; no doubt it will be a festive day, this first birthday in your own home. I hope this will be a very good and happy year for you. I hope you received my last letter. Please write soon how everybody is; I am longing to hear something again.

Have you seen Theo? I heard he arrived at The Hague last Wednesday. Herewith a small contribution to your scrapbook. All is well with me, but I am up to my ears in work and have only a moment to spare.

Greetings to all in the Poten; how I should like to look in on you today!

Wishing you the best of luck,

Yours truly, Vincent

1874

Letter from Anna van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Leeuwarden, 6 January 1874

[Unpublished Letter from Anna van Gogh to Theo]
Leeuwarden,

6 January 1874

…
Monday morning at breakfast I found a letter from London, which contained a letter from Vincent and one from Ursula Loyer, both were very kind and amiable. She asks me to write her and Vincent wished very much we should be friends. I'll tell you what he writes about her: “Ursula Loyer is a girl with whom I have agreed that we should consider ourselves each other's brother and sister. You should consider her as a sister too and write to her, and I think you will then soon find out what kind of girl she is. I'll say nothing more than that I never heard or dreamed of anything like the love between her and her mother…Old girl, don't think there is more behind it than I wrote just now, but don't tell them at home; I must do that myself. But again: Love her for my sake.” I suppose there will be a love between those two as between Agnes and David Copperfield. Although I must say that I believe there is more than a brother's love between them, I send you here Ursula's letter and so you can judge for yourself. I hope you will send it back very soon with a long epistle of yourself.

…

[This letter was written in English, except for the sentences where Anna quotes Vincent, which are in Dutch. The name of the young woman Vincent fell in love with was actually Eugénie: Ursula was the name of her mother.]

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, January 1874

My dear Theo,
Many thanks for your letter. My warm good wishes for a very happy New Year. I know you are doing well at The Hague, because Mr. Tersteeg told me so. I can see from your letter that you are taking a keen interest in art, and that's a good thing, old fellow. I'm glad you like Millet, Jacque, Schreyer, Lambinet, Frans Hals, etc., for as Mauve says, “That's it.” That painting by Millet, L'angélus du soir, “that's it,” indeed - that's magnificent, that's poetry. How I wish I could have another talk with you about art; but we'll just have to keep writing to each other about it. *Admire* as much as you can; most people *don't admire enough*.

Here are the names of a few the painters I particularly like. Scheffer, Delaroche, Hébert, Hamon, Leys, Tissot, Lagye, Boughton, Millais, Thijs [Matthijs] Mans, De Groux, De Braekeleer, Jr., Millet, Jules Breton, Feyen-Perrin, Eugène Feyen, Brion, Jundt, George Saal, Israëls, Anker, Knaus, Vautier, Jourdan, Jalabert, Antigna, Compte-Calix, Rochussen, Meissonier, Zamacois, Madrazo, Ziem, Boudin, Gérôme, Fromentin, de Tournemine, Pasini, Decamps, Bonington, Diaz, Th. Rousseau, Troyon, Dupré, Paul Huet, Corot, Jacque, Otto Weber, Daubigny, Wahlberg, Bernier, Émile Breton, Chenu, César de Cock, Mile. Collart, Bodmer, Koekkoek, Schelfhout, Weissenbruch, and last [but] not least, Maris and Mauve.

But I could carry on like that for I don't know how long, and then there are still all the old masters, and I am sure I have forgotten some of the best of the modern ones.

Do go on doing a lot of walking and keep up your love of nature, for that is the right way to understand art better and better. Painters understand nature and love her and *teach us to see*.

And then there are painters who never do anything that is no good, who cannot do anything bad, just as there are ordinary people who can do nothing but good.

I'm getting on very well here. I've got a delightful home and I'm finding it very pleasurable taking a look at London and the English way of life and the English people themselves, and then I've got nature and art and poetry, and if that isn't enough, what is? But I haven't forgotten Holland and especially not The Hague and Brabant.

We are busy at the office doing stocktaking, but it will all be over in 5 days, we got off more lightly than you did in The Hague.

I hope that, like me, you had a happy Christmas.

And so, my boy, best wishes and write to me soon, Je t'écris un peu au hasard ce qui me vient dans ma plume [I have written to you in this manner just as it came into my pen], I hope you'll be able to make something of it.

Goodbye, regards to everybody at work and to anybody else who asks after me, especially everybody at Aunt Fie's and at the Haanebeeks'.

Vincent

I am enclosing a few lines for Mr. Roos.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to

London, 9 February 1874

[To Carolien van Stockum-Haanebeek]
My dear Carolien,
I feel the urge to write you a few words. How nice were the days “*wenn* [*sic*] *wir zusammen waren*” [when we were together]; rest assured that I never forget you, but I am not such a good hand at letter-writing as I should like to be. I live a rich life here, `having nothing yet possessing all.' At times I am inclined to believe that I am gradually turning into a cosmopolite; that is, neither a Dutchman, nor an Englishman, nor yet a Frenchman, but simply a *man*. And as a homeland, the whole world, *i.e.* a small spot in the world where we are sent to stay. We have not got there yet, though I am straining after it, and perhaps may grasp it. And as my ideal, what Mauve called, “That is *it*.”

Old girl, à Dieu.

Yours truly, Vincent

A handshake for you and Willem, like old times, till your fingers hurt.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 20 February 1874

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter. I don't want the book just now; take your time and send it back when you have finished it. I have not read the book by Van Vloten, but I should like to see it. I have read another book on art by Van Vloten, and did not quite agree with him, though it was very learned. Burger is simpler, and whatever he says is true.

I am glad you have been in Amsterdam. When you see him, will you thank Uncle Cor for the pamphlet he sent me? I am glad you feel so comfortable at Roos's. As I already let you know through Anna Carbentus, you are quite right about those priggish girls. I also agree with you about Bertha Haanebeek; but watch your heart, boy.

Have you seen Mr. Jacobson's collection yet? He will certainly ask you to come to see it, and it is well worth while. Give him my respects and tell him I am doing quite well here and that I see many beautiful things.

I am all right and am very busy. Thank Willem for his letter and greet everybody at Roos's and Iterson and anybody who may ask after me. Best regards.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to

London, 3 March 1874

[To the Van Stockum - Haanebeek family]
Dear Carolien and Willem,
Hearty congratulations.
I am afraid you are disappointed at not hearing from me sooner, but that's how I am, and you know that I mean well. But now you must return good for evil, and let me know at once how you are.

Now I have something new to tell you; perhaps our Anna will come here. You can well imagine how wonderful this would be for me. It is almost too good to be true. Well, we'll have to wait and see. If she comes, it will probably be in May; and perhaps it might be arranged for me to go and bring her back. I am longing to be closer to her than I am now. We have hardly seen each other once these last few years, and we only half know each other.

The best of luck to you, greetings to all in the Poten, and to anyone who asks after me.

Have you kept up your acquaintance with the Tersteeg family?

Yours truly, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 30 March 1874

Dear Theo,
I have received your gift, included in a letter to me, of a guilder intended for the purchase of a pair of cuff links. I thank you very cordially, old man, but you should not have, I have more money than necessary.

Thanks for the letter which I received this morning. I was very glad to hear that Mauve is engaged to Jet Carbentus. That is fine…I was pleased to hear that you are doing so well.

You have done well to read the book by Burger; you should devour books on art as much as possible, especially The Gazette de Beaux-Arts, *etc.* By all means try to get a good knowledge of pictures. That picture by Apol we have here now is good, but last year he painted the same subject and I thought it was better and brighter than this one.

I am glad that you go to see Uncle Cor now and then; he has pictures and prints which you can never see at the house in The Hague.

I, too, am very busy just now and am glad of it, for that is what I want. À Dieu, boy, keep in good spirits. I wish you well. Greetings to Iterson.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 30 April 1874

Dear Theo,

Many happy returns of your birthday, “Do well and don't look back, then all will come right.”

I was glad to receive your last letter. A few days ago I sent you a photograph, “Young Girl with a Sword” by Jacquet, as I thought you would like to have it.

The picture by Van Gorkom is not very dirty. (Entre nous, I have not seen it, but tell him I said it was not very dirty.) How are Mauve and Jet? Tell me about them.

I am glad you visit the Haanebeeks often. When I return to Holland, I will stop for some days in The Hague, because for me The Hague is like a second home to me. (I will stay at your place.)

I would have liked to accompany you on this walk to the Vink. I seize every opportunity to make a tour of the area but, for the moment, I am very busy. It is very beautiful here (although it is in the city). Lilac, hawthorns and laburnums flower in all gardens; the chestnut trees are splendid.

He that sincerely loves nature, finds pleasure everywhere. Nevertheless I miss Holland, especially Helvoirt.

I am very busy gardening now, I have sown scented peas, poppies and daisies; I have nothing more to do than to wait to see what they will give.

I have to tell that I am happy every morning to have to walk the distance between my accommodation and the shop and, in the evening, that between the shop and my accommodation, it is a good three-quarters of an hour walk each time.

It is a fine thing that business finishes so early; the office closes at six o'clock, and yet there is no less work done. My compliments to all the friends, especially to Tersteeg, Haanebeek and Carbentus, also to everyone at Uncle Pompe's because they are going to Kampen, and to Mr. Bakhuyzen. Best wishes.

Vincent

The apple trees have blossomed beautifully; I think everything is earlier here than in Holland.

As soon as I know anything more definite about my going home, I shall write at once. I am afraid, however, that I shall not be able to go for at least four weeks. Write soon.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 16 June 1874

[Note by Jo Bonger-van Gogh. Before going to Holland, Vincent declared his love to Ursula Loyer, but heard that she was already engaged to be married, so he came home in a melancholy mood.]

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter. I intend to leave here on Thursday, June 25, or Saturday, June 27, if nothing interferes. I am longing so much for everybody and for Holland. I am also anxious to have a good talk with you about art; think it over and perhaps you will have some questions to put to me. We have many beautiful things here, including a fine picture by Jacquet and a beautiful Boldini.

There are beautiful things in the Royal Academy this year. Tissot has three pictures there. Lately I took up drawing again, but it did not amount to much.

I was glad to see from your letter that you often visit the Haanebeeks. À Dieu, we shall meet soon. My compliments to all the friends.

Ever your brother, Vincent

I am glad you like César de Cock so much; he is one of the few painters who understands our dear Brabant intimately. I do not know if I told you that I met him in Paris last year.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Helvoirt, 10 July 1874

Helvoirt
Dear Theo,
Thanks for the inquiry you made. We are now going to stay here another day and arrive in London on Wednesday morning. The photograph that I put in the catalogue of Forbes was for you, as I thought it would interest you: it represented the Scheldt in Belgium. It is of a picture by Cap. It is not so very beautiful, but it is at least original. I will write soon from London.
Best wishes from Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 21 July 1874

Dear Theo,

Yesterday a box was sent to The Hague, in which I enclosed a photograph of a picture by J. Maris and also, as I promised, “Der Wirthin Töchterlein.” I hope you will put them both up in your room. In the same box is a photograph of a picture by Thijs Maris, for Mr. Tersteeg. Schüller in Paris sent me six copies of both, which I needed for presents; I have none to spare of the Thijs Maris.

Anna and I arrived safely in London and hope we shall find something for her here. I do not say it will be easy, but every day she is here she learns something, and at all events I think there is more chance for her to find something here than in Holland. It is a great pleasure for me to walk with her through the streets in the evening. I find everything again as beautiful as when I saw it the first time. Good luck to you, boy, and give my compliments to the Rooses, Haanebeeks and Carbentuses when you see them. I am learning to swim.

Write to me whether you have already read in Michelet and what you think about it. To me that book was a revelation. À Dieu.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 31 July 1874

Dear Theo,
I am glad you've been reading Michelet and that you understand him so well. If that kind of book teaches us anything it is that there is much more to love than people generally suppose. To me, that book has been both a revelation and a Gospel.

'Il n'y a pas de vielle femme!'[There are no old women.] (That does not mean that there are no old women, only that a woman does not grow old as long as she loves and is loved.) And then a chapter like “The Aspirations of Autumn,” how rich that is … That a woman is a 'quite different being' from a man, and a being that we do not yet know, or at best only superficially, as you put it, yes, that I am sure of. And that a man and a woman can become one, that is to say, one whole and not two halves, I believe that too.

Anna is bearing up well, we go on marvellous walks together. It is so beautiful here, if one just has a good and single eye without too many beams in it. And if one does have that eye, then it is beautiful everywhere.

Father is far from well, although he and Mother say that he's better. Yesterday we received a letter with all sorts of plans (wouldn't we just try this and that) which will prove to be unworkable and certainly useless and at the end Father said once again that he leaves it all to us, etc., *etc.* Rather petty and disagreeable, Theo, and it reminded me so much of Grandfather's letters, but qu'y faire [What can you do?]. Our beloved Aunts are staying there now and are no doubt doing much good! Things are as they are and what can a person do about it, as Jong Jochem said.

Anna and I look at the newspaper faithfully every day and reply to whatever advertisements there are. On top of that we have already registered with a Governess agency. So we are doing what we can. More haste less speed.

I'm glad that you go round to see the Haanebeeks so often, give them all my kindest regards and tell them some of my news.

The painting by Thijs Maris that Mr. Tersteeg has bought must be beautiful, I had already heard about it and have myself bought and sold one quite similar.

My interest in drawing has died down here in England, but maybe I'll be in the mood again some day or other. Right now I am doing a great deal of reading

On 1st of January 1875 we shall probably be moving to another, larger shop.

Mr. Obach is in Paris at the moment deciding whether or not we should take that other firm over. Don't mention it to anybody for the time being.

Best wishes and write to us again soon. Anna is learning to appreciate paintings and has quite a good eye, admiring Boughton, Maris and Jacquet already, for instance, so that is a good start. *Entre nous*, I think we are going to have a difficult time finding something for her, they say everywhere that she is too young, and they required German, too, but be that as it may, she certainly has a better chances here than in Holland. Goodbye,

Vincent

You can imagine how delighted I am to be here together with Anna. Tell H. T. [Herman Tersteeg] that the pictures have duly arrived and that I shall be writing to him soon.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 10 August 1874

Dear Theo,
“Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.”
“He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her.”

So keep to your own ideas, and if you doubt whether they are right, test them with those of Him who dared to say, “I am the truth,” or with those of some very human person, Michelet, for instance…

Virginity of soul and impurity of body can go together. You know the “Margaret at the Fountain,” by Ary Scheffer, is there a purer being than that girl “who loved so much”?

“Leys n'est pas un imitateur mais un semblable” [Leys is not an imitator but a similar one] is a true saying that struck me too. One might say the same of Tissot's pictures, of his “Walk in the Snow,” “Walk on the Ramparts,” “Marguerite in Church,” *etc.*

With the money I gave you, you must buy Alphonse Karr's Voyage autour de mon jardin. Be sure to do that - I want you to read it.

Anna and I walk every evening. Autumn is coming fast and that makes nature more serious and more intimate still. We are going to move to a house quite covered in ivy; I will soon write more from there. Compliments to anyone who may inquire after me.

Vincent

1875

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, February 1875

Dear Theo,

I have quite filled your little book , and I think it turned out well. When you have a chance send me “La Falaise” [The Cliff] by Jules Breton.

Our gallery is ready now and is very beautiful, we have some splendid pictures: Jules Dupré, Michel, Daubigny, Maris, Israëls, Mauve, Bisschop, *etc*. In April we are going to have an exhibition. Mr. Boussod has promised to send us the best things available: “La Malaria” by Hébert, “La Falaise” by Jules Breton, *etc*.

How I should like to have you here - we must manage that someday. How I should love to show you my room!

There is a beautiful exhibition of old art here, including: a large “Descent from the Cross” by Rembrandt; 5 large figures in twilight - you can imagine the sentiment; 5 Ruysdaels; 1 Frans Hals; Van Dijck; a landscape with figures by Rubens; “Autumn Evening” by Titian; 2 portraits by Tintoretto; and some beautiful old English art - Reynolds, Romney, and a splendid *Old Crome* landscape.

Adieu. I shall send you your little book at the first opportunity. Write soon.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 6 March 1875

Dear Theo,

Bravo, Theo. Your appreciation of that girl in “Adam Bede” is very good. That landscape in which the fallow, sandy path runs over the hill to the village, with its clay or whitewashed cottages, with moss-grown roofs, and here and there a black thornbush, on either side of the brown heath, and a gloomy sky over it, with a narrow white streak at the horizon - it is out of Michel.

But there is a still purer and nobler sentiment in it than in Michel. Today I enclose, in the box we send, the little book containing poetry I spoke of. Also “Jesus” by Renan and “Joan of Arc” by Michelet and also a portrait of Corot from the “London News,” which hangs in my room too.

I do not think you have any immediate chance of being transferred to the house in London.

Don't regret that your life is too easy, mine is rather easy too; I think that life is pretty long and that the time will arrive soon enough in which “another shall gird thee and carry thee where thou wouldst not.”

Adieu, remember me to all the friends. With a firm handshake,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 6 April 1875

London, 25 Bedford Street, Strand 6
Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter. I copied in your little book “Meeresstille” [Calm Sea] by Heine, didn't I? Some time ago I saw a picture by Thijs Maris that reminded me of it. It represents an old Dutch town with rows of brownish-red houses with stepped gables and high stoops; grey roofs; and white or yellow doors, window frames and cornices. There are canals with ships and a large white drawbridge under which a barge with a man at the tiller passes the little house of the bridge-keeper, who is seen through the window, sitting alone in his little office. Farther on is a stone bridge across the canal, over which some people and a cart with white horses are passing.

And there is life everywhere: a porter with his wheelbarrow; a man leaning against the railing of the bridge and looking into the water; women in black with white bonnets.

In the foreground is a brick-paved quay with a black rail; in the distance a church spire rises above the houses. A greyish white sky is above.

It is a small picture, and the artist was looking down on the scene. The subject is almost the same as that of the big J. Maris, “Amsterdam,” which you probably know; but this is talent and the other, genius.

I have copied a few more things for you which I will send when I have a chance.

Don't forget “La Falaise” and anything else you may happen to think of. That Victor Hugo is splendid. À Dieu; my love to Father if you see him.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, April 1875

Dear Theo,
Enclosed is a little drawing. I made it last Sunday, the morning when my landlady's little daughter died; she was thirteen years old. It is a view of Streatham Common, a large grassy plain with oak trees and gorse. It had been raining overnight; the ground was soaked and the young spring grass was fresh and green.

As you see, it is sketched on the title page of Poems by Edmond Roche. There are some very fine ones among them, grave and sad; one begins and ends thus:

J'ai gravi triste et seul la dune triste et nue,
Où la mer fait gémir sa plainte continue,
La dune où vient mourir la vague aux larges plis,
Monotone sentier aux tortueux replis.
[I have, sad and alone, climbed the sad and barren dune
Where the sea moans its constant lament
The dune where the waves die in large folds
Monotonous path of torturous folds.]

And another, “Calais”:

Que j'aime à te revoir, o ma ville natale,
Chère nymphe marine assise aux bords des eaux,
J'aime de ton beffroi la flèche qui s'élance,
Belle de hardiesse et belle d'élégance,
Et sa coupole à jour, qui laisse voir les cieux.
[How I love to see you again, my native town
Dear sea nymph sitting on the seashore
I love the shaft darting from your belfry
Beautiful in its valour and beautiful in its elegance
Its lacework cupola, through which one sees the sky.]

You will probably be curious to know the one that describes the etching by Corot, and therefore I am copying it too:

L'étang à Corot
Nous regardions l'étang d'une eau morne et plombée
Lentement sous la brise assembler pli sur pli…
…Si vous le voulez bien; n'êtes vous pas le maître

Qui l'avez recréé après le créateur?
[We looked at the pond with its sombre, leaden water
As it assembled in the breeze fold after fold…
…if you desire it, are you not the master
Who created it after the Creator?]
Ville d'Avray
Kindest regards and good luck to you. À Dieu.
Vincent
[Sketch Ville d'Avray after Corot drawn at foot of page.]

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

London, 8 May 1875

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your last letter. How is the patient? I had already heard from Father that she was ill, but I did not know it was as bad as that. Please write me soon about her.

Ay, boy, “What shall we say?” C. M. and Mr. Tersteeg have been here and left again last Saturday. In my opinion they went too often to the Crystal Palace and other places where they had nothing particular to do. I think they might just as well have come to see the place where I live. I hope and trust that I am not what many people think I am just now. We shall see, some time must pass; probably they will say the same of you a few years hence, at least if you remain what you are: my brother in both senses of the word.

Farewell and my compliments to the patient.

With a handshake, Vincent

Pour agir dans le monde il faut mourir à soi-même. Le peuple qui se fait le missionnaire d'une pensée religieuse n'a plus d'autre patrie que cette pensée.

L'homme n'est pas ici-bas seulement pour être heureux, il n'y est même pas pour être simplement honnête. Il y est pour réaliser de grandes choses pour la société, pour arriver à la noblesse et dàpasser la vulgarité où se traîne l'existence de Presque tous les individus.

[To act well in this world one must sacrifice all personal desires. The people who become the missionary of a religious thought have no other fatherland than this thought.

Man is not on this earth merely to be happy, or even to be simply honest. He is there to realize great things for humanity, to attain nobility and to surmount the vulgarity of almost everybody.]

RENAN

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 31 May 1875

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the letter I received this morning. Yesterday I saw the Corot exhibition. In it was the picture, “The Garden of Olives”; I am glad he painted that. To the right, a group of olive trees, dark against the glimmering blue sky; in the background, hills covered with shrubs and a few large ivy-grown trees over which the evening star shines.

At the Salon there are three very fine Corots; the best of them, painted shortly before his death, “Les Bûcheronnes” [female woodcutters], will probably be reproduced as a woodcut in L'Illustration or Le Monde Illustre.

Of course I have also been to the Louvre and the Luxembourg. The Ruysdaels at the Louvre are splendid, especially “Le Buisson,” “L'Estacade,” and “Le Coup de Soleil.” I wish you could see the little Rembrandts there, “The Men of Emmaus” and its counterpart, “The Philosophers.”

Some time ago I saw Jules Breton with his wife and two daughters. His figure reminded me of J. Maris, but he had dark hair. As soon as there is an opportunity I will send you a book of his, Les Champs et la Mer, which contains all his poems. He has a beautiful picture at the Salon, “St. John's Eve.” Peasant girls dancing on a summer evening around a St. John's fire; in the background, the village with a church and the moon over it.

Dansez, dansez, oh jeunes filles,
En chantant vos chansons d'amour,
Demain pour courir aux faucilles,
Vous sortiez au petit jour.

There are now three pictures of his at the Luxembourg: “A Procession among the Cornfields,” “Women Gleaning” and “Alone.” À Dieu.

Vincent

Letter from Van Gogh Family to Theo van Gogh

Zundert, 1875

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

7 January 1875

I am glad she [Anna] is still together with Vincent.

Mrs. Van Gogh to Theo.

We are still enjoying the memories of those nice days together. Those were very good days that we won't forget easily, and Vincent being with us that cold evening, and Anna's nice letter arriving when we were all sitting together around the stove.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

1 February 1875

Together with Vincent she had seen Hamlet there and seems to have well enjoyed it all.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

11 February 1875

She [Anna] is happy and feels well placed, she likes her work and gets satisfaction out of it. She is really becoming a very capable person and she blesses the opportunity of being surrounded by such beautiful nature; she says it gives her courage and force to work and struggle on, and serenity and peace in the heart.

Anna van Gogh to Theo

28 April 1875

Do you sometimes hear from Vincent? I never do. It seems to me he has illusions about people and judges them before he knows them, and then, when he finds out how they really are and that they don't come up to the expectations he had formed *too soon* about them, he is so disappointed that he throws them away like a bouquet of wilted flowers without looking whether among those wilted flowers there would not be some that are not “quite rubbish” if only they would be treated with some care. I am really sorry I went to stay with him during the school holidays and was a burden to him. If I would have had any reason to foresee that that would be the case I certainly would have found some way to arrange things differently. I did not tell this to the people at home; they think he is a great support to me and that seems to give Father and Mother a great sense of relief. Well, the sun shines into my little room too beautifully and joyfully to think about unpleasant things and still less to write about them; if, however, you know why he is like that to me, I should be very glad if you would tell me.

Lies to Theo

30 May 1875

Oh, if only Anna wanted to, how much she would be able to do for him. I don't understand she has changed so much; I used to think she loved him so much.

I have never had the opportunity of really getting to know Vincent well, but during that holiday and at that moment I realized what he is and what it meant to have such a brother. Theo, I for one, I think we should be proud of him and should follow his example instead of going against him. If only Father could hear but once how he talked to us then and could realize the purity of his thoughts, how differently he would think of him.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo

9 July 1875

If with regard to Vincent, we sometimes were worried about something strange in him, this does not mean - you do know that, don't you? - that we overlooked all the good qualities he has.

There is a kind of naturalness that is blamable. Someone who yields to low passions, follows *nature*, that is to say bestial nature, but *human nature* teaches him to dominate those passions.

Now don't misunderstand me; I don't want to say that I suspect you or Vincent of yielding to those ignoble passions, no indeed!

But this is the course of my reasoning: a person can sometimes be *not natural* *enough*. Youth is allowed to be lively, gay, cheerful; a youthful person is allowed to enjoy meeting people who are also youthful, gay and cheerful. In those years it is even a good thing if one doesn't go against one's nature, for there is in a cheerful mood a beneficial force. Melancholy can be harmful, and to indulge in melancholy does not help to produce energy.

My dear Theo! You should really think about that; I see that recently your liveliness has diminished, your cheerfulness is no longer what it was before.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

11 August 1875

The time is near that Anna and Willemien are going to leave us.

[They both went to Welwyn, in England.]

Reverend van Gogh to Theo

31 December 1875

How Vincent is going to go on, we don't know yet - he certainly is *not* happy. I believe it is not the right place for him there. We talked quite openly and discussed possibilities. Yesterday he went to Uncle Cor to consult him too; he is also a businessman. I tend to believe that I must advise Vincent to ask for his resignation in two or three months. (I tell you this *confidentially*!) Don't think I act hastily; I have noticed the signs of the times, seriously noticed them! In the meantime, these are only deliberations; it is not a definite decision. We also keep an eye on God in this matter. May His light give us wisdom and courage to act, when we see it necessary […] There is so much good in Vincent. That is why it may be necessary to make a change in his position.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 19 June 1875

Dear Theo,

I had hoped to revisit her before her death , but it was not to have been. L'homme s'agite et Dieu le mène [Man proposes and God disposes.]

In the first box that we shall send to Holland you will find a photograph of that picture by Ph. De Champagne of which Michelet says, “It stayed in my memory for thirty years, coming back to me incessantly.” Further, an etching by Daubigny after Ruysdael, “The Bush”; a lithograph after Corot, “Sunset”; a lithograph by Bodmer, “Fontainebleau in Autumn”; and two etchings by Jacque. À Dieu.

Vincent

I do not know how long I will stay here; nevertheless, I hope to go to Helvoirt before returning to London, and I would like to believe that you will be there as well. I will pay for the trip.

You will certainly not forget her, or her death, but it is better to keep that to yourself.

It is one of those things that, as time goes by, we “are sorrowful but always rejoicing”; that is what we have to learn.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 29 June 1875

Dear Theo,

I really want to know if you are leaving The Hague. Is that what you want, too? Do write me if it is *yes* or *no*? Provisionally I am staying here, and I probably will not go to Holland before the autumn.

In the first box that goes to The Hague you will find a little parcel for Helvoirt. Please forward it after looking at what's in it. There are a few lithographs which I should like to see hanging in Father's study, next to the “Funeral Procession through the Cornfields,” by Van der Maaten. “An Old Huguenot,” by Anker - the lithograph of which is in the parcel - I have sold to Uncle Vincent, who was here a few days ago. He also bought a beautiful picture by Jacque, “Horses before a Plough in the Rain.”

I don't know whether I have already written to you about it or not, but there has been a sale here of drawings by Millet. When I entered the hall of the Hôtel Drouot, where they were exhibited, I felt like saying, “Take off your shoes, for the place where you are standing is Holy Ground.”

You know that Millet lived at Gréville. Well, I do not know whether it was at Gréville or Granville that the man whom I told you of died. However this may be, I looked at Millet's drawings of “The Rocks of Gréville” with extra care. There is now a picture of his at the Luxembourg, “The Church at Gréville.” À Dieu

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 6 July 1875

[letterhead] Goupil & Cie,
Paris, 6 July 1875
My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter. Yes, my boy, I thought as much. You must let me know how your English is getting on. Have you done anything about it? If not, it's not the end of the world.

I'm renting a little room in Montmartre. I'm sure you'd like it. It's small, but it looks out over a little garden full of ivy and Virginia creeper. I'll tell you what prints I have on the wall:

Ruysdael Le buisson [The Bush]
“ D'Blanchisseries [The Bleaching Ground]

Rembrandt Bible Reading. (A large Old-Dutch room, evening, a candle on the table. A young mother sits reading the Bible beside her baby's cradle. An old woman is listening. It reminds me of, `Verily I say unto you, where 2 or 3 are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' It's an old copper engraving as big as Le buisson, superb.

Ph. De Champagne Portrait d'une dame
Corot Soir
“ “
Bodmer Fontainebleau
Bonington Une Route
Troyon Le Matin
Jules Dupré The Evening (the Halt)
Maris A Washerwoman
“ The Christening
Millet The Four Hours of the Day (woodcuts, 4 proofs)
V. d. Maaten Funeral procession through the Cornfields
Daubigny The Dawn (Cock crowing)
Charlet Hospitality. (farm surrounded by pine trees, in winter in the snow; a peasant and a soldier in front of the door)
Ed. Frère Seamstresses
“ The Cooper

Anyway, my boy, look after yourself, you know how, be as meek and mild as you can. Let us always remain good friends.

Goodbye, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 15 July 1875

Dear Theo,
Our Uncle Vincent visited us here, I saw him often and talked about a heap of things with him. I asked him if he saw any chance of getting you a place in the store in Paris.

At first he wouldn't hear of it, saying that you were too valuable in The Hague. Then, after I insisted, he said he would think about it.

He will certainly come to see you while he is in The Hague; he is not going to change from his dullness, let him say what he wants, it will do no harm to you, and won't do you any harm when you need something in the future. Don't talk of me unless you need something.

He is very, very clever. When I was here last winter, one of the things he said to me was, “Supernatural things I may not know, but I know everything about natural things.” I do not know if those were his exact words, but that was the meaning.

I can also tell you that one of his favourite pictures is “Lost Illusions” by Gleyre.

Sainte-Beuve said, “In most men there exists a poet who died young, whom the man survived.” And Musset said, “Know that often a dormant poet is hidden within us, always young and alive.” I think Uncle Vincent belongs to the first group. So you know whom you are dealing with. Ask him squarely if he can arrange for you to have authority here or in London.

Thank you for your letter that came this morning and the poem by Rückert. Do you have a copy of his poems? I would love to get to know them. As soon as I have a chance, I shall send you a French Bible, and The Imitation of Christ. It was probably the favourite book of that lady painted by Ph. de Champaigne. There is a portrait of her daughter, a nun, in The Louvre, also by Ph. de Ch. She has l'Imitation on the chair beside her.

Father wrote to me once: “You know that the same mouth which said: “Be as harmless as the doves,” and straight away added: “and wise as a serpent.” [Matt. 10:16] Keep that in mind and believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Do you have the photographs after Meissonier in the gallery? Look at them often; he has painted men. Probably you know his “Le Fumeur à la Fenêtre” and

“Le jeune Homme Déjeunant.”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 24 July 1875

[Copy of first page of the letter.]
[Letterhead] Paris, July 24 1875

Dear Theo,

A few days ago we received a picture by de Nittis, a view of London on a rainy day, Westminster bridge and the house of Parliament [sic]. I used to pass over Westminsterbridge every morning and evening and know how it looks when the sun sets behind Westminster abbey and the house of Parliament, and how it looks early in the morning, and in winter in snow and fog.

When I saw the picture I felt how much I loved London. Still I think that it is better for me that I left it.

This in answer to your question.

I certainly do not believe that you will be sent to London.

Thanks for the “Springtime of Life.” And “At Midnight” by Rückert. The first is very beautiful, the latter reminds me of “September Night” by de Musset. I wish I could send it you, but I do not possess it.

Yesterday we sent a box to The Hague in which you will find what I promised you.

I hear that Anna and Liesbeth are at home, I should like to see them.

Be as happy as you can and write to me soon. With a firm handshake,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 13 August 1875

Dear Theo,
I wanted to write you earlier. I am happy that Father has accepted the nomination at Etten; in the circumstances, I think it right that W. and A. [their sisters] are leaving together. I would have liked to be with you all that Sunday when you went to Helvoirt - did I write you that I spent the day with Soek and his family at Ville d'Avray? I was surprised to find three pictures by Corot in a little church there.

Last Sunday and the previous Sunday, I went to church to listen to Dr. Bercier; I heard him preach on “Toutes choses prouveront le bien de ceux qui aiment Dieu” [All things work together for the good of those that love God] and on “Il fit l'homme à son image” [God created man in his own image.] It was beautiful and noble.

You should go to church every Sunday if you have the time; even if the preaching is not good, it is better to go; you will not regret it. Have you been to church to hear the Reverend Mr. Zubli?

On the list of engravings that hang in my room, I forgot the following:

N. Maes	The Nativity
Hamon	“If I Were the Sombre Winter”
François	Last Summer Days
Ruyperez	The Imitation of Jesus Christ
Bosboom	Cantabimus and Psallemus

I am trying to get another engraving of Rembrandt's “Bible Reading” for you; if possible, I will send it to you in the first box of pictures. Did I send you a lithograph of Troyon's “Morning Effects” and François' “Last Summer Days”? If not, tell me. I have duplicate copies of them.

And now, be as happy as you can; do well and don't look back if you can help it.

Believe me, always your loving brother, Vincent

My compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Tersteeg and Mauve. Also to the Van Stockums, Haanebeeks, Aunt Fie and the Rooses!

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, August 1875

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your last letter and the poem by Rückert.
Last Sunday, I again went to hear M. Bercier. He had chosen this text: “Il ne vous est pas permis” [It is not permitted] and he concluded with “Heureaux ceux pour qui la vie a toutes ses épines” [Happy is he whose life is all thorns]

I know that uncle Vincent really likes this phrase, “Young man, rejoice in your youth and that your heart is made content by the days of your youth, and live like your heart guides itself according to your eyes, but understand that for everything God will make judgment. Take away the chagrin of your heart, and put away malice, for youth and adolescence is not in vain. But remember your Creator during the days of your youth, before the bad days come and the years arrive when you will say `I don't have any pleasure'.”

For me, I find the following phrase better:

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this will give pleasure for all men, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Enclosed is a note for Mr. Tersteeg. It is to ask him if he will have two engravings framed for me, “Good Friday” and “St. Augustine.” You will find them in the next box I send you. And will you be so kind as to have them sent to Helvoirt by September 10? I should like it to be a present [for his mother's birthday] from both of us, so will you pay 2.50 towards the frames? I told Mr. Tersteeg that you would write me how much it cost and that I would then remit the money to him; the 2.50 you can give me when we meet. That will probably be before Christmas; I think it would be better not to ask for leave before that time.

Tonight I am invited to dine at Mr. Hamman's. À Dieu, write me soon and believe me,

Your affectionate brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 1 September 1875

Paris, 1st September 1875
Dear Theo,

This morning I received from Father and from you the news of the death of Uncle Jan. News of this sort makes one repeat the prayer, “Unite us, O Lord, close together, and may our love of Thee strengthen that bond,” and again: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

In the first box of pictures going to Holland you will find some lithographs and the engravings after Rembrandt that I mentioned to you. You will surely like the two lithographs after Bonington. At the same time I shall send you a few photographs of pictures by Jules Breton and Corot for Father; I shall write on the back, “for Helvoirt.”

I never heard of the painter, Pynas, whom you write about. I should like to see the picture you mention. I don't know that lithograph after Diaz's “A Monk” either.

Last Sunday I was at the Louvre (on Sundays I generally go there or to the Luxembourg). I wish you could see Van Ostade, his own family - himself, his wife and, I think, eight children. They are all in black - the wife and daughters with white caps and kerchiefs - in a stately old-Dutch room with a fireplace, large oak panels and ceiling, the whitewashed walls with pictures in black frames. In the corner of the room is a large bed with blue curtains and quilt.

The Rembrandt, “The Men of Emmaus,” which I wrote you about has been engraved; Messrs. Goupil & Co. will publish the engraving next autumn.

Do you ever visit Borchers's home? His mother is, I think, a real lady. Go out as much as you can, I mean, of course, to Van Stockum's, Haanebeek's, Carbentus's, Borchers's, etc.; not to Kraft's or Marda's, you know, unless it happens that you can't do otherwise - then there is no harm in it for once.

How is business? I know how difficult it is sometimes, but try to be as useful as you can.

Best wishes and write soon, always your loving brother,

Vincent

Enclosed is a note for Borchers; compliments to all the Roos family and to everybody who asks after me. B. tells me that Weehuizen is dead, which I did not know. Were you there?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 4 September 1875

Dear Theo,

I am enclosing my letter for Mother's birthday; please include it with yours.

I have bought the book about Michel, with etchings after his pictures; as soon as I have finished it, I will send it to you. Yet Michel is not nearly so beautiful as the landscape described in Adam Bede which impressed us both so much. There is also a painting by Bonington which is almost “*it*” but not quite. When you have a chance and I have finished the book, please lend it, in my name, to Uncle Cor; but I want it to be yours. I see the pictures themselves, so you may as well have the descriptions and etchings after them.

Compliments to the Haanebeeks, Carbentuses, Van Stockums, Mauve, and Roos when you see them.

Best wishes, always your loving brother, Vincent

Also give the book by Michel to Mr. Tersteeg to read.

Letter from Theo van Gogh/Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 7 September 1875

[Letter from Theo, on the other half of which is Vincent's reply]
The Hague, 7 September 1875
Dear Vincent,
Last spring Weehuizen died. I thought you knew. He died very suddenly after a few days' illness. He died in hospital with nobody present. I greatly regretted that I was not with him. I had been on familiar terms with him of late. He had read Michelet's L'Amour and often talked about it to me, and he loved nature so much and sought the *still sadness* in it. Last Sunday I heard a beautiful sermon. Jesus wept.

Thank you for the lithographs and the book by Michel you promised me; I am very curious to see them.

I have taken your letter to the Borchers. They seem to be good people, and I hope to see more of them. Today we received the novelties, including that engraving after Rembrandt. It looks fine, the figure of Jesus especially is beautiful, and the whole is noble. Adieu, good luck.

Yours affectionately, Theo

The frames for the engravings for Mother's birthday cost 4 guilders apiece.

[Reply]

Paris, 8 September 1875

Dear Theo,

You didn't expect to get this letter back, did you?

No, my lad, that's not the way to look at it. Certainly Weehuizen's death is sad, but sad in another way than you say.

Keep your eyes open, and try to be strong and brave. Are you sure that Michelet's book was the right one for him?

Theo, I want to make a suggestion that may perhaps surprise you. Do not read Michelet any longer or *any* other book but the Bible till we meet again at Christmas, and do as I told you: go out in the evening often, dropping in on Van Stockum, Borchers and the like. I don't think you will regret it; you will feel much freer once you start this regimen.

Beware of the words I underlined in your letter. There is still a sadness, certainly, thank God, but I do not know whether we are entitled to it yet. You notice I say *we*: I, no more than you.

The other day Pa wrote me, “Sadness does no harm, but makes us see things with a holier eye.” *This* is the true “still sadness,” the pure gold, but we have not got as far as that, not by a long shot. Let us hope and pray we may get there, and believe me always

Your loving brother, Vincent

I have got a little bit further than you, and I see already that, alas, the maxim “La jeunesse et l'adolescence ne sont que vanité” [Youth and adolescence are nothing but vanity] is *nearly* all true. So keep heart, old fellow, I shake your hand warmly.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 12 September 1875

Dear Theo,
Flügel, Flügel über's Leben!
Flügel über Grab und Tod!
[Wings, wings to fly above life!
Wings to fly above the grave and death!]

That is what we want, and I am beginning to understand that we can get them. Don't you think Father has them? And you know how he got them? By prayer and the fruit of prayer - patience and faith - and from the Bible that was a light on his path and a lamp ahead of his feet.

This morning I heard a beautiful sermon on the theme: Forget what is behind you; the preacher said for example: Have more hope than memories; what there has been seriousness and blessed in your past life is not lost; wait no longer therefore, you will find it elsewhere, but advance … All these things have become new in Jesus Christ.

Keep heart and believe me,
Your loving brother, Vincent

If it was true that youth and adolescence are only vanity - of course, if one takes into account what is written above and if one dreams that a well employed youth is a treasure, although he breaks off and resumes later, we would have to strive and hope to become men like our father and others. We hope on these two, and pray. Compliments to all that may ask after me.

You know the etching by Rembrandt, “Burgomaster Six,” standing reading before the window? I know that Uncle Vincent and Uncle Cor are very fond of it, and I sometimes think they must have resembled him when they were younger. You also know the portrait of Six when he was older. I think there is an engraving of it in the gallery at The Hague. His life must have been beautiful and serious.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 13 September 1875

Dear Theo,
The photograph after J. Breton and the one after Corot are for Helvoirt; the rest is for you.

Please send the ones for Helvoirt on when you have a chance; however, I will do my best to get another copy of that Rembrandt, so perhaps you had better postpone the forwarding until I have sent you that one, too.

Surely you will have received the letter I wrote yesterday.

With kind regards,
Vt.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 17 September 1875

Dear Theo,

A feeling, even a fine feeling, for the beauties of Nature is not the same as a religious feeling, though I believe these two are connected. *

Nearly everyone has a feeling for nature, some more, some less, but there are some who feel: God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Father is one of those few, Mother too, and Uncle Vincent as well, I think.

You know that it is written: “The world passeth away and the lust thereof”, and that on the other hand we are also told about “that good part which shall not be taken away”, and about “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” Let us also pray that we may grow rich in God. Still, do not dwell too deeply on these matters - in the fullness of time they will become clearer to you of their own accord - and just take the advice I have given you.

Let us ask that it may fall to us to become the poor in the kingdom of God, God's servants. We are still a long way from that, however, since there are often beams in our eye that we know not of. Let us therefore ask that our eye may become single, for then we ourselves shall become wholly single.

Regards to Roos and to anybody who may ask after me, and believe me, always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

You are eating properly, aren't you? In particular eat especially as much bread as you can. Sleep well, I must go and polish my boots for tomorrow.

*The same is true of the feeling for art. Do not succumb too much to that either. Above all, save some love for the business and for your work, and respect for Mr. Tersteeg. One day you will appreciate, better than now, how much he deserves it. No need to overdo it, though.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 25 September 1875

Dear Theo,

The path is narrow, therefore we must be careful. You know how others have arrived where we want to go, let us take that simple road too.

Ora et Labora, [Pray and work] let us do our daily work, whatever the hand finds to do, with all our strength and let us believe that God will give good gifts, a part that will not be taken away, to those who ask Him for it.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new!” [2 Cor. v.17.]

I am going to destroy all my books by Michelet, *etc.* I wish you would do the same.

How I am longing for Christmas, but let us have patience, it will come soon enough.

Courage, lad; my compliments to all the friends, and believe me,

Your loving brother,

Vincent

As soon as possible I will send the money for the frames. When I write to Mr. Tersteeg, I will tell him that for the moment I am rather short of cash; I asked our cashier to hold back every month a part of my salary as I shall want a lot of money around Christmas for my journey, etc., however I hope to send it before long.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 27 September 1875

[Goupil & Cie.]
Paris, 27 September 1875

Dear Theo,

“The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; the kingdom of God is within you.” “The son of Man is not come to be served, but to serve,” and we who want to become His followers, Christians, we are not greater than our Lord . Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the pure in heart.

Narrow is the path which leadeth unto life, and those that find it are few. Struggle to enter by the narrow gate, for many will seek to enter, and will not be able .

My brother, let us be prudent; let us ask of Him Who is on high, Who also prayeth for us, that He take us not away from the world, but that he preserve us from evil. Yea, let us be sober, and watch, let us trust in God, and not lean upon our intellect. Let us ask of Him that He force us to come in; that He enable us to fulfill a Christian's life; that He teach us to deny ourselves, to take our cross every day and follow after Him; to be gentle, long-suffering and lowly of heart.

A part that shall not be taken away, a spring of living water, springing into Life eternal , these are the good gifts that the Hearer of prayers, the Giver of all perfect gifts, will give unto those that pray for them unto Him.

And over and above this the assurance that there is “a Father's house in which are many mansions,” and that, when He that hath gone and prepared a place for us, He will receive us all unto Himself. And for our comfort in life, on the road to that “Father's house,” the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who shall lead us in truth .

Yet a Christian's life has its dark side too, it is principally man's work.

For those that walk with God, God's friends, God's pious ones, those who worship him in the Spirit and in Truth, are tried and purified, and often have received from God a thorn in the flesh; blessed shall we be, if we can repeat after our father, Paul: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, but now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things, and am I become, and God hath made me sorrowful yet always rejoicing.”

Write soon and give my regards to all acquaintances, and believe me

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 29 September 1875

Dear Theo,

Boy, be careful, do not lose your resistance.

See things as they are, and do not approve of everything for yourself. It is possible to deviate, to the right as well as to the left.

Think of what Pa has undoubtedly said more than once to you, too; The *intellect* and the feeling must go hand in hand.

Cordial greetings, and always,

Your affectionate brother, Vincent

Write again soon.

I advised you to go out a good deal, but if you don't like to, don't do it.

You know I used not to go out so much myself, which occasioned unpleasant remarks many a time.

How I should like it if we could have breakfast together or drink a cup of chocolate in my room. Keep courage, old fellow.

Don't take things that don't really concern you very closely *too* much to heart, and don't let them hit you too hard.

How about eating bread, have you tried that? In a great hurry I shake your hand warmly in thought.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 30 September 1875

Dear Theo,

With this letter I am sending you the book by Michel that I promised you, an etching after the "Marguerite" by Scheffer, a lithograph after Corot and a packet of chocolate.

I know quite well that your life is not easy just now, boy, but stay firm and keep up your courage: it is sometimes necessary "not to dream, not to sigh."

You know "thou art not alone, but thy Father is with thee."

With a firm handshake,

You loving brother, Vincent

Please keep the etching after Rembrandt that goes with this letter, and the photographs of the pictures by Corot and Jules Breton which I sent before, till Father and Mother are well settled at Etten, and then send them; that will be about the end of November.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 6 October 1875

Dear Theo,

Although I have written you recently, I send you the following because I know that sometimes rough obstacles arise on our path. Courage, old son, after the rain, good weather: keep hoping for that.

The rain and good weather alternate on *The road that goes uphill all the way, yes to the very end, and one rests also from time to time during the journey that takes the whole day long, from morn till night.*

Think on this, now and in later years, “This also will pass away.”

Jules Dupré liked to repeat: 'One has one's beautiful days'. Let us believe it too.

Today, I have the opportunity to send a parcel to A. and W. in England. I have sent them notably The Imitation of Jesus Christ and some separate fragments of the Bible published in a collection of the Psalms which I have sent you.

Read them with assiduity. Do you want also the four Evangelists and some Epistles, which are published separately?

I would like to have a Hymnbook in Dutch. If the opportunity arises, send me the least expensive edition than you can find. I already have the Psalms. There are some very beautiful English hymns, for instance:

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be:
Lead me by Thine own hand
Choose out the path for me…
I dare not choose my lot;
I would not, if I might;
Choose Thou for me, my God:
So shall I walk aright.
The kingdom that I seek,
Is Thine, so let the way
That leads to it be Thine,
Else I must surely stray.
Choose Thou for me my friends,
My sickness or my health;
Choose Thou my cares for me,

My poverty or wealth.
Not mine, not mine the choice,
In things or great or small
Be Thou my guide, my strength
My wisdom, and my all.

And the following:

Nearer, my God, to Thee
Nearer to Thee.
E'en though it be a cross,
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.

And also:

Oft in sorrow…oft in woe
Onward, Christians, onward go:
Fight the fight, maintain the strife,
Strengthened with the Bread of life.
Let your drooping hearts be glad:
March in heavenly armour clad:
Fight, nor think the battle long,
Soon shall victory tune your song.
Let not sorrow dim your eye,
Soon shall every tears be dry;
Let not fears your course impede,
Great your strength, if great your need.

Best regards to all the friends. How is Carolien Van Stockum? Give her my kindest regards and believe me, your loving brother,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 11 October 1875

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter I received this morning. This time, I would like to write you in a way I seldom do. I propose in particular to tell you in detail how I live here.

As you know, I live in Montmartre. In the same building a young Englishman has his lodging, he is also employed at the store. He is 18 years old; he is the son of a London dealer of paintings. He had never left his paternal home before he came here, and he was very rough-hewn during the first weeks of his stay. He eats six to eight sous worth of bread morning noon and night (N.B. bread sold in Paris is very good) and supplements his meals with several pounds of apples or pears. He is as skinny as a toothpick, he has two rows of solid teeth, big red lips, twinkling eyes, a pair of big ears which stick out from his head, a razor-cut pate (black hair), *etc.* At first everybody laughed at this young chap, even I. But bit by bit I grew to like him, and I assure you that at the moment I am glad to have his company in the evenings.

He has a naïve and unspoiled heart and he is very good at his work at the store. Every evening, we go home together, we eat a little in my room, and then I read aloud, every evening, mostly from the Bible. We would like to read it from one end to the other. In the mornings, usually between five and six, he comes to wake me up, we have breakfast together in my room, and we leave about 8 for the store.

Lately, he is eating a bit more reasonably and he is now collecting prints, which I am helping him to do.

Yesterday we went to Luxembourg together, and I showed him the pictures that I like the most. In truth, the simple people know things better than the intelligent ones.

Breton	Alone, Benediction of the Harvest, Recall of the Gleaners
Brion	The Pilgrims of St. Odille, Noah
Bernier	Fields in winter
Cabat	Pond, and Autumn Evening
Émile Breton	Winter Evening
Bodmer	Fontainebleau
Millet	Church at Gréville

Daubigny	Spring and Autumn
François	The End of Winter, The Churchyard
Gleyre	Lost Illusions
Hébert	Christ in the Garden of Olives, and Malaria
Rosa Bonheur	Ploughing, *etc.*

Also the picture (I cannot recall the name) of a convent where the monks receive a stranger and suddenly perceive that it is Jesus. On the wall of the convent is written, “Man proposes and God disposes,” “He that receiveth you receiveth me, he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.”

At the store, I do all the work that is given into my hands. Old son, we do this work all our lives, give me the power to consecrate my strength.

Did you do what I advised you to do, get rid of the works of Michelet, Renan, etc.? I think this would give you peace of mind. However, do not forget the piece by Michelet about the woman's portrait by Ph. De Champaigne; similarly, do not forget Renan. But throw away their works. “If you have found honey, mind that you do not eat too much, and become disgusted”, you read in the book of Proverbs, or somewhere like that. Do you know Erckmann-Chatrian: *Le Conscrit, Waterloo,* and most of all *L'Ami Fritz* and *Madame Thérèse?* Read these works, if you can find them. A change of diet stimulates the appetite (provided that we take care to look for a *plain* food, because it is not written for nothing: Give us this day our daily bread), and the bow cannot always be kept bent.

I hope you will pardon my telling you these things. I know you are intelligent enough to find them out for yourself. Don't find *everything* all right. Learn to distinguish for yourself between what is relatively good and *evil,* and let that feeling show you the way under God's guidance, for boy, we need God's guidance so much. Look for light and freedom, and *do not ponder too deeply over the evils of the world*.

Write again soon and in a little more detail. My compliments to everybody, especially to Mr. Tersteeg and family, and be as happy as you can. À Dieu, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 14 October 1875

Dear Theo,
Just another few words to cheer myself as well as you. I advised you to dispose of your books, and advise it still. Be sure to do it, it will give you peace of mind. But at the same time be careful not to become narrow-minded, or afraid of reading what is well written, quite the contrary, such writings are a *source of comfort in life.*

`Que toutes les choses qui sont véritables, toutes les choses qui sont honnêtes, toutes les choses qui sont justes, tout les choses qui sont pures, toutes les choses qui sont amiables, tout les choses qui sont de bonne réputation, et où il y a quelque vertu, et qui sont dignes de louange, que toutes ces choses occupent vos pensées'. [Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; and if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.]

Seek only for light and freedom and do not immerse yourself too deeply in the worldly *mire*.

How I should like to have you here, to show you the Luxembourg and the Louvre, etc., but I have the feeling that you, too, will be coming here one day.

I have had quite a good letter from Anna, I am sending it on to you, but please let me have it back when you have read it.

Father once wrote to me, “Do not forget the story of Icarus, who wanted to fly to the sun, and having reached a certain height lost his wings and fell into the sea.” You may often feel that neither Anna nor I are what we hope to become and that we still lag a long way behind Father and other people, that we lack soundness and simplicity and sincerity. One does not become *simple* and true overnight. But let us persevere, *and above all have patience. He who believes, does not hasten*. Still, there is a difference between our desire to become Christians and that of Icarus to fly to the sun.

To my mind, there is nothing wrong with having a reasonably strong body, so make sure you feed yourself properly, and if you feel very hungry sometimes, or rather, have a good appetite, then eat well. I assure you that that is what I do myself often enough, and *above all used to do*. Especially bread, in my opinion, my boy, and don't be too shy about it. “Bread is the staff of life,” the English say (although they like meat as well, on the whole far too much).

And now, write again soon and about everyday matters, too, for a change. Take care of yourself and give my regards to anyone who asks about me. Let us hope we see each other in a month or two. I shake you warmly by the hand in my thoughts, and am always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 9 November 1875

Dear Theo,

It is again time for you to hear from me, but it will only be a short note today; I have not much time, as I am very busy.

Thanks for what you sent me; I am very glad to have it.

I am glad for our parent's sake as well as for yours that you were at Etten on the day of the ordination. You must tell me all about it.

Uncle Vincent and Aunt left again yesterday. I saw quite a bit of them. To my great regret I did not see them off at the station when they left; enclosed is a note for Uncle, telling him how it happened.

We are in autumn, I suppose you go for walks often. Do you rise early? Me, I rise regularly at a good hour, it is an excellent habit to get into; the new day is so delicious, I have learnt to like it. Most of the time, I go to bed at an equally good hour. Every morning my worthy Englishman prepares oatmeal - how I wish you could be here some morning.

I shall write more soon. Write again soon and about everything. With a firm handshake, I am always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from H. V. van Gogh to To whom it may concern

Brussels, 14 November 1875

Maison Goupil & Cie.
H. V. van Gogh Successeur.
Estampes
Françaises se Etrangéres
Tableaux et Aquarelles
58 R. Montaigne de la Cour,
Bruxelles.

The undersigned declares that Mr. Theod. van Gogh has been employed by our house from 6 January of the current year until today, and that I have every reason to express my entire satisfaction with his behaviour as well as with the zeal he has given evidence of during this period of time.

Brussels, 14 November 1875
H. V. van Gogh
V. Schmidt success.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 15 November 1875

Dear Theo,

Enclosed is a note for Uncle Haanebeek; I had not written since Annette's death and felt a strong urge to do this. Do you call on them now and then? At all events you will take this note yourself, won't you?

Every morning my dear Englishman prepares oatmeal, his father sent him 25 pounds of it. I wish you could taste it with us.

I am so glad that I met this boy. I have learned from him, and in return I was able to show him a danger which was threatening him.

He had never been away from home, and though he did not show it, he had an unhealthy (though noble) longing for his father and his home. It was the kind of longing that belongs only to God and heaven. This idolatry is not love. He who loves his parents must follow their footsteps in life. He understands this now clearly; and though his heart is sad, he has the courage and the desire to go forward.

Has Father already told you, as he often did me, 'Keep your heart with all diligence, because the heart is an open door to life'? Then let us do so, and with the help of God, we will stay on the right path.

Good luck to you, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 4 December 1875

Dear Theo,
A few words in a hurry, because tomorrow is St. Nicholas Day. It is such a pleasant day in Holland, I should like to celebrate it once more.

I am looking forward to Christmas, aren't you? We shall have a great many things to talk about. It is a pity that Anna cannot come too; I hope she also will have pleasant days. Christmas in England is very interesting, and perhaps Anna will learn to love her surroundings better if she celebrates the holiday there and helps to make things pleasant in the house.

My dear Englishman (Gladwell is his name) is also going home for a few days. You can imagine how he longs to go; he has never been away from home before.

Write to me soon.

Is it as cold in Holland as it is here? With our little stove, Gladwell and I are very comfortable - morning and evening.

I have taken to smoking a pipe again and I enjoy it as of old. Compliments to everybody who may ask about me. A warm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 9 December 1875

Dear Theo,
This morning I heard from home what had happened to you, and I wanted to write you at once. I wish I could do something for you; one of these days a box will be sent to The Hague, I will put some chocolate in it for you. Gladwell calls that "consolation." I will also send you the book by Jules Breton - at least, if I can get it back, as I lent it to somebody. I am anxious to know how you are; write soon and please give me some details about how you spend your days.

How I should like to be with you, Theo, but what can we do? It cannot be helped, boy. In a fortnight I shall go home and then we will certainly see each other, and our meeting again will not be the less delightful for the accident that has befallen you.

If you see Uncle Jan, please remember me to him and thank him for his letter. You must try to become good friends with him. I don't know him well, but I know he is "pure gold."

It has been very cold. Fortunately, the thaw set in yesterday. I was very glad of it.

I am rather busy these days with the inventory and finishing things off before my departure.

And now, Theo, a warm handshake and wishing you a speedy recovery, always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 10 December 1875

Dear Theo,
Herewith I send you the things I promised. I am sure you will like the book by Jules Breton. One of his poems, titled “Illusions”, struck me in particular. Happy are those whose hearts are so tuned, “All things work together for good to them that love God” is a beautiful sentence. It will be thus for you, and the aftertaste of these difficult days you will certainly find agreeable.

But write me how you are feeling soon, and tell me when the doctor says you will be well again - that is, if you have not done so already.

Two weeks from today I hope to be in Etten. You can imagine how I am looking forward to it. Did I you already tell that I have taken up smoking a pipe again? I have found in it an old faithful friend, I believe that we never more will separate. Uncle Vincent told me that you smoke too.

Give me very best love to the Roos family. Both of us have enjoyed many good things in their house, and they have proved faithful friends.

At the moment we have here Émile Breton's picture, “Sunday Morning.” You know it, don't you? It is a village street of cottages and barns, and at the end is the church, surrounded by poplars. Everything is covered with snow, and little black figures are going to church. It tells us that winter is cold but that human hearts are warm.

Best wishes, boy, and believe me always

Your loving brother, Vincent

The packets of chocolate marked X are for you; the others are for Mrs. Roos. Smoke the cigarettes together with the rest of the family. Adieu.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 13 December 1875

Dear Theo,

I was looking forward to the letter I received this morning, and am very glad that you are recovering. Your parcel was only sent today; the little book by Jules Breton is in it.

I am longing for Christmas and am eager to see you, boy, but it will be soon enough now. I think I shall leave here a week from Sunday, in the evening. Try your best to get as long a holiday as possible.

And now there is another thing, which I hope you will pardon my mentioning. You too, you have found the poems of Heine and d'Uhland are beautiful. Be on guard, old son, they are dangerous traps. The illusion is of short duration, do not abandon yourself to them.

Don't you think it would be best to put away those little old books I copied for you?

If, later, the books of Heine and d'Uhland fall into your hands again, you may reread them with other feelings and a more serene heart.

I like very much Erckmann-Chatrian, as you know. Do you know L'Ami Fritz*?*

To get back to Heine:

Take the portraits of Father and that of Mother, then take Brion's Les Adieux, read Heine with these three images in front of your eyes and you will understand what I am talking about. Old son, you know although I fear not in the least to preach or to lecture you, because I know only you are, in your soul, like me, this is why I talk seriously with you from time to time. In any case, experience what I have told you.

I hope you will be well before long and will write soon. How is Willem Valkis? My regards to him and all the family and all who know me, also to Van Iterson.

Just now we have a beautiful picture by Schreyer, a wagon with horses in an autumn landscape, with a setting sun. Also a beautiful Jacque, a melancholy landscape with sheep. How do you like that small Jacque, “Ploughing,” that has been in The Hague for some time? Very best wishes and speedy recovery. Always

Your loving brother, Vincent

1876

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 10 January 1876

Dear Theo,

I have not again written to you since we saw each other. Meanwhile something happened to me that was not entirely unforeseen.

When I saw Mr. Boussod again, I asked him His Excellence if he approved of my being employed in the house for another year, and told His Excellence that I hoped that he had nothing serious to reproach me with?

But, alas, it was the case, and His Excellence has forced me, as it were, to say that I would leave on 1st. April, after having thanked the gentlemen for all that I might have learned with them.

When the apple is ripe, a soft breeze will make it fall from the tree, and such was the case here. I have probably done things that in a certain sense have been very wrong, this is why I have never made a big thing to answer back.

Well, my boy, I am not at all clear what I should do next, but we shall try to maintain hope and courage.

Oblige me by showing this to Mr. Tersteeg, His Excellence may know what has happened, but I believe that it is better if you do not tell it to anyone else; and to act as if nothing has happened. Write to me soon and believe me

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, January 1876

Dear Theo,

In the first box going to The Hague you will find a few parcels; will you be so kind as to send them on?

First, there is one for yourself, which contains Felix Holt. When you have read it, please send it to Etten; and when they have finished it, please have them return it here, for it does not belong to me. It is a book that impressed me very much, and I am sure it will be the same with you. There is also a parcel for Mr. Tersteeg and one for his wife, and also one for Mauve and his wife. I wrote Mauve that someday he must ask you for that book on Michel; please show it to him when you have a chance. There is also a parcel for Father. Try to send it to Etten in time for his birthday; perhaps you might add Felix Holt, and you can read it after it has been to Etten - maybe that will be the best. In the little roll addressed to you are three etchings after Jules Dupré - one for Uncle Jan van Gogh with my kindest regards and one for Father. There is also a lithograph after Bodmer and an etching by Jacque for Father. Another lithograph, after Cabat, is for you.

Cabat resembles Ruysdael. There are two beautiful pictures of his at the Luxembourg: one, a pond with trees around it in autumn at sunset; the other, a road along a waterside and a few large oak trees on a grey autumn evening. The etching after Jules Dupré is beautiful. It is from an album of six which includes Dupré's portrait. He has such a simple and noble face, it reminds me somehow of Mauve; but he is older, and perhaps in reality they do not look at all alike.

You are right to take English lessons; you will not be sorry. I should like to send you a Longfellow and Andersen's Fairy Tales; I shall try to get them. If I send them, read especially Longfellow's Evangeline, Miles Standish, King Robert of Sicily, *etc.*

And now it is again time to say good-by, with a firm handshake. Regards to Roos, and to anybody who asks about me, and believe me always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Also give my compliments to friend Borchers.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, January 1876

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, write to me often, for I long to hear from you in these days. Write me at length, speak to me of your daily life, you see that I am doing the same. What you told me about Boks was very interesting, how he arranged his studio, and that you go there often - keep me well informed about those things.

We feel lonely now and then and long for friends and think we should be quite different and happier if we found a friend of whom we might say: “*He is the one*.” But you, too, will begin to learn that there is much self-deception behind this longing; if we yielded too much to it, it would lead us from the road.

There is a phrase that haunts me these days - it is today's text, “His children will seek to please the poor.”

And now here is some news: my friend Gladwell is moving. One of the employees of the printing office convinced him to come and lodge with him; for quite a while he did everything he could to persuade him.

I know that Gladwell made this decision without thinking about it, I regret his departure very much; it will be soon, probably towards the end of the month.

For several days we have had a mouse in our “cabin”, which is what we call our room. Every night, we put bread on the floor for it, and it knows already where to find it.

I have been reading the ads in the English newspapers, and I have already answered some of them. Let us hope for success.

Kind regards to Roos and others if they ask about me, and write soon. À Dieu. Tell me if Mr. Tersteeg mentions me to you; give him my kindest regards whenever I write to you. Always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 2 February 1876

Dear Theo,
Will you do me a great favour? You know that edition of Andersen's Stories of the Moon, translated by Dr. ten Kate, which costs fifteen cents. Could you send me a copy when you have an opportunity?

The box for The Hague in which I shall enclose the parcels I mentioned will not leave till tomorrow. The one for Father will not reach Etten in time, but send it as soon as you can.

Till now I have had no replies to the letters I have written in response to advertisements, nor have I heard from Uncle Vincent. I wrote to Mr. Obach, asking if he would give references if required, and he answered me with a very kind note. Well, boy, what can I do but continue on my way quietly, looking to Him whom we think of when we say, “Who will show us the right path?”

À Dieu, kind regards to our friends, always
Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 7 February 1876

Dear Theo,
Congratulations to you on Father's birthday. That was a beautiful text from you on the 8th February: “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

We ignore what is ahead for our father and for us, but we can leave that to Him whose name is “Our Father” and “I am that I am”.

Today, I received a reply from one of my letters; they asked if I am capable of teaching French, German and drawing, and also asked for my photograph. I answered today; as soon as I hear from them again, I will let you know.

Thanks for the little book by Andersen, I am glad to have it. It is to be read aloud to a Dutchman, a fellow employee whom I have seen much of lately.

Yesterday, I went to an Anglican church; I was very happy to assist again in an Anglican service, it is very simple and very beautiful. The sermon was on the theme of “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

Many thanks again for the book by Andersen, a handshake and compliments to Roos. I heard from home that Mr. Tersteeg has been at Etten. Ever yours, in haste,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 19 February 1876

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your last letter and also for the catalogue sent in the last box. Have I thanked you already for Andersen's tales? If not I do so now.

From home I have heard that this spring you will have to travel on business, you will not be sorry for that, I suppose; it is a good experience and you will see many beautiful things in your travels.

In the next box you will find the Longfellow. Yesterday evening Gladwell was with me, he comes every Friday and we read poetry together. I have not read “Hyperion” yet, but I have heard that it is very beautiful.

I have just read a very beautiful book by Eliot, three tales, called “Scenes from Clerical Life”; the last story in particular, “Janet's Repentance,” struck me very much. It is the life of a clergyman who lives chiefly among the inhabitants of the dirty streets of a town, his study looks out on the gardens with stumps of cabbage, etc., and on the red roofs and smoking chimneys of poor tenements. For his dinner he usually had nothing but underdone mutton and watery potatoes. He died at the age of thirty-four and during his long illness he was nursed by a woman who was a drunkard, but by his teaching, and leaning as it were on him, she had conquered her weakness and found rest for her soul. At his burial they read the chapter which says, “I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” And now it is again Saturday evening, for the days pass so quickly and the time for my departure will soon be here. No answer as yet from Scarborough. Kind greetings and a handshake, always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 15 March 1876

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter. Please thank Mauve and his wife for theirs also; I enjoyed it very much. I am longing to see the two pictures by Mauve that are destined for the Salon.

Perhaps Gladwell will come back to his old room; he is to have my place at the gallery.

Are you having gales at The Hague like the ones we are having here? Do you know that I will first go to Etten, save for something unforeseen? I think I will leave the 1st April, perhaps even the 31st March.

Our parents have written me that you also intend to come to Etten. When do you leave?

I hope to have the opportunity to send you the Longfellow before your departure; it is perhaps a good book for a journey.

My hour approaches: just three more weeks. Now and then I have to remind myself, “Be patient and meek.”

Aunt Cornelie has lent me a beautiful book: Kenelm Chillingly by Bulwer-Lytton. It is full of beauty inside. The subject? The son of a rich Englishman who does not find anywhere rest and peace in his life and he tried to find it among the lower classes. He will end up nevertheless by returning home, without regretting anything that he has done.

And now à Dieu, a pleasant journey (enjoy yourself and see many beautiful things) if you leave before my next letter. Always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 25 March 1876

Dear Theo,
At last I am sending Longfellow's poems; I am sure the book will become a friend to you.
Today I answered two advertisements again. I continue to do it, though I get hardly any answers. My time here is drawing to a close.

You will see many beautiful things on your travels. Though love of nature is not *everything*, it is still a precious possession; may we keep it always.

And now you will become a guest in “many an Inn” - that is pleasant, too, sometimes. You know, I once made a trip on foot to Brighton; I always remember it with pleasure. The inns in England are often so cosy. Longfellow describes it so well in Tales of a Wayside Inn.

Gladwell has got my place at the gallery and is there already to become familiar with the work before I leave. I have seen several pictures intended for the Salon, including two beautiful large Gabriels: “A Morning in the Meadows” (through the haze one sees a town in the distance) and one of what we should call a “watery sun.” There were also two large Xavier de Cocks. One represents an evening at the beginning of summer, with a meadow surrounded by poplars; in the distance, the farm and fields and a girl driving the cows home. In the foreground a pool, around which three cows are lying in the grass - one white, one black and one red; the sun has set and the trees stand out dark against the light yellowish sky.

I am writing in great haste, as you can see from the handwriting. A pleasant journey; always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, 28 March 1876

Dear Theo,
Just one word more, probably the last I shall write from Paris. I leave here on Friday night and shall be home Saturday morning at the same time as at Christmas.

Yesterday I saw six pictures by Michel, how I wish you could have seen them too! Sunken paths through sandy fields leading to a mill, or a man going home across the heath with grey skies above - so simple and beautiful. I think the “Men of Emmaus” saw nature in the same way as Michel and I always think of them when I see one of his pictures.

At the same time I saw a very large picture by Jules Dupré. There is black marshy soil as far as one can see, on the second plane is a river, and in the foreground, a pool with three horses. Both the river and the pool reflect a bank of white and grey clouds, behind which the sun has set. The sky is a soft blue, with some grey-red and purple at the horizon.

I saw these pictures at Durand Ruel's; more than twenty-five etchings after Millet, the same number after Michel and a great number after Dupré and Corot. All the other artists can be purchased there at 1 franc apiece; it was tempting. I could not resist the Millet and bought the last three that were to be had after “The Angelus”; of course, my brother will get one of them at the first opportunity.

Write again soon, kind regards to Roos, and Mr. and Mrs. Tersteeg and all who may ask after me. A handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, c. 4 April 1876

Dear Theo,

On the morning before I left Paris, I received a letter from a schoolmaster in Ramsgate. He proposed that I go there for a month (without salary). At the end of that time he will decide whether I am fit for the position. You can imagine how happy I am to have found something! I will have in any event board and lodging free.

Yesterday I went with Father to Brussels; we found Uncle Hein in a very sad state. On the train Father and I spoke much about pictures, including the Rembrandts at the Louvre and the portrait of “Burgomaster Six” and particularly about Michel.

Wouldn't there be a chance for Father to see that book about Michel? If the opportunity arises, don't forget it.

I am very happy to have the chance to see you before I leave, and Liesbeth too.

As you know, Ramsgate is a little town by the sea. I saw somewhere that there were 12,000 inhabitants, but I don't know any more about it.

And now till Saturday, a good journey to you. Always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Gladwell saw me off at the station last Friday night. On my birthday he came at half-past six in the morning and brought me a beautiful etching after Chauvel, an autumn landscape with a herd of sheep on a sandy road.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to His Parents

Ramsgate, 14-17 April 1876

Dear Father and Mother,
You have probably received my telegram, but you will be glad to hear some more particulars. On the train I wrote down a few things, and I am sending them to you, so that you will know all about my journey.

Friday.

In thought we will stay together today. Which do you think is better … the joy of meeting or the sorrow of parting? We have often parted already; this time there was more sorrow in it than there used to be, but also more courage because of the firmer hope, the stronger desire, for God's blessing. And didn't nature seem to share our feelings, everything looked so grey and dull a few hours ago.

Now I am looking across the vast expanse of meadows, and everything is very quiet; the sun is disappearing again behind the grey clouds, but sheds a golden light over the fields.

These first hours after our parting - which you are spending in church, and I at the station and on the train - how we are longing for each other and how we think of the others, of Theo and Anna and the other little sisters and the brother. Just now we passed Zevenbergen; I thought of the day you took me there, and I stood on the steps at Mr. Provily's, looking after your carriage on the wet road; and then of that evening when my father came to visit me for the first time. And of that first homecoming at Christmas!

Saturday and Sunday.

On the steamer I thought often of Anna - everything reminded me of our journey together.

The weather was clear, and the river was especially beautiful, and also the view, seen from the sea, of the dunes, dazzling white in the sun. The last I saw of Holland was a little grey church spire. I stayed on deck until sunset, but then it became too cold and rough.

At dawn the next morning on the train from Harwich to London it was beautiful to see the black fields and green meadows with sheep and lambs and an occasional thornbush and a few large oak trees with dark twigs and grey moss-covered trunks; the shimmering blue sky with a few stars still, and a bank of grey clouds at the horizon. Before sunrise I had already heard the lark. When we were near the last station before London, the sun rose. The bank of grey clouds had disappeared and there was the sun, as simple and grand as ever I saw it, a real Easter sun. The grass sparkled with dew and night frost. But I still prefer that grey hour when we parted.

Saturday afternoon I stayed on deck till the sun had set. The water was fairly dark blue with rather high white-crested waves as far as one could see. The coast had already disappeared from sight. The sky was one vast light blue, without a single little cloud. And the sunset cast a streak of glittering light on the water. It was indeed a grand and majestic sight, but still the simpler, quieter things touch one so much more deeply.

The train for Ramsgate left two hours after I arrived in London. That is still about four and a half hours by train. It is a beautiful route; for instance, we passed one part that was quite hilly. At the base the hills are covered with scanty grass, and at the top, with oak woods. It reminded me of our dunes. Between the hills was a village with a grey church overgrown with ivy like most of the houses. The orchards were in full bloom and the sky was a light blue with grey and white clouds.

We also passed Canterbury, a city with many medieval buildings, especially a beautiful cathedral, surrounded by old elm trees. I have often seen pictures of it.

You can imagine, I was looking out the window for Ramsgate a long time before we got there.

At one o'clock I arrived at Mr. Stokes's; he was not home but will be back tonight. During his absence his place was taken by his son (twenty-three years old, I think), a teacher in London. I saw Mrs. Stokes at dinner. There are twenty-four boys from ten to fourteen years. (It is a pleasant sight to see them at their dinner.) So the school is not large. The window looks out on the sea. After dinner we took a walk out on the shore; it was very beautiful. The houses on the shore are mostly built of yellow stone in simple Gothic style, and have gardens full of cedars and other dark evergreens. There is a harbour full of ships, shut in between stone jetties on which one can walk. And then there is the unspoiled sea, and that is very beautiful. Yesterday everything was grey. In the evening we went with the boys to church. On the wall of the church was written: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

The boys go to bed at eight o'clock, and they rise at six.

There is another assistant teacher, seventeen years old. He, four boys and myself sleep in another house near by, where I have a little room that is waiting for some prints on the wall.

And now enough for today. What happy days we spent together! Thanks, thanks for everything. Love to all and a handshake from

Your loving, Vincent

Thanks for your letters, they arrived just now. I shall write soon, when I have been here a few days and have seen Mr. Stokes.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 17 April 1876

Dear Theo,
I arrived here safely yesterday, at about one in the afternoon. The first thing that struck me was that the windows of this not so very big school look out onto the sea. It is a boarding school, and there are twenty-four boys from ten to fourteen years old. Mr. Stokes is on a trip for a few days, and so I haven't seen him yet. They expect him this evening. There is another assistant teacher seventeen years old.

Last night and this morning, we all went for a walk along the seashore. Enclosed is a spray of seaweed.

On the waterfront, most of the houses are built of yellow brick in the style of those in Nassaulaan in The Hague, but they are higher and have gardens full of cedars and evergreen trees of a somber green.

Dikes of stone, upon which you can walk, protect the harbour, where all sorts of ships are tied up. Yesterday everything was grey.

By and by I shall go and unpack my trunks, which have just been delivered, and I am going to hang some prints in my room.

The holidays are not yet over, so I have not had to give any lessons so far. I am anxious to see Mr. Stokes.

I must go for a walk with the boys.

Adieu, always
Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 21 April 1876

Dear Theo,

Enclosed you will find a postal order of ten shillings and an advertisement for Anna.

Be so kind as to have it put in any paper you think best. If it is not enough, I shall send you the rest, and if it is too much, buy some photographs with it and send them to Etten on May 21[their parent's silver wedding], but at all events tell me how much you paid for the advertisement and where it was placed, in case I should need to do it again.

Today, Mr. Stokes has returned. He is man of medium height; he is completely bald, and wears whiskers. They say that the boys respect him, but they love him just the same; ten hours after he arrived, they were playing marbles with him.

We often go to the beach; this morning I helped the boys make a sandcastle, like we used to make in the garden at Zundert.

I wish you could catch a look out of the windows of the school. The residence looks out on a square (all the houses in this square look the same, it's often the case here), in the middle of which is a large lawn enclosed by an iron fence and lined with lilacs. This is where the boys play at midday. The house where I have my room is in the same square.

When I was in Rotterdam and heard that I had a long wait, I was on the point of coming to The Hague; I even went to the station. Yet I did not go. Later on I hope to see everything and everybody there with a calmer eye.

I shall never forget leaving those at home on Good Friday. In the morning we went to church at the Hoeve and received communion; Father's text was, “Arise, let us go hence.”

And in the afternoon we did arise, and from the carriage window I saw Father and our little brother standing on the road, looking after the train.

And Sunday afternoon I was at the church in Ramsgate, and there I was struck by the words on the wall which you will find in Anna's letter (which I enclose).

Compliments to Roos and to everybody who may ask after me. A firm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 28 April 1876

Dear Theo,

Many happy returns, my best wishes for this day, may our mutual love increase with the years.

I am so glad that we have so many things in common, not only memories of childhood but also that you are working in the same business in which I was till now and know so many people and places which I know also, and that you have so much love for nature and art.

Mr. Stokes has told me that he intends to move after the holidays, of course with the whole school, to a little village on the Thames about three hours from London. There he will organize his school somewhat differently and perhaps enlarge it.

Now I am going to tell you about a walk we took yesterday. It was to an inlet of the sea, and the road thither led through fields of young corn and along hedges of hawthorn, *etc.*

Arriving there, we saw to our left a high steep ridge of sand and stone as tall as a two-storey house. On the top of it were old, gnarled hawthorn bushes, whose black and grey moss-grown stems and branches were all bent to one side by the wind; there were also a few elder bushes.

The ground on which we walked was covered all over with big grey stones, chalk and shells.

To the right lay the sea, as calm as a pond and reflecting the light of the transparent grey sky where the sun was setting.

The tide was out and the water very low.

Thanks for your letter of yesterday, I am very glad that Willem Valkis is also an employee of the house. Give him my best regards. I wish I could walk once more with you through my woods, to Scheveningen.

Have a pleasant day today and give my love to all who may ask about me and believe me,

Your loving brother,

Vincent

Once more my best wishes, lad, I hope you will begin a happy and prosperous year. These are important years that we are living through now and much depends on them. May everything come out all right.

A hearty handshake. À Dieu.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 1 May 1876

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and for placing the advertisement. Did you find the postal order in the letter?

Yesterday afternoon, the wind was so strong that Mr. Stokes wouldn't let the boys go out. I asked his permission, for six of the biggest and myself, to go for a short walk. We went down to the beach, the sea was very rough, and it was not very easy to walk against the wind. We saw the lifeboat towed by a tug, returning from a mission to a ship that had run aground on a sandbank; but it didn't bring it off.

I know that picture by Willems very well; the drawing by Mauve which you write about must be very beautiful. Do you ever go to his studio?

You ask me what I teach the boys. Mainly French basics; only one student is starting the study of German. For the rest, a little of everything, mainly sums, examinations, their dictation, *etc.* So for the present, there is nothing too complicated in all this, but it is not easy to see that what they are learning is what we are teaching them.

And now today is your birthday; in thought I give you a firm handshake and send you my very best wishes once more.

Obviously, I have hours of supervision after school, so my time is pretty well taken up, perhaps it will get more in the future. Last Saturday evening, I gave a bath to a half dozen of these young gentlemen, not because I was obliged to, but because that allowed us to be ready on time. I also try to make them read. I have some books that are well suited for boys, The Wide, Wide World , *etc.*

And now goodbye. Thanks for your letter, for placing the advertisement and for sending the paper. Always

Your loving brother, Vincent

One of these days you will receive some English hymnbooks; I shall mark a few poems in them. There are so many beautiful ones, and especially when heard often, one grows so fond of them.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 6-8 May 1876

Dear Theo,

By the same mail you will receive the two little books I promised you. I marked a few things in them, but you will find many other beautiful ones besides. But as I wrote to you already, one grows so fond of them, especially when one is in the country itself. It is again Saturday evening, and the weather is lovely; the sea is calm, it is low tide, the sky is a subtle milky blue, on the horizon a hint of fog. All morning the weather was so nice, it was so clear there where I can now see the fog.

The town has something very peculiar about it; everywhere you can see the influence of the sea - but you know that characteristic, too, for one also finds it at The Hague and Scheveningen.

Do you go to see Uncle Cor now and then? Sometimes I have such a longing to see him, I wrote to him yesterday. Tell Mr. Tersteeg something about the school here. Honestly, I have had some happy hours here, *yet I don't have plain and complete confidence in this happiness, in this peace.* The one may be the result of the other. Man rarely declares that he is satisfied; as soon as he finds that that it goes too well, the sooner he thinks that it will not go well enough. But this is in parenthesis; we must not talk about it, but continue quietly on our way.

Spend a pleasant Sunday morning. Give my love to all the Roos family, also to Mr. and Mrs. Tersteeg and Betsy and a firm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 12 May 1876

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter; I am also fond of “Tell me the old, old story.” I heard it sung for the first time one evening in Paris, in a little church where I often went. Number 12 is also very beautiful. I am sorry indeed that I did not hear Moody and Sankey when they were in London.

There is such a longing for religion among the people in the large cities. Many a worker in a factory or shop has had a strange, beautiful and pious youth. But city life sometimes removes “*the early dew of morning.*” Even so, the longing for “*the old, old story*” remains. What is at the bottom of the heart stays at the bottom of the heart. In one of his [sic] books Elliot [George Eliot] describes the life of factory workers, etc., who have formed a little community and hold religious services in a chapel in Lantern Yard, and he says of it, “It is the kingdom of God on earth, no more and no less.”

It is touching to see the thousands of people listening to the evangelists.

Your plan of giving Father and Mother “The Farewell” by Sadée is good, so that is settled. Willemien will be there on May 21. From your letter I see you also intend to go. By all means do so, boy, if it is possible. There is sometimes a special blessing in such an act. What a surprise it would be for them! Mother's last letter had a melancholy tone; in a word or two she touched upon the necessity of our being so far from home, and her eyes too are giving her trouble. Come, boy, brighten them once more by your presence on that day.

This afternoon Mr. Reid sent me a catalogue of the exhibition in London. A firm handshake and congratulations on the birthdays of Lies and Cor and also on May 21. Kind regards to Roos, in haste,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 31 May 1876

Dear Theo,
Bravo on going to Etten May 21, so happily four of the six children were at home. Father wrote to me at length how everything went on the day. Thanks also for your last letter.

Did I write to you about the storm I watched recently? The sea was yellowish, especially close to the shore. On the horizon a streak of light, and above it immensely large dark grey clouds, from which one could see the rain coming down in slanting streaks. The wind blew the dust from the little white path among the rocks into the sea and shook the hawthorn bushes in bloom and the wallflowers that grow on the rocks. To the right, fields of young green corn, and in the distance the town, which, with its towers, mills, slate roofs, Gothic-style houses and the harbor below, between two jetties sticking out into the sea, looked like the towns Albrecht Dürer used to etch.

I watched the sea last Sunday night as well. Everything was dark grey, but on the horizon the day was beginning to break. It was still very early and yet a skylark was already singing. And the nightingales in the gardens by the sea. In the distance, the light from the lighthouse, the guard ship, *etc.*

That same night I looked out of the window of my room at the roofs of the houses you can see from there, and at the tops of the elms, dark against the night sky. Above the roofs, a single star, but a beautiful, big, friendly one. And I thought of us all and I thought of my own years gone by and of our home, and these words and this sentiment sprang to my mind, `Keep me from being a son who brings shame, give me Thy blessing, not because I deserve it, but for my Mother's sake. Thou art Love, cover all things. Without Thy constant blessing we succeed in nothing.'

Enclosed is a little drawing of the view from the school window through which the boys follow their parents with their eyes as they go back to the station after a visit. Many a one will never forget the view from that window.

You really ought to have seen it this week, when we had days of rain, especially at dusk when the lamps are lit and their light is reflected in the wet streets. On such days Mr. Stokes can sometimes be in a bad temper, and if the boys make more of a noise than he likes they occasionally have to go without their bread and tea in the evening. You ought to see them looking out of the window then, there is something so melancholy about it. They have so little apart from their meals to look forward to and to see them through from one day to the next.

I wish you could also see them going down the dark stairs and through the narrow passage to where they have their dinner. The sun does shine pleasantly in there. Another peculiar place is a room with a rotten floor where there are six basins in which they wash, and a dim light is all that reaches the washstand through the broken panes of the window It is certainly quite a melancholy sight. I should like to spend, or to have spent, a winter with them, just to see what it is like.

The youngsters have made an oil stain on your little drawing, please forgive them.

Enclosed, a few lines for Uncle Jan. And now, good night. Should anyone ask after me, my greetings to them. Do you still visit Borchers from time to time? If you see him, remember me to him as well as to Willem Valkis and everybody at the Rooses'. A handshake in my thoughts from

Your loving Vincent

Letter from Van Gogh Family to Theo van Gogh

Zundert, 1876

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

12 January 1876

Vincent's problems keep giving us great concern. On the fourth of this month he wrote that he had had a very unpleasant encounter with M. Boussod at the moment of the New Year's wishes. He had been especially blamed for going home at the end of the year. He certainly should not have done it, but he appears to have stubbornly stuck to his point. After this encounter there is no other way open to him, he feels, than to say that he will leave the first of April.

Lies to Theo

27 February 1876

How nice for you to be allowed to make the trade journey for the spring season. I am sure that will be a big change for you.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

8 March 1876

It is just as I wrote to you, it is certain that Willemien is not going to stay in England.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

15 March 1876

Anna suggests that she will come home with Willemien in the beginning of May and stay with us until August. Up to that time she is willing to remain Willemien's governess.

[Mother] And now, dear Theo, live happily. Look for the good things in life in all respects. Avoid what is not good. Control yourself in the things which you don't need but were recommended to you in well-meant advice.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

31 March 1876

I find it a marvellous thing for you and hope that it will be successful. You are going to visit some interesting towns.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

1 July 1876

If he really has such a love of the church or the Evangelization and is really serious about it, I would think that he could start the study for it in this country, and we might try to find the necessary resources. But at least eight years would be needed. On the other hand, it might be better if he tried to find over there or in this country - perhaps better in this country - some position as bookkeeper or as assistant in an office or shop.

If he wants to teach, then he should start the study to be an assistant schoolmaster and try to improve himself later by his own exercise and study of languages. Alas, we begin to become more and more worried about him. Of course, the lack of finances is also a problem; he doesn't want us to send him anything, but this morning I enclosed twenty-five guilders in my letter to him.

[Vincent's address is] c/o W. P. Stokes Esq., Linkfield House, Isleworth (near London).

Lies to Theo

18 August 1876

How much worry that boy gives Father and Mother. Looking at them one could not fail to notice it. It is a pity he doesn't have a little more energy. He becomes dull with piety, I believe.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

8 September 1876

Just now a letter from Vincent. We have not yet been able to read it completely due to the wriggly handwriting. But in any case it is not a letter that gives us pleasure, alas! If only he learned to remain simple as a child, and would not always go on filling his letter with Bible texts in such an exaggerated and overwrought manner. It makes us worry more and more, and I fear that he becomes altogether unfit for practical life; it is bitterly disappointing. How are his letters to you? If he wants to become an Evangelist, he should be ready to start the *preparation* and necessary *studies*; I would then have more confidence.

Anna to Theo

12 October 1876

[On Theo's illness.]

[I have been very worried, but] Father had written that the crisis is over.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

19 October 1876

Let us be grateful that so far you are getting somewhat better and let us thank God who has spared your life.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Ramsgate, 17 June 1876

Dear Theo,
On Monday last, I travelled from Ramsgate to London. That is quite a stroll, the moment that I started on my way, it became very hot, and the same heat waited for me on my arrival at Canterbury. That evening, I pushed on a little bit too long; finally I halted in a place where there were many beech trees and some elms at the edge of a pond; there I rested for a while. The following morning at half past three, when the birds started singing to salute the first light of dawn, I started off again. Ah! That was a good walk!

At midday I had made Chatham, where one can see in the distance, in the middle of partial flooding of low-lying meadows, the Thames where the boats go; I thought the weather was always grey in these parts.

It was there that I met a cart, which took me a few miles further, but then the driver went into an inn, and as I supposed I would have to wait a long time, I continued on my way. I arrived at the fall of night in the familiar suburbs of London and I wound my way through the town by long, long `roads'. I stayed two days in London, I walked many times from one place to another in the city to make certain visits, particularly to a pastor to whom I had already written. I have enclosed a copy of this letter, I sent it to you to let you know that I started to write with the sentiment of “Father, I am not worthy” and “Father, have pity on me”.

If I find work it will tend towards a position between clergyman and missionary in the suburbs of London, mainly to the working class population.

Don't breathe a word to anyone about this new idea, Theo. My salary at Mr. Stokes's is probably very small, just enough for room and board, then a few hours of freedom to give particular lessons; if there is no free time to spare, I earn all in all eight pounds per year.

I continue with my story. I stayed one night with Mr. Reid, the following night with Mr. Gladwell, where they showed great gentleness toward me. Mr. Gladwell kissed me goodnight that evening and it did me good; may it be given to me in the future to prove my friendship for his son now and then. I wanted to go on to Welwyn that very evening, but they kept me back literally by force because of the pouring rain. However, when it began to let up a little about four o'clock in the morning, I set off for Welwyn.

First a long walk from one end of the city to the other, about ten miles (twenty minutes walking each mile). I arrived at five o'clock in the afternoon at our sister's house, I was happy to see her. She looks well, and her room has Good Friday, Christ in the Garden of Olives, Mater Dolorosa, *etc.* not framed, but surrounded by ivy, surely very pleasing.

My boy, you will think on reading my letter to the pastor: ”He is not so bad, he's good!” But I am sure he is. Whatever he may be, think of him once in a while. A firm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

[Enclosed letter.]

Reverend Sir,

A clergyman's son who, because he has to work for his living, has neither the time nor the money to keep up studies at King's College, and is in any case already a few years older than is usual for those who go there and has not yet even started the preliminary studies in Latin and Greek, would, all this notwithstanding, be very glad to find a position connected with the church, albeit the position of a university-educated clergyman is beyond his reach.

My father is a clergyman in a village in Holland. I went to school when I was 11, staying on until I was 16. I then had to choose a profession and did not know which to choose. Through the kind offices of one of my uncles, a partner in the firm of Goupil & Cie, art dealers and publishers of engravings, I obtained a position in his business in The Hague. I was employed in this business for 3 years. From there I went to London to learn English and, after 2 years, moved on to Paris. Various circumstances have, however, compelled me to leave Messrs. G. & Cie., and for the past two months I have been teaching at Mr. Stokes's school in Ramsgate. But since my aim is a position in connection with the church, I must look elsewhere.

Although I have not been trained for the church, perhaps my past experience of travels, of living in different countries, of associations with various people, poor and rich, religious and irreligious, of work of various kinds, days of manual labour followed by days of office work, &c., perhaps also my ability to speak various languages, may in part make up for my not having been to a university.

But the reason I would much sooner give for commending myself to you is my innate love of the church and everything to do with the church, which may lie dormant from time to time but always reawakens; and, if I may say so, although with a sense of great inadequacy and imperfection: the Love of God and of man.

And also, when I think of my past life and of my father's house in the village in Holland, a sense of: `Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son: make me as one of thy hired servants. Be merciful to me a sinner.'

When I lived in London I often attended your church and have not forgotten you. Now I would ask for your recommendation as I look for a position, and also that you keep your fatherly eye on me should I find such a position. I have been left a good deal to myself, and I believe your fatherly eye will do me good, now that:

The early dew of morning
has passed away at noon.

Thanking you in anticipation for what you may feel able to do for me…

Letter from Anna van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Welwyn, 17 June 1876

[Also enclosed in Letter 69]
Dear Theo,
You can well imagine how delightful it was meeting Vincent again. I am so glad he is meeting all of them here, too, for no one can imagine what a happy life I lead here, surrounded by so much love. It will be extremely hard to say goodbye to them all. Perhaps I shall stay here until Christmas.

Thanks for your last letter; the situation you write about is not what I am looking for. I shall probably stay in England for a while now. And now goodbye; I do hope to see you this summer, how lovely that vacation time is drawing so near.

Vincent is busy showing engravings to the children.

With much love,
Yours, Anna

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 5 July 1876

Dear Theo,

The time may come when I shall look back with a certain melancholy on the “fleshpots of Egypt,” connected with other situations - that is, the bigger salaries and the higher worldly esteem - this I foresee.

There is indeed “plenty of bread” in the houses that I shall enter if I continue along the road which I have taken, but there is not plenty of money. And yet I see a light in the distance so clearly; if that light disappears now and then, it is generally my own fault.

It is very doubtful whether I shall make great progress in this profession, whether the six years spent in the house of Messrs. Goupil and Co., - during which time I ought to have prepared myself for *this* profession - will not always remain an insuperable obstacle. However, I think I cannot now draw back in any way, even if a part of me should wish to (*later on - at present this is not the case*).

Lately it has seemed to me that there are no professions in the world other than those of schoolmaster and clergyman, with all that lies between these two - such as missionary, especially a London missionary, *etc.* I think it must be a peculiar profession to be a London missionary; one has to go around among the labourers and the poor to preach the Bible, and as soon as one has some experience, talk with them, find foreigners who are looking for work or other persons who are in difficulties and try and help them, etc., *etc.* Last Sunday, I went to London two or three times to find out if there was a chance of becoming one of them, as I speak a number of languages and have mixed, especially in Paris and London, with people of the lower classes and foreigners. Being a foreigner myself, I thought I might be fit for it and might become increasingly so. However, one must be at least twenty-four years old, and at all events I shall have to wait another year.

Mr. Stokes says that he definitely cannot give me any salary because he can get teachers enough for just board and lodging, and that is true. But will it be possible for me to continue this way? I am afraid not; it will be decided soon enough.

But, my boy, however this may be, one thing I can repeat: these few months have bound me so strongly to the sphere that extends from schoolmaster to clergyman, as much by the pleasures connected with those professions as by the thorns which have pricked me, that I cannot draw back any more. So I have to go on!

I can assure you that some very peculiar difficulties will present themselves right away, and others are looming in the distance; one is in quite a different world from that of Messrs. Goupil and Co.

When will I get those small engravings, “Christus Consolator” and “Remunerator,” which you promised me? Write to me as soon as you can find a moment, but send your letter to Father, as my address will probably change very soon, and he will know it first.

Last week, I was at Hampton Court to see the beautiful gardens and long avenues of horse chestnuts and lime trees, in the tops of which a multitude of crows and rooks have built their nests, and also to see the palace and the paintings. Among other things there are many portraits by Holbein which are very beautiful; two splendid Rembrandts (the portrait of his wife, and of a rabbi); beautiful Italian portraits by Bellini, Titian; a picture by Leonardo da Vinci; cartoons by Mantegna; a beautiful picture by S. Ruysdael; a still life of fruit by Cuyp, *etc.* I wish you had been there with me; it was a pleasure to see pictures again.

And involuntarily I thought of the persons who had lived there at Hampton Court, of Charles I and his wife (she is the one who said: “Thank you, Lord, for making me a Queen, but an unhappy Queen”) at whose tomb Bossuet spoke from the fullness of his heart. Do you have Bossuet's Oraisons Funèbres? In it you will find that speech (there is a very cheap edition, I think for 50 centimes); and I thought also of Lord and Lady Russell, who must have been there very often, too (Guizot described their lives in L'amour dans le mariage - you must read that when you can lay your hands on it).

Enclosed, a feather from one of the rooks there.

Write as soon as you can, I long to hear from you, believe me with a handshake,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 8 July 1876

C/o Jones Esq., Holme Court

Dear Theo,

Your letter and the prints were a delightful surprise; they came this morning while I was busy weeding the potatoes in the garden. Many thanks; both the engravings, “Christus Consolator” and “Remunerator,” are hanging over the desk in my little room. God is righteous, and He will lead all who err onto the right path; you were thinking of that when you wrote, “May this happen, I am erring in many ways, but I don't despair. Do not be unhappy about your “luxurious” life, as you call it; go quietly on your way. You are more simple-hearted than I am, and probably you will reach your goal quicker and to a greater extent.

Don't delude yourself about the liberty I have; I am bound in different ways, some even humiliating, and these will become still worse in time; but the words engraved above the image of Christus Consolator, “He has come to proclaim liberty to the captives” are true to this day.

Now I must ask you something. While in The Hague I had lessons from a Bible teacher, Hille, who then lived in the Bagijnestraat. He took great pains over me. Though I didn't show it, what he told me made an impression on me, and I should like to send him a word and, if possible, do him some small favour. Go and visit him if you have a moment and if you can find his address, and tell him that I have become a schoolmaster and am looking out for some other situation in connection with the church. He is a very simple man who, I think, has had many struggles in life; involuntarily I sometimes thought when looking at him: the end of that man will be peace.

And give him the enclosed little drawing from me.

How I should like to have a glimpse of Mauve's place; I can see distinctly what you described seeing that evening you were there.

Write again soon, best wishes, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Give my kind regards to Mr. Tersteeg and his wife and Betsy, and the Roos family, and to other friends if you see them. But do not speak about me. As you see, I landed in that other school after all; enclosed you will find two prospectuses. If you can recommend the school to anybody who wants to send his boy to England, please do.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 2 August 1876

My dear Theo,

I heard from Father that you intended to come home one day while Anna and Elizabeth were there; tell me if you did.

Yesterday Mr. Jones and his family came home. I had decorated the boys' dining room with a “Welcome Home” on the wall of holly and ivy, and large bouquets on the table. There is a lot of holly in the garden, and they have cut away all the branches from a few old trees; these are now full of young shoots, quite white or yellowish with an occasional pink leaf, and that is very beautiful. I gathered a large bunch of it to put on the table.

Mr. Jones asked me if I could tell him the price of fifty pounds of butter in Holland. If it is not too expensive, he intends to have it sent over from Holland regularly. Please ask Mrs. Roos how much it is, and write to me as soon as possible.

I suppose the boys will arrive soon now.

Have you ever read the story of Elijah and of Elisha carefully? I re-read them over the last few days and I am sending you an enclosure on what I have written on the subject. What a moving story it is! I similarly re-read in the Acts the story of Paul, when he found himself at the edge of the sea and everyone fell on his neck and kissed him. I was touched by this sentence of Paul: “God comforts the simple people.”

It is God who made man and it is He who may enrichen their lives with moments and times of life sublime, also with marvellous states of the soul.

The sea was made, the oak was made, but man, made in the image of his Father, is fairer than the sea.

Nevertheless, the sea is beautiful; Mr. Stokes' home is infested with bugs, but the spectacle of the sea, contemplated from the window, is unforgettable.

The heart of a carnal man “sometimes succumbs to a violent desire” is the view of those who preach and work for Him, who has given them some sort of a baptism of the Holy Spirit and of fire. Those, you see, their eyes weep again in sadness when they think of their youth and “to the good of those He quenched.” Their sublime peace they have now is nevertheless worth more that their deceitful tranquillity of before, because tranquillity and real peace begin only from the moment where “there is nothing left in which to rest” and that “one no longer loves anything on earth, except God.” They lament: “Woe is me!” and they beg: “Who will save me from this mortal body?”; it is perhaps the best age of their lives, and very glad are those that attain these high summits!

These are the cries that I have already heard twice. The first time, in Paris, from the pastor Bercier, fallen victim of an anguish caused by a huge physical pain which menaced him, cried: “Who will deliver me from this body!” in a tone which, I well know, made all those present in the church shudder. The second time, it was Father who pronounced these words (in his sermon, in April, when I was home), although he spoke in a very calm and more penetrating voice than usual, added (his face looked like that of an angel): The blissful from above say: what you are now, we once were, and what we are now, you will be one day.” Between father and those above, there is again a space of life, and there is even space between father and us. But Those who are above can make us brothers of father, they can also make us increasingly intimate one to the other. I wish that it is so, my boy, because you know how much I love you!

Yesterday I took a lovely walk along the Thames; on the other side there were beautiful country places and gardens. It was a sky such as Ruysdael or Constable would have painted.

A firm handshake, kind regards to Roos, and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 16-17 August 1876

[Hurriedly written in pencil]
Dear Theo,
Just now Van Iterson came to surprise me. I am pleased that he has come but it is as if he is a man from another world, so much lies between the time when we were together in the business and now.

I am sending you the “wide, wide world” and another little book; give one of them to Carolien.

How I wish that you could see what it is like here some time.

On Saturday morning at 4 o'clock I hope to walk to London to visit Gladwell and others. I wish that you could walk with me. A hearty handshake in my thoughts.

À Dieu.

Ever your loving brother, Vincent

[This is a note that Vincent must have hastily written when Teunus van Iterson, who worked in the London branch of Goupil's, dropped in unexpectedly to see him. In all probability Vincent seized the opportunity for van Iterson to take the note and the two books back to London with him, and from there send them to Theo using the company's mail. The date of this note is questionable: in letter 75 of 5th October 1876, Vincent says “Saturday eight days ago I went to London…left here early at 4 o'clock…” which would have been Saturday 23rd September, suggesting that this letter may have been written during the week before then.]

[This is a transcription of the Dutch text.]

Waarde Theo
Daarjuist komst v Iterson mij verassen
ik vind het prettig dat hij komt maar
`t is of hij een mensch uit de andere
wereld is zou veel ligt er tusschen
den tijd dat wij samen in de zaak
waren en nu.
Hierbij de “wijde wijde wereld” en
een ander boekje geef ook een daarvan

aan Carolien.
Wat zou ik graag willen gij het
ook eens zien kondt hier.
Zaturtag morgen 4 uur hoop ik
naar Londen te wandelen om
Gladwell en anderen op te
zoeken. Ik wou gij mede kondt wandelen.
Een hartelijken handdruk in gedachten.
à Dieu, geloof mij,
Uw zoo liefh broer
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 18 August 1876

My dear Theo,
Yesterday, I went to see Gladwell, who is home for a few days. A terrible blow has struck them, his young sister, so full of life, with dark eyes and hair, had fallen from a horse at Blackheath; they found her unconscious and she died five hours later, without regaining consciousness. She was seventeen years old.

As soon as I heard the news, I went to see them, knowing that Gladwell was home. I left at eleven o'clock; and had a long walk to Lewisham. I crossed London from one end to the other and didn't arrive at my destination until almost five o'clock.

They had all just come back from the funeral; the whole household was in mourning.

I was happy to have come, but confused, truly upset by the spectacle of a pain so great and so venerable. “Blessed are they that mourn, blessed are they that sorrow, but always rejoice, blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are those that find love on their road, who are bound together by God, for to them all things will work together for their good.”

I chatted for a long time, until evening, with Harry, about everything, the kingdom of God, the Bible; we chatted further, we walked up and down the station platform. Never will we forget the moments before we said goodbye.

He and I, we know each other intimately; his work is mine, I know as well as he the people that he knows down here, their lives are as mine. From him, I have been given an urge to dive into the history of this family; I love these people, more now that I know their history in detail, because now I can sympathize with them on their existence and style of life.

So then, we walked up and down the platform of the station, an ordinary world, but we were animated by thoughts that were not ordinary. Such moments do not last long, and soon we had to part.

From the train the view of London was beautiful, squatting in its gloom, with Saint Paul's and the other churches in the distance. I went by train to Richmond, and by foot to Isleworth, along the Thames. A fine walk. To the left, there are parks with their poplars, their oaks and gigantic elms; to the right, the river which reflects their images. The evening is fine, somewhat solemn. I got back home at quarter past ten.

Thanks for your last letter. You had not yet written that Mrs. V. was dead; how often I accompanied her home in the evening. How I should have liked to walk with you all to the Hoeve!

I often teach the boys Bible history, and last Sunday morning, I read the Bible with them. Every morning and evening we read the Bible and sing hymns and pray. And that is a good thing. We also go to Ramsgate. While these twenty-one boys of the London streets and markets pray *Our Father, who art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread*, I imagine the cry of a young crow which the Lord hears, and it did me good to pray with them and to bow my head lower than they probably did at the words, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

I am still full of what happened yesterday. I wanted to console the father, but I felt embarrassed in front of him, although I was able to speak to the son. The atmosphere of that house was truly holy.

Have you ever read A Life for a Life, by the author of John Halifax? I am sure you would like that. How is your English coming? It was delightful to take a long walk once more; here at school they walk very little. When I think of my life full of struggle in Paris last year and compare it with this, where I sometimes do not get out-of-doors the whole day - at least not farther than the garden - I sometimes wonder; When shall I come back to that other world? If I go back to it, it will probably be doing other work than last year. But I think I like teaching Bible history to the boys better than walking; one feels more or less safe in doing the former. And now kind regards to Roos and to anybody who may ask after me. A handshake in thought and best wishes from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Enclosed is a letter for Mauve which you may read. I think it is right not to forget one's former acquaintances, therefore I occasionally write to some of them, also to Soek in Paris and others.

I write between school hours and rather in a hurry as you can see; if you can persuade somebody to read Eliot's Scenes from Clerical Life and Felix Holt, you will be doing a good deed. The former is so splendid!

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 26 August 1876

Dear Theo,

Enclosed you will find a note for Mr. Tersteeg; the last time I wrote to him I was still in Paris and it is time he had another letter. We have not lost track of each other since I left The Hague.

The morning is beautiful, the sunlight falls across the enormous acacias in the courtyard, it lights up the roofs and windows visible beyond the garden. There are already gossamer threads in the garden, it makes the morning fresh and the boys run left and right to warm themselves up.

I intend to recount to them this evening, in the dormitory, the story of John and Theogenes. I often tell them stories in the evening, for instance, the Conscript, by Conscience, or Madame Thérèse by Erckmann-Chatrian, and New Years Eve by Jean Paul - which I am sending you at the same time - and Andersen's Fairy Tales, such as The Story of a Mother, the Red Shoes, The Little Matchseller; King Robert of Sicily by Longfellow, *etc*. I sometimes tell them episodes from Dutch history.

Every day we study the Bible; this gives us the best feelings of joy.

No day passes without praying to God and without talking about Him. For the moment, my talks about Him leave much to be desired, but it will get better with His help and blessing.

Did I ever tell you about that picture by Boughton, “The Pilgrim's Progress”? It is towards evening. A sandy path leads over the hills to a mountain on which one can see the Holy City, lit by the sun setting red behind the grey evening clouds. On the path, a pilgrim on his way to the city. He is already tired and asks a woman in black, who is standing on the path and whose name is 'Sorrowful yet always rejoicing':

Does the road go uphill then all the way?

'Yes to the very end.'

And will the journey take all day long?

'From morn till night, my friend.'

The landscape through which the path runs is very beautiful, brown heathland with birches and pine trees here and there and patches of yellow sand, and in the distance the mountains against the sun. Truly, it is not a picture but an inspiration.

I am writing to you between lessons. Today I took a few moments off to go for a walk between the hedgerows with 'John and Theogenes' to study it. How I wish you could see the playground and the garden beyond, now, in the twilight. The gas is flickering in the school and one can hear the companionable sound of the boys at their lessons. Now and then one of them starts to hum a snatch of some hymn or other, and then there is something of the "old faith" in me. I am still far from being what I want to be, but with God's help I shall succeed. I want - to be bound to Christ with unbreakable bonds and to feel these bonds. To be sorrowful yet always rejoicing. To live in and for Christ, to be one of the poor of His Kingdom, steeped in the leaven, filled with His spirit, impelled by His Love, reposing in the Father with the repose of which I wrote to you in my last letter. To become one who finds repose in Him alone, who desires nothing but Him on earth, and who abides in the Love of God and Christ, in whom we are fervently bound to one another.

Thanks for your postcard. Mr. Jones has not yet decided what he will do. My compliments to all who may ask after me, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

One word more. I have just been telling the story of John and Theogenes, first in the dormitory, then in the upper room where there are four more; I told it in the dark, and they had gradually all fallen asleep before I had finished speaking. No wonder, for they have raced about a great deal today on the playground, and then, you see, I do not speak without difficulty, how it sounds to English ears, I do not know, but "practice makes perfect." I think the Lord has taken me as I am, with all my faults, though I am still hoping for more profound acceptance.

Tomorrow evening, I must tell the same story to the assistant and two older boys who could stay up later. We eat our bread together in the evenings. While I was telling my story, I heard a piano playing, down below, the tune of "Tell me the old, old story."

The hour is very late and the rules do not allow me to work so late. Soon I am going to smoke a pipe in the courtyard, it is nice there, also in the little courtyard where a pig has his liberty during most of the year (he is not there at the moment). In truth, it is amusing to amble about a while.

Now, good night, sleep well and, if you pray in the evenings, think of me as I remember you. Good night, my boy. A handshake from

The heart that is fainting
May grow full to o'erflowing
And they who behold it
Shall wonder and know not
That God at its fountains

Far off has been raining.
Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 1 September 1876

Mijn oog o ween niet meer, maar houd uw tranen,
Mijn ziele, treur niet meer, maar bid, maar bid, mijn ziel.
[Mine eye, oh weep no more, but hold your tears,
My soul, mourn no more, but pray, but pray, my soul.]

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the letter I received this morning. There are hours and days and periods in life when God hides His countenance, as it were; but for those who love God those times, those sad times, are not wholly devoid of God, but as if they were full of prophecies for the future and full of voices from the past, "so far the Lord has led you," "cherish the old faith again."

If things you had not expected should happen to you, strengthen in yourself the sorrowing for God, and the voice, "Abba, Father."

It was an autumn day when I stood on the steps before Mr. Provily's school, watching the carriage in which Pa and Mother were driving home. One could see the little yellow carriage far down the road - wet with rain and with spare trees on either side - running through the meadows.

The grey sky above it all was mirrored in the pools.

And about a fortnight later I was standing in the corner of the playground when someone came and told me that a man was there, asking for me; I knew who it was, and a moment later I fell on Father's neck. What I felt then, could not it have been "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father"? It was a moment in which we both felt we had a Father in heaven; for Father too looked upward, and in his heart there was a greater voice than mine, crying, "Abba, Father."

(Try to send me the page from Michelet.)

[Written in the margin] Do you ever go to Communion? They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Between that moment and the present there lie years of exile. - There is a phrase that accompanies us, and seems to grow up with us - sorrowful yet always rejoicing. There is the prayer for a mother for her children, a prayer which is very powerful, for the prayer of the righteous has great power:

Father, I pray unto Thee not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

There is the faithful hand of the father which blessed us when we left the parental home.

And then, boy, as I told you before, there is a strong craving for the day when He will no longer remember the sins of my youth. Who rejoices in grey hairs? As far as the east is from the west, so far I shall remove your transgressions from you [Ps. 103:12]. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” Whoever doth not hate his own life cannot be a disciple of Christ [Luke. 14:20]. Once Pa sent me this:

Zucht tot heiliging
Wie zal voor immer en volkomen ons bevrijden
Van `t lichaam dezer daad gebogen onder `t juk…
[Translation of the whole poem]

CRAVING FOR SANCTITY

Who shall deliver me completely and forever
From the body of this deed; bowed down beneath the yoke,
How long shall I have to fight against myself
Before I can tear this heart away from the service of sin?
I had promised my God that He should be called my God,
That I should follow Him with undivided mind;
I was tried - and my oath was forgotten;
I was tempted - and my foot wavered.
No, not with my own strength shall I learn to conquer -
Confess your weakness, O my soul, and self-deceit, begone!
The Father shall fashion the child's heart;
The Master shall be the guiding spirit of the pupil.
Well then, father! Let Thy love make me capable;
My Master, take my hand, and show me Thy banner.
I stood alone - and fell; now we go together.
I broke down - Thou fightest for me and I am victorious.
Only now do I feel strong, now that I feel I am weak,
Powerless in myself, all-powerful in the Lord!
Let sin tempt, let angry passions churn,
Thou, God in me! strikest down all enemies.
I am sad, but it is a godly grief,
A cloud of night, but edged with the heavenly red of dawn;
I weep, O God! but with joy in my heart;

I bow my head, but, Father, onto thy lap.

Who rejoices in grey hairs? Who can look behind it, like Felix Holt did behind the word *failure*? Who is there to see when the first years of life, life of youth and adolescence, life of worldly enjoyment and vanity will perforce wither - and they shall, even as the blossom falls from the tree - and vigorous new life shoots up, the life of love unto Christ Who is importunate and of sorrowing that is unrepenting, unto God; how then in our close dependence on God, and in the unmistakable and keen sensation of it, we find more favour in His eyes, which are too pure to see evil, and He can and will entrust His Holy Spirit more safely to our weakness, His Holy Spirit, Which grants life, and urges us to do good works; who rejoices in grey hairs? Who is sorrowful yet always rejoicing, chastised but not slain, to die but lo! we live - oh, who rejoices in falling and rising again, long-suffering and meek? - who rejoices in the green wood of the straight pines and cedars, and ivy and holly and moss in winter? - Withered wood *does give* more heat, a bright fire and light, when it is kindled, than green wood. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear…”

Vader onder al mijn noden
Vader onder heil en straf…

[Literal translation of the whole poem.]

Father, in all my troubles
Father, in bliss and punishment
Father, even in the realm of the dead,
Father, even in the silent tomb
Whenever I may behold change
Thou, O God, standest firm forever.
My dust rests also on Thy faithful security
Slumbers in Thy home.
Therefore years, speed freely on
With your gladness and your grief
Whatever disaster I may bewail
God, my God changeth not.
When we sit in mournful darkness
Still that Eternal Light will keep
All its brilliance and all its glory
Worthy of all praise and poetry.
I know to Whom I entrust myself;
Though day and night may alternate,
I know the rock on which I build:
He Who awaits my salvation will not fail me.

Once in the evening of my life,
Tired of cares and struggling, I shall offer up
Unto Thee for every day granted me here
A loftier and purer song of praise.
Oh my soul, why art thou bowed down
Why art thou troubled within me?
Regain thy old faith
In the joy in the praise of the Most High.
Many a time hath He changed
Thy burden into happiness.
Put thy trust in Him, raise thine eyes to Heaven
For I shall glorify my God forever.

And above all love one another with a fervent love, for love shall cover a multitude of sins [*sic*. 1 Pet. 4:8].

Waar liefde woont gebiededt de Heer Zijn zegen
Daar woont Hij zelf
Daat wordt Zijn heil verkregen
En't leven tot in eeuwigheid.
[Where love dwells the Lord commands His blessing
There He lives Himself
There His Grace is won
And life eternal.]

Let us bear love one unto another that God may augment and strengthen our love, and gather love around us, and if there should be no human being that you can love enough, love the town in which you dwell, as you do, too - don't I love Paris and London, though I am a child of the pine woods and of the beach at Ramsgate? And seek to please the poor and to find favour in their eyes.

“Strengthen thine heart.” “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father.”

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” And this is life eternal: knowing God and Christ Whom He sent [John 17:3]. “There is no fear in love.” “In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you.”

“And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” It is better to fall into the hands of the Lord than into the hands of men.

Let Christ be the centre of your longing, Comforter of the disquieted mind. “Strengthen thine heart” also in this sense; eat thy *bread* in simplicity of heart; at least do this, I cannot do otherwise, God help me, if there be peril in doing it:

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Eat your bread but live simply, and smoke your pipe, which I do myself whenever I can manage to go out once in a while. “And turn thy way unto the Lord, He will pave it.”

[Written in the margin] Do not be afraid to sing a hymn in the evening when you are out for a walk and nobody is about: “As pants the hart for cooling streams, when heated in the chase,” or, “Oh my soul, why art thou bowed down,” or, “Centre of our craving,” or, “I know to Whom I entrust myself.”

The years between twenty and thirty are full of perils of all kinds, full of great perils, ay, perils of sin and death, but also full of God's light and comfort; struggling, thou shalt prevail, and when the dangers are past, thou shalt recall them poignantly and say, It was a good time after all.

“Strengthen thy charity.” What, however, is this Charity Paul speaks of? And what are those wonderful words thou knowest also, 1 Cor. 13? This Charity is Life in Christ, this Charity is our Mother; all the good things of the earth belong to Her, for all is good if enjoyed with thankfulness, but She extends much further than those good things of the earth. To Her belongs the draught of water from a brook on a hike or from a fountain in the hot streets of London or Paris, to Her belong also “I shall make thy bed in sickness,” “as one whom his mother comforteth, so I will comfort you,” and to Her belongs: “Constancy unto death toward Christ, who giveth us the strength to do all.”

“There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

“Strengthen thy hope,” for there is much that is good in life; for the one who loves Christ the world is what it is, and all things seem to fall to his share. Certainly it is true that much joy lies behind us, and much that we formerly anticipated joyfully, and if perchance much joy lies before us, we have seen already: “the world passeth away, and the lust thereof.” And if it be true:

I've found a joy in sorrow, a secret balm for pain
A beautiful tomorrow of sunshine after rain
I've found a branch of healing near every bitter spring
A whispered promise stealing (*from every?)* broken string.

thus it is true that there is no joy without unhappiness. Sorrow is better than laughter, and it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasts…for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better [Eccles. 7:2-3]. *Even in mirth the heart is sad*.

For myself, I will strive after the Love of Christ and after working for Him all my life; though it fail and though I fail, there will always remain that standing from afar and longing for the heights away from the misery here below. But I will seek Faith and Love, and go on beseeching the Spirit of God under all circumstances. For this is my vow unto the Lord, my … [illegible], my rock. If I am forsaken, I am forsaken, but He is faithful and loves with an eternal Love, and grants that the longing of our hearts be ever green.

[Written in the margin] Regards to Roos, Haanebeek, Tersteeg, Borchers, Carolien and Marie.

[Written at the top of the next page] Read in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah: Is. 9, 11, 35, Is. 40, 42, 43, 44, 45:2 and the following verses 49,53, 55, 58, 61, 63, 65; Jer. 3, 17, 30, 31.

The Lord is thy keeper: He is thy shade upon thy right hand. In Him is deliverance from death, in Him is everlasting life. My boy, there will come days when we shall no longer believe because we heard *It* said, but when we shall know *It* and felt It and love *It*. Then we shall be moved, when we hear the name of God pronounced, yea, even as we are moved when we see our father again after having been away from home for a long time. And we shall all be brethren and sisters and children of the Shepherd, as if anew, and in many a sense.

Let us go on in life as long as our legs will carry us, and though the foot may get tired, and the tribulation great, and though the ear may hum with the noise of the world, which it has heard for so many years, and though the whole head be weary, and the going hard, let us go on in life, because our Father and our Mother say unto us, “Go on and don't look back”; and if we may do good along the way, let us not forbear; but still, God desires more our heart than our works. Pa and Mother say, Go on, and they love us - did not Pa say, My boy, you know very well I would give my last shirt for you. Let us go on as long as our legs will carry us, and thou shalt find that God giveth strength to the weary and fortifieth him that is weak, that God supporteth us; for there is greater love in the future, therefore we delight and have faith in the life that is to come.

An imaginary handshake, it is late already, à Dieu. Well, brother, this is the fruit of the pen and of the heart.

Your loving brother, Vincent

[Written in the margin] If you can manage it, please send Mother a carte de visite Nr. 669 l'enfant prodigue by Scheffer for her birthday.

I am happily looking forward to Christmas; two years ago we took a walk in the snow in the evening, do you remember? And saw the moon rise over the Marienhof? I also quite clearly remember the night, that same Christmastide, I drove from Bois-le-Duc to Helvoirt in a little open cart, it was terribly cold and the road was slippery; how beautiful Bois-le-Duc looked, the market square and the streets covered with snow and the dark houses with snow on the roofs. Brabant is ever Brabant, and one's native country is ever one's native country, and countries of exile are ever countries of exile. And viewed from the distant road to Bois-le-Duc, how pleasant Helvoirt looked that evening and the lights in the village and the steeple amidst the snow-covered poplars. But it is love that gives it all so much beauty and animation. And do you remember that trip to St. Michiel's Gestel.

“The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be on their head: and they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

“A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.”

“Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.”

“Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees.” “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

[Written at the top of the following page] There is no better nor surer way to follow through life than Love, above all for our Father: in His name we go on from one day to the next. But we can also bear love unto others. How often the memory of one already gone to my Father's house - where there are many mansions - has warmed me and made my heart glow with Love on my evening walks through the streets of London, and in the cabbage fields outside the town. And as often as I walk in the streets of London, the thought of Him and the Love of Him rise up in me.

When Lies came home at Christmas we had a pleasant meeting. She and Albertien came in Uncle Vincent's carriage from Breda. Pa, Cor and I went along the road to meet them, and when we saw the carriage in the distance I ran ahead of the other two. It was twilight, and the carriage was dark. Through the window one saw the road with the fields and a row of trees on either side. At the end of the road the church was dark against the sky. Behind the church lowered big dark evening clouds, but edged with silver. It was such an unexpected joy to see the little lass again - a much greater joy than I had anticipated.

Anna will be back in Welwyn by now, I suppose; when she leaves Welwyn, she will realize how much she has loved it. You know how in winter she used to be the first to get up and light the fire - she has been a blessing in the house. Her little room is so lovely - with the ivy about the window and the view of the garden and the big chestnuts around which swarms of swallows fly in summer - when the sun is setting behind the trees. And the rooks nest there, too. The “Mater Dolorosa” by Delaroche hung over her bed.

Do you happen to have kept that page from Michelet beginning, “Je vois d'ici une dame”? If you have, please copy it for me; I want it, but don't have the book any more.

Heeft de overhand op mij
O Mijn weerspannig overtreden…
[Translation of the whole poem]
Oh, if my waywardness
Prevail over me,
Be Thou the one to reconcile and purify me!
Most blessed is he whom Thou hast chosen,
Whom in the midst of the tumult of the earth
Thou bidst draw near and hear Thy holy voice,
Yea, dwell in Thy house.
Most blessed is he whose sins are forgiven,
Who is delivered from punishment forever,
Whose defiling iniquities
Are hidden from the holy eye of the Lord.
Most blessed is the man whom
God does not hold guilty in justice,
But who, with a devout and undissembling mind,
Nourishes no wicked deceit, only white righteousness.

How shall these things come to pass?

“Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?”

“I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron…”

“I am…the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”

“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”

“Hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: …Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.”

“For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

“The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

“As one whom his Mother comforteth, so I will comfort you … saith the Lord. Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of youth? … Thou shalt call me, My Father; and shalt not turn away from me.”

“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.” Redeem me, and I shall be redeemed.

For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee …All thy lovers have forgotten thee … I shall restore health unto thee, and take the plagues away from thee.

“The Lord hath appeared of old to me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” “As one whom his Mother comforteth, so I will comfort you, saith the Lord.” “There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 3 October 1876

Dear Theo,
Our parents have written to me that you are ill. My boy, I wish I could be with you. Last night, I went on foot to Richmond; I thought of you all the time, it was a beautiful grey evening. You know that every Monday I go to the Methodist church at Richmond; yesterday I spoke a few words on the subject " Nothing pleases me except Jesus, and everything pleases me in God."

I would like to be closer to you. Oh! Why are we always at odds with each other? Why? I am enclosing a letter from the aunts at Zundert - you know that Aunt Bet had an accident. I wrote to them that you and I would walk over to Zundert at Christmas if possible.

I have copied a few of the psalms for you; perhaps you would like to read them one of these days. Drop me a line as soon as you can.

A week from last Sunday, I made a long trip to London, and there I heard about a kind of job which perhaps might do for me sometime. In seaport towns like Liverpool and Hull, certain preachers are often in need of helpers who know how to speak several languages, to work among the sailors, foreigners, and visit the sick; some salary is attached to such a position.

I left here early at four o'clock in the morning. It was beautiful in the park here, with the avenues of dark elm trees, the wet road through it, and a grey rainy sky above it all; in the distance there was a thunderstorm. At daybreak I was in Hyde Park; the leaves were already falling from the trees and the Virginia creeper was beautifully red against the houses, and there was a fog. At seven o'clock I was in Kensington, and rested a little in a church where I used to go so many Sunday mornings.

In London I visited some friends and also Messrs. Goupil & Co.'s gallery, and saw there the drawings that Van Iterson had brought with him. It was delightful to see once more the Dutch towns and meadows in that way. That picture by Artz, the "Mill on the Canal," I think very fine.

You also have a beautiful life before you, Theo, keep courage.

Has Van Iterson come back yet? I was so glad to see him again. He is bringing you The Wide, Wide World; read it one of these days - the first chapters especially are so fine, and so true and simple. And read now and then in Longfellow, for instance:

“I see the lights of the village, gleam through the rain and the mist,
and a feeling of sadness comes o'er me, that my soul cannot resist.”

And now, boy, a handshake for you and for Uncle Jan. Adieu, keep courage and get better quickly; write soon how you are, and send back the aunt's letter then. Poor Aunt Bet, we are such old friends. O Zundert! Memories of you are sometimes almost overpowering. Adieu, boy, may God unite us more and more and make us true brothers. Compliments to Uncle Jan and to all the Roos family, from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Paris will be beautiful now in autumn. Every Sunday last year Gladwell and I visited many friends and as many churches as possible; we went out in the morning and came home late. Notre Dame is so splendid in the autumn evening amid the chestnut trees. But there is something in Paris more beautiful than the autumn and the churches, and that is the poor. I think often of many a one over there.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 7 October 1876

Dear Theo,
It is Saturday again and I write once more. How I long to see you again, Oh! my longing is sometimes so strong. Write soon, a little word as to how you are.

Last Wednesday we took a long walk to a village an hour's distance from here. The road led through meadows and fields, along hedges of hawthorn, full of blackberries and clematis, and here and there a large elm tree. It was so beautiful when the sun set behind the grey clouds, and the shadows were long. By chance we met the school of Mr. Stokes, where there are still several of the boys I knew. The clouds retained their red hue long after the sun had set and the dusk had settled over the fields, and we saw in the distance the lamps lit in the village. While I was writing to you, I was called to Mr. Jones, who asked if I would walk to London to collect some money for him. And when I came home in the evening, hurrah, there was a letter from Father with tidings about you. How I should like to be with you both, my boy. And thank God there is some improvement, though you are still weak. And you will be longing to see Mother, and now that I hear that you are going home with her, I think of the words of Conscience:

“I have been ill, my mind was tired, my soul disillusioned and my body suffering. I whom God has endowed at least with moral energy and a strong instinct of affection, I fell in the abyss of the most bitter discouragement and I felt with horror how a deadly poison penetrated my stifled heart. I spent three months on the moors, you know that beautiful region where the soul retires within itself and enjoys a delicious rest, where everything breathes calm and peace; where the soul in presence of God's immaculate creation throws off the yoke of conventions, forgets society, and loosens its bonds, with the strength of renewed youth; where each thought takes the form of prayer, where everything that is not in harmony with fresh and free nature quits the heart. Oh, there the tired souls find rest, there the exhausted man regains his youthful strength. So I passed my days of illness . . .. And then the evening! To be seated before the big fireplace with one's feet in the ashes, one's eyes fixed on a star that sends its ray through the opening in the chimney as if to call me, or absorbed in vague dreams too much to look at the fire, to see the flames rise, flicker, and supplant one another as if desirous to lick the kettle with their tongues of fire, and to think that such is human life: to be born, to work, to love, to grow and to disappear.”

Mr. Jones has promised me that I shall not have to teach so much in future, but that I may work in his parish, visiting the people, talking with them, *etc.* May God give His blessing to me.

Now I am going to tell you about my walk to London. I left here at twelve o'clock in the morning and reached my destination between five and six. When I came into that part of the town where most of the picture galleries are, around the Strand, I met many acquaintances: it was dinnertime, so many were in the street, leaving the office or going back there. First I met a young clergyman who once preached here, and with whom I then became acquainted, and then the employee of Mr. Wallis, and then one of the Messrs. Wallis himself, whom I used to visit now and then at his house, now he has two children; then I met Mr. Reid and Mr. Richardson, who are already old friends. Last year about this time Mr. Richardson was in Paris and we walked together to Père Lachaise.

After that I went to van Wisselingh, where I saw sketches for two church windows. In the middle of one window stands the portrait of a middle-aged lady, oh, such a noble face, with the words “Thy will be done,” over it, and in the other window the portrait of her daughter, with the words, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” There, and in the gallery of Messrs. Goupil & Co., I saw beautiful pictures and drawings. It is such an intense delight to be so often reminded of Holland by art.

In the City I went to see Mr. Gladwell and to St. Paul's Church. And from the City to the other end of London, where I visited a boy who had left the school of Mr. Stokes because of illness and I found him quite well, playing in the street. Then to the place where I had to collect the money for Mr. Jones. The suburbs of London have a peculiar charm, between the little houses and gardens are open spots covered with grass and generally with a church or school or workhouse in the middle between the trees and shrubs, and it can be so beautiful there, when the sun is setting red in the thin evening mist.

Yesterday evening it was so, and afterwards I wished you could have seen those London streets when the twilight began to fall and the lamps were lit, and everybody went home; everything showed that it was Saturday night and in all that bustle there was peace, one felt the need of and the excitement at the approaching Sunday. Oh, those Sundays and all that is done and accomplished on those Sundays, it is such a comfort for those poor districts and crowded streets.

In the City it was dark, but it was a beautiful walk along the row of churches one has to pass. Near the Strand I took a bus that took me quite a long way, it was already pretty late. I passed the little church of Mr. Jones and saw in the distance another one, where at that hour a light was still burning; I entered and found it to be a very beautiful little Catholic church, where a few women were praying. Then I came to that dark park about which I have written you already and from there I saw in the distance the lights of Isleworth and the church with the ivy, and the churchyard with the weeping willows beside the Thames.

Tomorrow I shall get for the second time some small salary for my new work, and with it buy a pair of new boots and a new hat. And then, with God's will, I shall go fitted out afresh.

In the London streets they sell scented violets everywhere, they flower here twice a year. I bought some for Mrs. Jones to make her forget the pipe I smoke now and then, especially late in the evening on the playground, but the tobacco here has a touch of gloom about it.

Well, Theo, try to get well soon and read this letter when Mother is sitting with you, because I should like to be with you both in thought. I cannot tell you how glad I am that Mr. Jones has promised to give me work in his parish, so that I shall find by and by what I want. I am longing so much for you. A handshake for yourself and one for Mother when she is sitting beside you. Many regards to the Roos family and to everyone I know, especially to Mr. Tersteeg. Tell Mother it was delightful to put on a pair of socks knitted by her, after that long walk to London.

This morning the sun rose so beautifully again, I see it every morning when I wake the boys, à Dieu.

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 13 October 1876

Dear Mother and Theo,
Tomorrow the boys go home, and then I shall receive my money. I asked Mr. Jones to let me go to you those three days, my heart is so with you. It depends now on you both - if you say that I may come, Mr. Jones will let me go. Besides longing to sit at Theo's bedside, I should like so much to see my mother again and, if possible, also go to Etten to see Father and speak with him. It would only be for a short time; I should be with you but for one or two days.

Monday last, I was again in Richmond, and my subject was, “He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor”; but whoever wants to preach the Gospel must carry it in his own heart first. Oh! May I find it, for it is only the word spoken in earnestness and from the fullness of the heart that can bear fruit. Perhaps I shall go to London or Lewisham again one of these days.

Just now I gave a German lesson to Mr. Jones's daughters, and after the lesson I told them the story of Andersen's “The Snow Queen.”

If you can, let me know by the next mail if I may come; I was so happy over Mother's last letter.

One of these days I hope to visit Mr. Stokes's school. And I shall have to buy a pair of new boots to get myself ready for new wanderings.

The view from the window of your little room must be fine now - you see, I know it from long ago. We are having a great deal of rain here at present, in Holland I suppose it is the same. At Christmas I shall have a fortnight or three weeks to go to Holland; if Anna can go too, we might come together. And now winter is slowly approaching again - try to be your old self by that time. How welcome is that Christmastime in winter. Oh! my boy, I look forward so much to the time when it will be cold here and I shall have to make my rounds at Turnham Green.

When I think of you as one “who comforts his mother, and who is worthy to be comforted by his mother,” I almost envy you. But try to get better soon. Yesterday, I asked Mr. Jones to let me go to Holland, but he would not allow it, and at last he said, “Write to your mother; if she approves, I will too.”

What beautiful poems are De Genestet's “On the Mountains of Sorrow” and “When I was a Boy.”

A handshake for both of you and for the Roos family, and for Willem and any others you see whom I know. And let me hear soon from you again and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, c. 24 October 1876

Dear Theo,

How grateful I was for your little note, and for Mother's letter; so we shall wait until Christmas and may God give us a happy meeting then. “My illness is no misfortune.” No, for “sorrow is better than laughter.” No, when God supports us, illness is no misfortune, especially when we get new ideas and new intentions in those days of illness that would not have come to us if we had not been ill, and when in those days we achieve clearer faith and stronger trust in God.

“Man's extremity is God's opportunity.” In our weakness we are strong. Illness sanctifies health and teaches us to keep well. But do get well soon, my boy. Oh! how I long for Christmas.

Yesterday I was in Mr. Jones's church to help with the preparations for tonight. A clergyman from Leicester will then lecture on the Reformation and illustrate it by magic lantern with slides of that period. I have already seen some of the pictures, they are in the style of Holbein - you know that many painters and graphic artists here work in that style. There was a very beautiful picture of Luther's marriage.

Last Monday there was a “tea meeting” in that church; it was the anniversary of its opening. More than two hundred and fifty people were at tea, and afterward Mr. Jones and a few other clergymen spoke until late in the evening.

It has been very beautiful here lately, especially the streets in the evening when it is more or less hazy and the lamps are lit, and also in the park which I wrote you about. A few days ago I saw the sun setting there behind the elm trees with their bronze-coloured leaves. Over the grass was that haze which Anna wrote about, and the brook which the swans swim in runs through the park. The acacia trees in the playground have almost lost their leaves; I see them through the window in front of my desk - sometimes they stand out dark against the sky, sometimes I see the sun rise red in the mist behind them. It will soon be winter now; I am so glad Christmas comes in winter - that's why I like winter best of all the seasons.

How delightful it will be to sail down the Thames and across the sea, and see those friendly Dutch dunes and the church spire that is visible from so very far away.

How little we see of each other and how little we see of our parents, and yet the family feeling and our love for each other is so strong that the heart is uplifted and the eye turns to God and prays, “Do not let me stray too far from them, not too long, O Lord.”

No, when God supports us, illness is no misfortune, especially when we get new ideas and new intentions in those days of illness that would not have come to us if we had not been ill, and when we achieve clearer faith and stronger trust in God.

À Dieu, boy, my very best wishes; regards to Roos, and to other acquaintances if you see them and believe me with a handshake,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 31 October 1876

Dear Theo,
It is more than time for you to hear from me again. Thank God you are recovering. I am longing so much for Christmas - that time will be here perhaps before we know it, though it seems long now. Theo, your brother has preached for the first time, last Sunday, in God's dwelling, of which is written, “In this place, I will give peace.” Enclosed a copy of what I said. May it be the first of many.

It was a clear autumn day and a beautiful walk from here to Richmond along the Thames, in which the great chestnut trees with their load of yellow leaves and the clear blue sky were mirrored. Through the tops of the trees one could see that part of Richmond which lies on the hill: the houses with their red roofs, uncurtained windows and green gardens; and the gray spire high above them; and below, the long grey bridge with the tall poplars on either side, over which the people passed like little black figures.

When I was standing in the pulpit, I felt like somebody who, emerging from a dark cave underground, comes back to the friendly daylight. It is a delightful thought that in the future wherever I go, I shall preach the Gospel; to do that sell, one must have the Gospel in one's heart. May the Lord give it to me.

You know enough of life, Theo, to understand that a poor preacher stands rather alone in the world, but the Lord can increasingly rouse in us the consciousness and belief in “... yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

Ik weet aan wien ik mij vertrouwe
Al wisselen ook dag en nacht,
Ik ken de rots waarop ik bouwe,
Hij feilt niet, die mijn heil verwacht.
[I know to Whom I commit myself;
Though day and night may alternate,
I know the rock on which I build;
He Who awaits my salvation will not fail me.]

But, boy, how I am longing for Christmas and for you all; it seems to me I have grown years older in these few months.

Yesterday evening I was again at Richmond, and walked through a large grassy field surrounded by trees and houses, over which the church spire rises. The dew was lying on the grass and the twilight was falling: on one side the sky was still aglow from the setting sun, on the other, the moon was rising. Under the trees an old lady with beautiful grey hair was walking, dressed in black. In the middle of the grass plot the boys had lit a bonfire which one could see flickering from afar. I thought of the lines: “Once at the evening of my life, tired from care and strife, I'll bring Thee praise more loud and fair, for each day given to me here.”

à Dieu, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Thursday week I hope to preach on John and Theogenes in Mr. Jones's church. Your brother was indeed deeply moved when he stood at the foot of the pulpit and bowed his head and prayed: Abba, Father, in Thy name be our beginning.

Regards to Mr. and Mrs. Tersteeg and all at Roos's and to Van Iterson and to anybody you may see whom I know.

[Enclosed was Vincent's Sermon, in English, which he gave on 29 October 1876, and wrote down for Theo]

Psalm 119: 19. `I am a stranger on the earth, hide not Thy commandments from me.'

It is an old belief and it is a good belief, that our life is a pilgrim's progress - that we are strangers on the earth, but that though this be so, yet we are not alone for our Father is with us. We are pilgrims, our life is a long walk or journey from earth to Heaven.

The beginning of this life is this: there is only one who remembereth no more her sorrow and her anguish for joy that a man is born into the world. She is our Mother. The end of our pilgrimage is the entering in Our Father's house, where are many mansions, where He has gone before us to prepare a place for us. The end of this life is what we call death - it is an hour in which words are spoken, things are seen and felt, that are kept in the secret chambers of the hearts of those who stand by, - it is so that all of us have such things in our hearts or forebodings of such things.

There is sorrow in the hour when a man is born into the world, but also joy, deep and unspeakable, thankfulness so great that it reaches the highest heavens. Yes the Angels of God, they smile, they hope and they rejoice when a man is born in the world. There is sorrow in the hour of death, but there is also joy unspeakable when it is the hour of death of one who has fought a good fight. There is one who has said: I am the resurrection and the life, if any man believe in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live. There was an apostle who heard a voice from heaven saying: Blessed are they that die in the Lord, for they rest from their labour and their works follow them.

There is joy when a man is born in the world, but there is greater joy when a spirit has passed through great tribulation, when an angel is born in Heaven.

Sorrow is better than joy - and even in mirth the heart is sad - and it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasts, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. Our nature is sorrowful, but for those who have learnt and are learning to look at Jesus Christ, there is always reason to rejoice.

It is a good word that of St. Paul: as being sorrowful yet always rejoicing. For those who believe in Jesus Christ, there is no death or sorrow that is not mixed with hope - no despair - there is only a constantly being born again, a constantly going from darkness into light. They do not mourn as those who have no hope - Christian Faith makes life to evergreen life.

We are pilgrims on the earth and strangers - we come from afar and we are going far. The journey of our life goes from the loving breast of our Mother on earth to the arms of our Father in heaven. Everything on earth changes - we have no abiding city here - it is the experience of everybody. That it is God's will that we should part with what is dearest on earth - we ourselves change in many respects, we are not what we once were, we shall not remain what we are now. From infancy we grow up to boys and girls - young men and women - and if God spares us and helps us, to husbands and wives, Fathers and Mothers in our turn, and then, slowly but surely the face that once had the early dew of morning, gets its wrinkles, the eyes that once beamed with youth and gladness speak of a sincere deep and earnest sadness, though they may keep the fire of Faith, Hope and Charity - though they may beam with God's spirit. The hair turns grey or we lose it-ah-indeed we only pass through the earth, we only pass through life, we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. The world passes and all its glory. Let our later days be nearer to Thee, and therefore better than these.

Yet we may not live on casually hour by hour - no we have a strife to strive and a fight to fight. What is it we must do: we must love God with all our strength, with all our might, with all our soul, we must love our neighbours as ourselves. These two commandments we must keep, and if we follow after these, if we are devoted to this, we are not alone, for our Father in Heaven is with us, helps us and guides us, gives us strength day by day, hour by hour, and so we can do all things through Christ who gives us might.

We are strangers on the earth, hide not Thy commandments from us. Open Thou our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law. Teach us to do Thy will and influence our hearts that the love of Christ may constrain us and that we may be brought to do what we must do to be saved.

On the road from earth to Heaven
Do Thou guide us with Thine eye;
We are weak but Thou art mighty,
Hold us with Thy powerful hand.

Our life, we might compare it with a journey, we go from the place where we were born to a far-off haven. Our earlier life might be compared to sailing on a river, but very soon the waves become higher, the wind more violent, we are at sea almost before we are aware of it - and the prayer from the heart ariseth to God: Protect me 0 God, for my bark is so small and Thy sea is so great. The heart of man is very much like the sea, it has its storms, its tides and its depths; it has its pearls too. The heart that seeks for God and for a Godly life has more storms than any other. Let us see how a Psalmist describes a storm at sea. He must have felt the storm in his heart to describe it so. We read in the io7th Psalm: They that go down to the sea in ships that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth and raiseth up a stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to Heaven, they go down again to the depth, their soul melteth in them because of their trouble. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He bringeth them into their desired haven.

Do we not feel this sometimes on the sea of our lives? Does not every one of you feel with me the storms of life or their forebodings or their recollections?

And now let us read a description of another storm at sea in the New Testament, as we find it in the Vith chapter of the Gospel according to St. John in the 17th to the 21st verse. “And the disciples entered into a ship and went over the sea towards Capernaum. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea and drawing nigh unto the ship and they were afraid. Then they willingly received Him into the ship and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.” You who have experienced the great storms of life, you over whom all the waves and all the billows of the Lord have gone - have you not heard, when your heart failed for fear, the beloved well-known voice with something in its tone that reminded you of the voice that charmed your childhood - the voice of Him whose name is Saviour and Prince of Peace, saying as it were to you personally, mind to you personally: “It is I, be not afraid.” Fear not. Let not your heart be troubled.

And we whose lives have been calm up till now, calm in comparison of what others have felt - let us not fear the storms of life, amidst the high waves of the sea and under the grey clouds of the sky we shall see Him approaching, for whom we have so often longed and watched, Him we need so - and we shall hear His voice: It is I, be not afraid.

And if after an hour or season of anguish or distress or great difficulty or pain or sorrow we hear Him ask us: “Dost thou love me?” Then let us say: Lord Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee. And let us keep that heart full of the love of Christ and may from thence issue a life which the love of Christ constraineth, Lord Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee; when we look back on our past we feel sometimes as if we did love Thee, for whatsoever we have loved, we loved in Thy name.

Have we not often felt as a widow and an orphan - in joy and prosperity as well and even more than under grief - because of the thought of Thee. Truly our soul waiteth for Thee more than they that watch for the morning, our eyes are up unto Thee, 0 Thou who dwellest in Heaven. In our days too there can be such a thing as seeking the Lord.

What is it we ask of God - is it a great thing? Yes, it is a great thing, peace for the ground of our heart, rest for our soul - give us that one thing and then we want not much more, then we can do without many things, then can we suffer great things for Thy name's sake. We want to know that we are Thine and that Thou art ours, we want to be Thine - to be Christians - we want a Father, a Father's love and a Father's approval. May the experience of life make our eye single and fix it on Thee. May we grow better as we go on in life. We have spoken of the storms on the journey of life

But now let us speak of the calms and joys of Christian life. And yet, my dear friends, let us rather cling to the seasons of difficulty and work and sorrow, for the calms are often treacherous. The heart has its storms, has its seasons of drooping but also its calms and even its times of exaltation. There is a time of sighing and of praying, but there is also a time of answer to prayer. Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.

The heart that is fainting
May grow full to overflowing
And they that behold it
Shall wonder and know not
That God at its fountains
Far off has been raining.

My peace I leave with you - we saw how there is peace even in the storm. Thanks be to God, who has given us to be born and to live in a Christian country. Has any one of us forgotten the golden hours of our early days at home, and since we left that home - for many of us have had to leave that home and to earn their living and to make their way in the world. Has He not brought us thus far, have we lacked anything, Lord we believe help Thou our unbelief. I still feel the rapture, the thrill of joy I felt when for the first time I cast a deep look in the lives of my Parents, when I felt by instinct how much they were Christians. And I still feel that feeling of eternal youth and enthusiasm wherewith I went to God, saying: “I will be a Christian too.”

Are we what we dreamt we should be? No, but still the sorrows of life, the multitude of things of daily life and of daily duties, so much more numerous than we expected, the tossing to and fro in the world, they have covered it over, but it is not dead, it sleepeth. The old eternal faith and love of Christ, it may sleep in us but it is not dead and God can revive it in us. But though to be born again to eternal life, to the life of Faith, Hope and Charity, - and to an evergreen life - to the life of a Christian and a Christian workman, be a gift of God, a work of God - and of God alone, yet let us put the hand to the plough on the field of our heart, let us cast out our net once more - let us try once more. God knows the intention of the spirit. God knows us better than we know ourselves, for He made us and not we ourselves. He knows of what things we have need. He knows what is good for us. May He give us His blessing on the seed of His word, that He has sown in our hearts.

God helping us, we shall get through life. With every temptation he will give a way to escape.

Father we pray Thee not that Thou shouldest take us out of the world, but we pray Thee to keep us from evil. Give us neither poverty nor riches, feed us with bread convenient for us. And let Thy songs be our delight in the houses of our pilgrimage. God of our Fathers be our God: may their people be our people, their faith our faith. We are strangers on the earth, hide not Thy commandments from us, but may the love of Christ constrain us. Entreat us not to leave Thee or refrain from following after Thee. Thy people shall be our people. Thou shalt be our God.

Our life is a pilgrim's progress. I once saw a very beautiful picture: it was a landscape at evening. In the distance on the right-hand side a row of hills appeared blue in the evening mist. Above those hills the splendour of the sunset, the grey clouds with their linings of silver and gold and purple. The landscape is a plain or heath covered with grass and its yellow leaves, for it was in autumn. Through the landscape a road leads to a high mountain far, far away, on the top of that mountain is a city wherein the setting sun casts a glory. On the road walks a pilgrim, staff in hand. He has been walking for a good long while already and he is very tired. And now he meets a woman, or figure in black, that makes one think of St. Paul's word: As being sorrowful yet always rejoicing. That Angel of God has been placed there to encourage the pilgrims and to answer their questions.

And the pilgrim asks her: Does the road go uphill then all the way?” And the answer is: “Yes to the very end.” And he asks again: “And will the journey take all day long?” And the answer is: “From morn till night my friend.”

And the pilgrim goes on sorrowful yet always rejoicing - sorrowful because it is so far off and the road so long. Hopeful as he looks up to the eternal city far away, resplendent in the evening glow and he thinks of two old sayings that he heard long ago - the one is:

“Much strife must be striven
Much suffering must be suffered
Much prayer must be prayed
And then the end will be peace.”

And the other is

“The water comes up to the lips
But higher comes it not.”

And he says: I shall be more and more tired but also nearer and nearer to Thee. Has not man a strife on earth? But there is a consolation from God in this life. An Angel of God comforting man - that is the Angel of Charity. Let us not forget her. And when each of us goes back to the daily things and daily duties let us not forget that things are not what they seem, that God by the things of daily life teacheth us higher things, that our life is a pilgrim's progress, and that we are strangers on the earth, but that we have a God and father who preserveth strangers, - and that we are all brethren.

Amen.

And now the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us forever more.

Amen.

(Reading: Psalm 91.)

Once more, a handshake in my thoughts. Yesterday evening I went to Turnham Common to take the service for Mr. Jones, who was not well. I walked there with the oldest of the boys, he is 17 but as tall as I am and has a beard. He is due to go into business later, his father has a large factory. He has an honest, good, sensitive heart and a great need of religion. His hope and desire are to do good among the working people when he is older. I recommended Eliot's Felix Holt to him.

It was beautiful in the park with the old elm trees I the moonlight and the dew on the grass. It felt so good speaking in the little church - it is a wooden church.

Bye, Theo, bye, my boy. I hope I have written this so you are able to read it. Keep your spirits up and get better soon.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 10 November 1876

Dear Theo,
I feel that I must enclose a little note for you. You will spend delightful days at home, I almost envy you, my boy.

What beautiful autumn weather we are having. I think you will see the sun rise in the morning. In which room are you sleeping?

If you can get hold of the Imitation of Christ, you must read it; it is a splendid book which gives much light.

It expresses so well - for he who wrote the book put it into practice himself - how good it is to fight the Holy Strife for duty, and the great joy gained by being charitable and by doing one's duty *well*.

You must read this letter to Father and Mother. I have taken such beautiful walks lately - they were such a relief after the closeness of the first months here.

It is true that every day has its own evil, and its good, too. But how difficult life must be if it is not strengthened and comforted by faith, especially further on when the evil of each day increases as far as worldly things are concerned. And in Christ all worldly things may become better and, as it were, sanctified.

It is a beautiful saying and happy are those who know it, “Nothing pleaseth me but in Christ, and in Him all things please me.” But it is not acquired so easily; still, “seek and ye shall find.”

Next time when Father and Mother write, send me a word or two also.

Monday evening I hope to go to Richmond again, and to choose for my text the words: “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion.” Theo, I shall be unlucky if I cannot preach the Gospel, if my lot is not to preach, if I have not given all my hopes and all my trust to Christ. Well, misery is truly my lot, while what I need now is a little courage in spite of everything.

I should have liked to have you with me last Thursday evening in the little church at Turnham Green. I walked there with the oldest boy in the school, and told him some of Andersen's tales, including “The Story of a Mother.”

And now we are slowly approaching winter, and many people dread it. But it is pleasant at Christmastime, which is like moss on the roofs and like the pine trees, the holly and ivy in the snow! How I should like to meet Anna; I shall write to her again today.

Today, one of the servants left; these women hardly have an easy life here, and she couldn't stand it any longer; everyone, rich or poor, strong or weak, has moments in which he can go no further and when “all those things seem against us,” when many things that we have built up tumble down. But never despair, Elijah had to pray seven times, and David had ashes on his head many times.

A new assistant has come to the school, for in the future I shall work more at Turnham Green; he has never been away from home before, and it will not be easy for him in the beginning. And now a firm handshake in thought; it is already late, and I am rather tired, best wishes and don't forget

Your most affectionate brother, Vincent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to His Parents

Isleworth, 17-18 November 1876

Dear Father and Mother,
Thank God that Theo has almost recovered, and bravo that he has already walked with Father in the snow to the Heike [a hamlet near Etten]; how I wish I could have been together with you both. It is already late, and early tomorrow morning I must go to London and Lewisham, for Mr. Jones. I hope to visit the Gladwells, and it will be late in the evening when I come back.

Where do Mr. Jones and others get their incomes? Yes, I have often thought about it myself. A saying here is: God takes care of those who work for Him. I am longing to speak and consult with you about this question.

And then you asked me if I still teach the boys; generally I do so until one o'clock in the afternoon, and then after one o'clock I go out for Mr. Jones, or sometimes give lessons to Mr. Jones's children or to a few boys in town. And then in the evening and between times I write in my sermon book.

Last Sunday I was at Turnham Green early to teach at Sunday school - it was a real English rainy day. In the morning Mr. Jones preached about the woman of Samaria and then there was Sunday school again. I have to teach it on weekdays too; there are children enough, but the difficulty is to get them together regularly. Mr. Jones and his boys and I went in the afternoon to take tea with the sexton, a shoemaker who lives in one of the suburbs. The view from the windows there reminded me of Holland; a grass field almost turned into a swamp by the pouring rain, around it rows of little red houses with their gardens and the glow of the lighted lamps. In the evening Mr. Jones preached a very beautiful sermon about Naarman the Syrian, and then came the walk home.

Last Thursday Mr. Jones made me take his turn, and my text was: “I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and together such as I am, except these bonds.”

Next Sunday evening I have to go to a Methodist church in Petersham. Petersham is a village on the Thames, twenty minutes beyond Richmond. I do not know what text I shall take, The Prodigal Son or Psalm 42:1. In the morning and afternoon there is Sunday school at Turnham Green.

And so the weeks go by and we are approaching winter and a merry Christmas. Tomorrow I must be in the two remotest parts of London: in Whitechapel - that very poor part which you have read about in Dickens; and then across the Thames in a little steamer and from there to Lewisham. Mr. Jones's children have recovered, but now three of the boys have got measles.

This week I had to go with one of the boys to Acton Green for Mr. Jones - that grass plot which I saw from the sexton's window. It was very muddy there, but it was lovely when darkness fell and the fog began to rise and one saw the light of a little church in the middle of the plain. To our left were the railway tracks on a rather high embankment; a train passed by and the red glow of the engine and the rows of lights in the carriages were a beautiful sight in the twilight. To our right a few horses were grazing in a meadow surrounded by a hedge of hawthorn and dotted with blackberry bushes.

While I sit writing to you in my little room and it is so very, very quiet, I look at your portraits and the prints on the wall - “Christus Consolator,” “Good Friday,” “Women Visiting the Tomb,” “The Old Huguenot,” “The Prodigal Son” by Ary Scheffer, “A Little Boat on a Stormy Sea,” and an etching, “An Autumn Landscape,” a view of a heath that Harry Gladwell gave me on my birthday. And when I think of you all and of everything here, of Turnham Green, Richmond and Petersham, then I feel, Hear, O Lord, the prayer that my mother said for me when I left my parent's roof, “Father, I pray thee not that thou shouldest take him out of the world but that thou shouldest keep him from the evil,” and “O Lord, make me my father's brother, a Christian and a Christian labourer. Finish Thy work in me that Thou hast begun and unite us, O Lord, firmly together and may the love for Thee strengthen that bond more and more.”

And now good night to you both and to Theo and Willemien and Cor. I am looking forward to hearing from you again. Good night, I must start early tomorrow morning, a handshake from

Your most affectionate Vincent

[Written underneath in pencil]

From the other end of London.

Goodbye, everyone! I started this morning at four o'clock, now it is two. I have just passed through the old cabbage fields - now for Lewisham. One sometimes asks, how shall I ever reach my destination? À Dieu.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Isleworth, 25 November 1876

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your last letter, which I received at the same time as one from Etten. So you are back at work again; do whatever your hand finds to do with all your strength, and a blessing is certain. How I should have loved to accompany you on that walk to the Heike and to Sprundel in the first snow.

Father wrote me: “in the afternoon I had to go to the Hoeve. Mother had ordered a carriage, but they could not drive because the horses could not yet be calked; so I resolved to go on foot and that kind Uncle Jan would not let me go alone, but went with me. It was an uncomfortable expedition, but Uncle Jan rightly observed: The devil is never so black but you can look him in the face. We arrived and returned home safely, though there was a storm with sleet, so that the road was slippery as ice. It was delightful beyond words to sit comfortably together in a nice warm room in the evening and to rest after labour.” Shall we also go together like that to some church someday, being sorrowful yet always rejoicing, with an eternal joy in our hearts because we are the poor in the Kingdom of God? God grant it.

Last Sunday evening I went to a village on the Thames called Petersham In the morning I had been at the Sunday school in Turnham Green, and after sunset I went from there to Richmond and then to Petersham. Soon it became dark, and I did not know the right way. It was a terribly muddy road, on top of a sort of dike, the slope of which was covered with gnarled elm trees and bushes. At last I saw a light in a little house somewhere below the dike, and climbed and waded through the mud to reach it; there they showed me the right way. But, boy, there was a beautiful little wooden church with a kindly light at the end of that dark road. I read Acts 5:14 - 16 and Acts 12:5 - 17, Peter in prison; and then I told the story of John and Theogenes once more. A harmonium in the church was played by a young lady from the boarding school, the pupils of which were all there.

In the morning it was so beautiful on the road to Turnham Green - the chestnut trees and the clear blue sky and the morning sun mirrored in the water of the Thames; the grass was sparkling green and one heard the sound of church bells all around.

The day before I had made a long hike to London. I left here at four o'clock in the morning, and at half-past six was in Hyde park. There the dew was lying on the grass and the leaves were falling from the trees; in the distance one saw the pale lights of the lamps which had not yet been put out, and the towers of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, and the sun rose red in the morning mist. From there I went to Whitechapel, the poor part of London; to Chancery Lane and Westminster; to Clapham to visit Mrs. Loyer again, whose birthday was the day before. I also went to Mr. Obach's to see his wife and children again.

Then I went to Lewisham, where I arrived at the Gladwells at half-past three. It was exactly three months since I had been there on that Saturday when their little daughter was buried. I spent about three hours with them, and we shared many thoughts, too many for expression. From there I also wrote to Harry in Paris. I hope you will meet him someday; it may easily happen that you, too, will go to Paris. At half-past ten in the evening I was back here, having used the underground railway part of the way. I had been lucky enough to collect some money for Mr. Jones.

At Petersham, I warned the community that it was going to hear bad English, but that when I spoke I thought of the man in the parable who said: “Have patience with me, I will pay you fully.” Would that God comes to my assistance! At Mr. Obach's I saw the picture, or rather sketch, by Boughton, “The Pilgrim's Progress.” If you ever have an opportunity to read Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, you will find it greatly worth while. For my part I am exceedingly fond of it. It is nighttime, I am still writing, copying something for the Gladwells at Lewisham, etc.; one must strike the iron while it is still hot, and the heart of man when it is burning within him.

A firm handshake, kind regards to Mr. and Mrs. Tersteeg and to the Roos, Haanebeek, Van Stockum and Mauve families. À Dieu, believe me,

Your most affectionate brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 31 December 1876

Dear Theo,
Best wishes for the New Year, may it be a happy and prosperous in all respects. How delightful it was to meet again, how beautiful that morning you left was, and how often we shall recall that journey to Chaam.

Father preached a beautiful sermon this morning!

And now it is New Year's Eve, I wish you were here too. There is another thing I have to tell you. A few days ago Mr. Braat from Dordrecht came to visit Uncle Vincent, and they talked about me; Uncle asked Mr. Braat If he had a place for me in his business, should I want one. Mr. Braat thought so, and said that I should just come and talk it over. So I went there early yesterday morning; I thought I could not let it go by without seeing what it was. We arranged that I should come for a week after New Year's to try it out, and after that we will see. It would be desirable, for several reasons, that I remain in Holland, near Father and Mother, you also, and the others. My salary would certainly be a bit higher that with Mr. Jones, and it is one's duty to think of that because later in life a man needs more.

As for the religious work, I still do not give it up. Father has so many interests and he is so versatile, I hope that in whatever circumstances I may be, something similar will develop in me. The change will be that, instead of teaching the boys, I shall work in a bookshop.

How often have we longed to be together, and how dreadful the feeling of being far from each other is in times of illness or care - as we felt it, for instance, during your illness - and then the feeling that want of the necessary money might be an obstacle to coming together in time of need.

So it is quite possible that I shall go there.

Yesterday evening I was at Uncle Vincent's to tell him that I had gone to Dordrecht at once. It was a stormy night; you can imagine how beautiful the road to Prinsenhage was with the dark clouds and their silver linings.

I just entered for a minute the Catholic church where evening service was being held. It was a beautiful sight, all those peasants and peasant women in their black dresses and white caps, and the church looked so cheerful in the evening light.

You must tell Mr. Tersteeg at once that I am going to Dordrecht for a week to try it. Wish him and Mrs. Tersteeg a happy New Year for me. I am writing in a great hurry, Anna and the girls went to Prinsenhage, and Father thought it better for me to go with them. Aunt came back with them in the carriage, and I walked with Willem Carbentus. Well, boy, my dear brother, what happy days we all had together. Have a pleasant New Year's Eve, and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

More soon, à Dieu. If you write, address your letter to Dordrecht.

1877

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 21 January 1877

Dear Theo,
You probably expected a letter from me sooner. I am getting along pretty well at the bookstore and am very busy; I go there at eight o'clock in the morning and I leave at one o'clock at night. But I like it that way.

I hope to go to Etten on 11 February, as you know, we celebrate this day as father's birthday. Will you be there also? I want to give him the Eliot's “news” (the translation of Scenes from a Clerical Life). If we put our money together to get him a present, we could give him in addition Adam Bede.

Last Sunday, I wrote to Mr. & Mrs. Jones to tell them that I was not coming back, and unintentionally the letter became rather long - out of the fullness of my heart. I wished them to remember me and asked them *to wrap my recollection in the cloak of charity*.

I have hung in my bedroom the two engravings Christus Consolator that you have given me. I saw the pictures at the museum, as well as Scheffer's “Christ in Gethsemane,” which is unforgettable. Then there is a sketch of “Les Douleurs de la Terre” and several drawings, a sketch of his studio, and, as you know, the portrait of his mother. There are still other fine pictures, for instance, Achenbach and Schelfhout and Koekkoek and also a fine Allebé - an old man near the stove. Shall we look at them together someday?

The first Sunday I was here, I heard a sermon on “Behold, I make all things new.” This morning I heard the Reverend Mr. Beversen in a little old church. There was Communion, and his text was: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”

The window in my bedroom looks out on the gardens where I can see pine trees, poplars, and the backs of old houses etc., one of them has a gutter covered with ivy. Dickens said: “A strange old plant is the ivy green.” This view from my window can be solemn and gloomy, but you should see it in the light of the morning sun. Then when I contemplate it, I imagine a letter of yours in which you talked to me of houses covered with ivy. Do you remember it?

If you can afford it - if I can, I will do the same - you must subscribe to the Catholic Illustration of this year; there are prints in it from London by Doré - the wharves on the Thames, Westminster, Whitechapel, the underground railways, *etc.*

A schoolmaster [Görlitz] lives in the same house as I. Last Sunday, and today too, we took a fine walk together along the canals and outside the town along the river; we also passed that spot where you were waiting for the steamer.

This evening when the setting sun was reflected in the water and in the windows and cast a bright golden glow over everything, it looked just like a picture by Cuyp.

Write again as soon as you can. I shall have to do a lot of bookkeeping these days and shall be very busy.

Give my kind regards to Roos, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 7-8 February 1877

Dear Theo,
Adam Bede costs 2.60 guilders, so I am sending you back 1.40 guilders. Now I only hope they will enjoy the book at home, but they certainly will. Thanks for your letter, which gave me much pleasure. The next time we meet, we shall be as good friends as ever; sometimes I feel so delighted that we are again living on the same soil and speaking the same language.

Last week we had a flood here. Coming from the store at night, between twelve and one, I walked around the cathedral; the wind raged in the elm trees around it, and the moon shone through the rain clouds and was reflected in the canals, which were already filled to overflowing. At three o'clock that morning everybody in Rijken the grocer's house, where I live, was busy carrying the things from the shop upstairs, as the water in the house had risen to three feet. There was no little noise and bustle: on all the ground floors people were busy carrying things upstairs, and a little boat came floating through the street.

In the morning at daybreak I saw a group of men at the other end of the street; one after the other they waded through the water to their warehouses. Much damage has been done. The water also penetrated the place where Mr. Braat keeps his paper, etc.; it was not flooded from the outside, but by underground seepage. Mr. Braat says that it will cost him a lot of money. We have been busy a day and a half carrying everything upstairs into another house. Working with one's hands for a day is a rather agreeable diversion - if only it had been for another reason.

You ought to have seen the sunset that evening; the streets seemed of gold, the way Cuyp used to paint them. I am eager for my trunk, which is on the way, especially so that I may put my prints up in my room again. The only ones I have up now are “Christus Consolator,” which you gave me, and two English woodcuts of the “Men of Emmaus.”

But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. - And another one, Those that sat in darkness and the shadow of death have seen a great light, weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

It may be that there is a time in life when one is tired of everything and feels, perhaps correctly, as if all one does is wrong - do you think this is a feeling one must try to avoid and to banish, or is it “the sorrow for God,” which one must not fear, but cherish to see if it may bring some good? Is it “the sorrowing for God” which leads us to make “a choice that we will never regret?”

And at such a time, when one is weary of oneself, one should think with devotion, hope and love of the words: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest upon your souls.”

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up my cross, and follow me.” At such a time one may well think: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

If we let ourselves be taught by the experience of life, and led by the sorrowing for God, vital strength may spring from the weary heart. If only we are truly weary, we shall believe in God all the more firmly, and shall find in Christ, through His word, a friend and a Comforter. And days may come when we feel: “Thou removest my iniquities from me as far as the East is from the West” [sic, Ps. 103:12], and when we may feel something of “the zeal for Thine house hath consumed me” [sic, Ps. 69:9] and “our God is a consuming fire,” when we shall know what it means to be ardent in spirit. “Not always shall hope droop.” Let us not forget “the things which we heard in the beginning.” In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Nothing shall separate us from the Love of Christ, neither things present nor things to come.

[Written in the margin]

Juich Aarde juich tot God omhoog
Dat dankbre tranen uit uw oog…

[Translation of the whole poem]

Rejoice, oh earth, rejoice unto God on high;
Let grateful tears flow from thine eye
For Him, the All-bountiful;
Gaily celebrate this joyful day,
The most beautiful the world
Has ever seen glow on her horizon.
We still can hear the cheering of that blissful night
When the stars with new splendour
And the Host of Angels with new gladness
Rejoiced in the coming of Jesus.

Ik weet aan wien ik mij vertrouwe…[for translation of the whole verse, *see* Letter 79].

Niet altijd zal de hope kwijnen…[Not always shall hope droop…]
`t Hijgend hert der jacht ontkomen…
[Dutch version of the well-known hymn
As pants the hart for cooling streams
When heated in the chase,
So longs my soul, O God, for thee,
And thy refreshing grace, etc.]
O mijn ziel, wat buigt ge u neder…

Last Sunday I was in the French church here, which is a very solemn and dignified and has something most attractive about it. The text was, “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” The sermon closed with: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” After church I went for a lovely walk along a dyke past the mills; the glittering sky over the meadows was reflected in the ditches.

There are some special things in other countries, for instance the French coast I saw at Dieppe: the cliffs topped with green grass, the sea and the sky, the harbour with the old boats as if painted by Daubigny, with brown nets and sails, the small houses, among them a few restaurants, with little white curtains and green pine branches at the windows, the carts with white horses harnessed in large blue halters and red tassels, the drivers with their blue smocks, the fishermen with their beards and oilskins, and the French women with pale faces, dark, often rather deep-set eyes, black dresses and white caps. And, for instance, the streets of London in the rain with the lamps, and a night spent there on the steps of a little old grey church, as happened to me this summer after that trip from Ramsgate.

There are indeed some special things in other countries, but last Sunday, when I walked on that dyke, I thought how good it felt to be on Dutch soil, and I felt something like, “Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God!” For the memory of old times came back to me, among other things how we used to walk with Father to Rijsbergen, etc., during the last days of February and heard the lark above the black fields with young green corn, beheld the sparkling blue sky with the white clouds above, and then the paved path with the beech trees.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Or rather, Oh, Zundert! Oh, Zundert! Who knows if we might not walk together beside the sea this summer! We must stay good friends, anyway, Theo, and just believe in God and trust with an abiding trust in Him who presides over prayer and over thought - who can tell to what heights grace can rise?

Warmest congratulations on today [Their father's birthday] - it is already half-past one and so it is the eighth of February - may God spare us our father for a long time yet and may “He bind us closely to one another, and may our love for Him strengthen our bonds ever more.”

Father wrote that he had already seen starlings. Do you still remember how they used to perch on the church at Zundert? So far I have not noticed any here, but I did see a great many crows on the Great Church in the morning. Now it will soon be spring again and the larks, too, will be returning. “He reneweth the face of the earth,” and it is written: “Behold, I make all things new,” and much as He renews the face of the earth, so He can also renew and strengthen man's soul and heart and mind. The nature of every true son does indeed bear some resemblance to that of the son who was dead and came back to life. Let us not forget the text “sorrowful yet always rejoicing,” “unknown and yet well known,” and write the word *weemoed* [melancholy] as two words, *wee* [woe] and *moed* [courage] and faith in God, who in His time can cause the loneliness which we sometimes feel even in the midst of a crowd, to fall from us. He, of whom Joseph said, “He hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.” And yet Joseph had not forgotten his father, as well you know, but you also know what he meant by his words.

Take care of yourself, give my regards to all at the Roos's and above all to Mr. and Mrs. Tersteeg, and accept a handshake in my thoughts and believe me,

Your very loving brother, Vincent

Tell Mr. Tersteeg not to take it amiss that the drawing samples have been kept for so long. They are for the H. B. school [Hogere Burgerschool (high school)] and there are 30 already there. But they also want to choose some for the evening classes and so they need to keep them for about a week longer. You will have them back as soon as possible.

[In the margin] Send me that page from Michelet again, my boy. The one you sent me before is in the box in my desk and I need it. Write again soon.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 26 February 1877

Dear Theo,
The hours that we spent together slipped by too quickly. I think of the little path behind the station where we watched the sunset behind the fields and the evening sky reflected in the ditches, where those old trunks covered in moss stand and, in the distance, the little windmill - and I feel I shall often walk there, thinking of you.

I have enclosed a photograph of The Huguenot; hang it in your bedroom. You know the story: the awakening on the day before St. Bartholomew's, a young girl, who knows what is going to happen, forewarned her lover and insisted that he wear the insignia of the Catholics, a white brassard around his arm; his refusal because he feels that his Faith and his duty were stronger than his love for his sweetheart.

I don't remember whether I've already sent you that poem by Longfellow which I'm enclosing a copy of now. It has often given me pleasure and will do the same for you. I am glad that we saw the pictures by Scheffer together. That evening I went to see Mager , who boards with the sexton of the Lutheran church, in a real old Dutch house; his room is nice. We sat talking together a long time; he told me about Menton and a Christmas he had celebrated there. Thanks for coming this way yesterday. Let us have as few secrets from each other as is possible. That is what brothers are for.

'It is not over yet,' you say. No, it could not be over yet. Your heart will feel the need for confidence in itself; you will be hesitating between two roads: she or my father. As far as I am concerned, I believe that Father loves you more than she does - that his love is more valuable.

Do go there, whenever it becomes too much for you.

A pile of futile tasks has given me a lot of work today; but that is my duty; if one did not have it, very tenaciously have the feeling for it, how would anybody be able to collect one's thoughts at all? The feeling of duty sanctifies and unifies everything, making one large duty out of the many little ones.

Write me soon whether you arrived safely, and whether or not the walk and journey were too much for you. I am anxious for a letter from you, to hear also if you are going to Etten. A handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

This is perhaps a time when you feel the want of “a Psalm tone from the past, and a plaint from the cross.”

And I seemed to hear in the stillness of the night
His voice so tender and so soft.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 28 February 1877

Dear Theo,
Write again soon when you have a moment; keep up your courage and be strong. I'm enclosing something which I copied for you.

Last night, after I had been at the office till one o'clock, I made a detour to the Grote Kerk [Great Church]; then, I went along the canal and past by the old gate, I finally arrived at the Nieuwe Kerk [New Church], then I returned home. It had snowed, a deep silence reigned over everything; I saw here and there little bright lights in the windows and, in the snow, the black silhouette of a night watchman. It was high tide, and beside the snow the canals and ships looked very dark. It was charming around the two churches. The sky, grey and foggy, only let the moonlight filter through.

I thought of you on this walk. Getting back home, I wrote you what you will find in this envelope. You have De Genestet's poems, haven't you? Read them as often as you can. Once when I was in Paris, Father sent me “When I Was a Boy” and “There Is No Priest Who Explains Him.”

I am writing you hastily from work, à Dieu, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 7 March 1877

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter, be strong and He will strengthen your heart. Today I received a long letter from home, in which Father asked me if we could arrange to go together to Amsterdam next Sunday, to visit Uncle Cor. If you agree I will arrive at The Hague Saturday night at eleven o'clock, and we can go on to Amsterdam by the first train the next morning.

I think we had better do so, Father seems to have set his heart upon it, and it will be nice to spend another Sunday together. Can I stay over night with you - otherwise I could go to a hotel. Write me a postcard if it is all right, let us keep close together.

It is already late, this afternoon I took a long walk, because I felt I needed it, first around the Great Church, then past the New Church, and then along the dyke, where the mills are that one sees in the distance as one walks near the station. There is so much expressed in this peculiar landscape and surrounding, it seems to say: “Be of good courage, fear not.”

Oh might I be shown the way to devote my life more completely to the service of God and the Gospel. I keep praying for it and I think I shall be heard, I say it in all humility. Humanly speaking, one would say it cannot happen, but when I think seriously about it and penetrate under the surface of what is impossible to man, then my soul is in communion with God, for it is possible to Him, who speaks and it is done; who commands and it stands fast.

Oh! Theo, Theo boy, if I might only succeed in this, if that heavy depression because everything I undertook failed, that torrent of reproaches which I have heard and felt, if it might be taken from me, and if there might be given to me both the opportunity and the strength needed to come to full development and to persevere in that course for which my father and I would thank the Lord so fervently.

A handshake and kind regards to Roos,

Ever your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Uncle Cor

Dordrecht, 8 March 1877

Dear Uncle,

When Pa was here the other day, he told me that you had asked him if Theo and I could come to see you someday. I am most anxious to see you and Aunt and talk with you both, and should therefore like to ask you whether it is convenient if Theo and I should take the first train from The Hague next Sunday and spend the afternoon or evening with you. Theo will have to go on a trip soon, and if we do not come now, it may not be possible for a long time.

It was a glorious day when Pa was here recently; we took a walk together, and also went to the museum to see the pictures by Scheffer.

All is well with me; at the beginning of the year there is a lot of work, so that I have to stay until twelve or one o'clock at night.

I like being in Holland again, although the work across the Channel, notwithstanding all the trouble and profound disappointment, was dear to me. It is still - because of the disappointment and relative failure this time, I am deeply attached to it.

It is nice that Anna was able to find a situation so promptly too; I hope she will do well. If you agree to Theo and me coming next Sunday, kindly drop one of us a postcard; with kindest regards to you and Aunt, believe me in the meantime

Your affectionate nephew, Vincent

I should have written you about this sooner, but Pa did not ask me to go next Sunday until yesterday.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 16 March 1877

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter; I will make sure you find a note from me in Amsterdam. I hope we shall see each other next Sunday; it will be delightful to be together again.

Many congratulations on Willemein's birthday - what a nice little girl she is getting to be. She will receive from home The Wide, Wide World, and I am sending her Christmas at the Pole by Bungener.

I am glad that you are going on a business trip soon, it will be a nice change for you.

“I am so lonely and sad,” you say. “And yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.”

It is good to think of Jesus in all places and circumstances. How difficult the life of the peasants in Brabant is, for instance, that of Aerssen ; what is the source of their strength? And those poor women, what supports them in life? Don't you think it is what the artist painted in his “Light of the World”?

You do not know how I am drawn to the Bible; I read it daily, but I should like to know it by heart and to view life in the light of that phrase, “Thy word is a light unto my path and a lamp unto my feet” [*sic*, Ps. 119:105]. I hope and believe that my life will be changed somehow, and that this longing for Him will be satisfied; I too am sometimes sad and lonely, especially when I walk around a church or parsonage.

Let's not give in, but try to be patient and gentle. And do not mind being eccentric; keep yourself to yourself, and distinguish between good and evil for your own sake even if you do not show it outwardly.

“Do not depart from life without having openly demonstrated your love for Christ in some way or other,” Claudius says.

You have had an experience that can make you wise for a whole lifetime, do not forget it. “Nourris-moi du pain de mes larmes, vérité enseignez moi” [feed me on the bread of my tears, truth teach me].

Hate sin; remember how Father prayed every morning, “Deliver us from evil, especially from the evil of sin,” and well he knows.

I am looking forward to Sunday, and hope you will have a good journey. Work is always a good thing, “There is something good in all labour.” I am busy every day until late at night, but I am glad of it.

The storks are here already, but I have not heard any larks yet. The sky is often stormy, and then one sees swarms of rooks and starlings.

The photograph “Mater Dolorosa” which you sent me is hanging in my room. Do you remember, it was always hanging in Father's study at Zundert?

Well, Theo, have a good time, we will see each other soon. I am eager to see the prints you write about; till Sunday, à Dieu, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 22 March 1877

Dear Theo,
I want you to have a letter from me on your journey. What a pleasant day we had together in Amsterdam; I stayed and watched your train until it was out of sight. We are such old friends already - how often haven't we walked the black fields with the young green corn together at Zundert, where at this time of the year we would hear the lark with Father.

This morning I went to Uncle Stricker's with Uncle Cor and had a long talk there on you know what subject. In the evening at half past six Uncle Cor took me to the station. It was a beautiful evening and everything seemed so full of expression, it was still and the streets were a little foggy, as they so often are in London. Uncle had had toothache in the morning, but luckily it didn't last. We passed the flower market on the way. How right it is to love flowers and the greenery of pines and ivy and hawthorn hedges; they have been with us from the very beginning.

I have written home to tell them what we did in Amsterdam and what we talked about. On arrival here I found a letter from home at the Rijken's. Father was unable to preach last Sunday and the Reverend Mr. Kam stood in for him. I know that his heart burns for something to happen that will allow me to follow in his footsteps, not just some of the way, but all the way. Father has always expected it of me, oh, may it come about and blessings be upon it.

The print you gave me, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,” and the portrait of the Reverend Mr. Heldring are already up in my little room, oh, how glad I am to have them, they fill me with hope.

Writing to you about my plans helps me to clarify and settle my thoughts. To begin with, I think of the text, “It is my portion to keep Thy word.” I have such a craving to make the treasures of the Bible's word my own, to become thoroughly and lovingly familiar with all those old stories, and above all with everything we know about Christ.

In our family, which is a Christian family in the full sense of the term, there has always been, as far as one can tell, someone from generation to generation who was a preacher of the Gospel. Why should there not be a member of our family even now who feels called to that ministry, and who has some reason to suppose that he may, and must, declare himself and look for means of attaining that end? It is my prayer and fervent desire that the spirit of my Father and Grandfather may rest upon me, that it may be granted me to become a Christian and a Christian labourer, that my life may come to resemble, the more the better, those of the people I have mentioned above - for behold, the old wine is good and I do not desire new. Let their God be my God and their people my people, let it be my lot to come to know Christ in His full worth and to be impelled by His charity.

It is so beautifully put in the text, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” what that charity is, and in Cor. 13 she “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth.”

My heart is filled today with the text about those on the way to Emmaus, when it was toward evening and the sun was going down: “But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us.”

It is dear to you, too, that “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” keep it in mind, for it is a good text and a good cloak to wear in the storm of life, keep it in mind at this time now that you have been going through so much. And be careful, for though what you have been through is no small thing, yet as far as I can see there is something still greater ahead, and you too will be put in mind of the Lord's word: I have loved you with an everlasting Love, as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. I shall comfort you as one who comforteth his Mother. I shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth. I will make a new covenant with you. Depart, touch no unclean thing, and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God. And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters. Hate the evil and the places where it is rife, it draws you with its false splendour and will tempt you as the devil tried to tempt Christ by showing Him “all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them”; and saying, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” There is something better than the glory of the things of this world, namely the feeling when our heart burns within us upon hearing His word, faith in God, love of Christ, belief in immortality, in the life hereafter.

Hold on to what you have, Theo, my boy, brother whom I love, I long so fervently for the goal you know of, but how can I attain it? If only everything were already behind me, as it is behind Father, but it takes so much hard work to become a Christian labourer and a preacher of the Gospel and a sower of the Word. You see, Father can count his religious services and Bible readings and visits to the sick and the poor and his written sermons by the thousand, and yet he does not look back, but carries on doing good.

Cast your eye up on high and ask that it be granted to me, as I ask it for you. May He grant your heart's desire, He who knows us better than we know ourselves, and is above prayer and above thought, since His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts, as high as Heaven is above earth. And may the thought of Christ as a Comforter and of God as a lofty dwelling be with you.

Best wishes on your journey, write soon and accept a handshake in my thoughts. Goodbye, and believe me, always

Your loving brother, Vincent

I hope Father will soon be better. Try to be in Etten at Easter, it will be so good to be together again.

It may be said of many things in the past, and also of what you have been through: “Thou shalt find it after many days.”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, late March 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the letter which I received yesterday; having some spare time, I answer it today.

I remembered that when we were at the Van der Hoop museum we spoke about the book by Burger, so I am sending it to you by post. You will find in it another wood engraving after Doré, Judith and Holophernes, and one after Brion for your collection. Keep up your collection, and you will have a fine one in time. Please accept my small contribution to it, I am so anxious to keep in touch with you through these little things - whenever I enter my little room the prints on the walls remind me of you. It is an old truth that the love between brothers is a strong support through life: let us seek that support. May experience strengthen the bond between us, let us be true and outspoken toward each other, and let us not have any secrets - just as it is now.

Thanks for your last letter. “It is not over yet,” you say. No, it could not be over yet. Your heart will feel the need for confidence in itself and for unburdening itself - you will be hesitating between two roads: she or my father. As far as I am concerned, I believe that Father loves you more than she does - that his love is more valuable; it is pure gold:

The child puts his faith in his father,
The father is worthy of faith,
For who is nearer than the father,
In the kingdom of God or on Earth.
[Dutch hymn]

Do go there, whenever it becomes too much for you.

This week I received a letter from Uncle Vincent, who wrote that he did not think that carrying on the correspondence served any purpose, because in this case he could not be of any assistance to me at all…There was also a letter from Mr. Gladwell about Harry, who must have suffered agonies and have been sorely tried to have acted as he did.

Today Mr. Görlitz went to Etten to speak to Father about the teaching vacancy at De Leur. I hope with all my heart he will get it. I went to morning service today; the sermon was very beautiful, about Jesus appearing to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias (John 21).

Enclosed are a few poems by Uhland which struck me.
Write to me soon, my boy; kind regards to Roos, a handshake from
Your loving brother, Vincent
Enclosed are some flowers Görlitz brought from Etten.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 8 April 1877

Dear Theo,
I must send you another letter; as you see, I am writing from Etten.
Yesterday morning I received a letter from home in which Father wrote that Aerssen was dying and that he had been to see him, as Aerssen had expressed the wish that Father should visit him. At this news my heart was drawn so strongly towards Zundert that I longed to go there also.

But more about this later. I have just read your last letter, from which I see that your trip is over and you are back in The Hague. Please write again soon, and let us stay close together.

Today I received a postcard from Anna, saying she arrived safely; may she do well. Has it struck you, too, that something has come over her that makes you think of the woman who loved Jesus, of whom the Bible speaks? And thinking of her, I am reminded again and again of Béranger's words:

Dans les palais et sous le chaume,
Dit la Vierge, j'ai de mes mains
Préparé le miel et le baume
Pour les souffrances des humains.
[In the palaces and under the thatch,
The Virgin says, I have prepared
With my own hands the honey and balsam
For human sufferings.]

And how sweet she was with that family at Welwyn, sharing their happiness and misfortune, and never withholding any help or comfort that was within her; also in the days that child fell ill and died. I have seen so clearly how they all loved her. From the very beginning she exerted herself to the utmost, rising early in winter to light the fire with her own hands, even though the first days were not easy for her, and she wrote she often thought, “Without Thou, O Eternal Being, Ah, what would man be on this earth; Who is there in heaven but Thou; Nought delights me any more on earth but Thou.” And how she looked forward to Communion, and went to it, and was fortified by it. And how Pa and Mother love her, as, indeed, we all do; ay, let us stay close together.

Saturday night I took the last train from Dordrecht to Oudenbosch, and walked from there to Zundert. It was so beautiful on the heath; though it was dark, one could distinguish the heath and the pine woods and moors extending far and wide - it reminded me of the Bodmer print hanging in Father's study. The sky was overcast, but the evening star was shining through the clouds, and now and then more stars appeared. It was very early when I arrived at the churchyard in Zundert; everything was so quiet. I went over all the dear old spots, and the little paths, and waited for the sunrise there. You know the story of the Resurrection - everything reminded me of it that morning in the quiet graveyard.

Having arrived at Aerssen's house, I heard from young Aerssen and Mientje, as soon as they had got up, that their father had died that night - oh! They were so grieved, and their hearts were so full. Hein also came very early in the morning. I was glad to be with them, and I shared their feelings, for I too had loved the man.

The aunts send you their love, as well as Jan Doome, whom I also visited. From there I walked with Hein to Rijsbergen and spent about an hour in the house; we read the Bible together. Woutje Prins had also sat up with Aerssen three nights, and had been with him to the last. His passing was peaceful. I shall never forget that noble head lying on the pillow: the face showed signs of suffering, but wore an expression of peace and a certain holiness. Oh! It was so beautiful, to me it was characteristic of all the peculiar charm of the country and the life of the Brabant people. And they were all talking about Father, how good he had always been, and how much these two had loved each other.

Then I walked with Hein Aerssen to Etten, and I am home now, ready to start for Dordrecht early tomorrow morning.

Good-by, brother, it is mail time; a firm handshake and kind regards to all, from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from His Parents to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 8 April 1877

Dear Theo,
You did well to write to us. Bear up, my dear fellow, and always take an interest in life, also for our sakes. Oh, we can make things so pleasant for each other, isn't this a great aim in life?

Theo, what do you say about Vincent's surprising us again? He ought to be careful.

The key was to the churchyard, thanks. Kindest regards from Mother and everybody. Tomorrow Lies will have to leave.

Ever your loving father, T. v. G.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 22 April 1877

Dear Theo,
I received your letter of April 21; thanks for writing so soon. The letter gave me a feeling of joy, like the woman who found her mite again must have felt, for you tell me that Aunt Koos's little writing desk, with the letters from Father and Mother, has been found by Mrs. Roos during the spring cleaning. How carefully and anxiously I looked for it last year, fancying I had taken it with me to England and had left it in one of the houses where I lived in London. I am so glad it has been found, I am so thankful for it. Keep it for me for the present; when I have started in Amsterdam, I shall want it. Now I remember quite well that I left it with Roos when I went to England because there was not much room in my trunk and also because I thought it would be safer than taking it with me abroad.

It seems to me a new proof and a hint - I have already observed more of them lately - that everything will be all right with me, that I shall succeed in the thing I so earnestly desire. Something of the old faith grows in me that my thoughts will be confirmed, my spirit renewed, and my soul restored to the old faith. It will be a choice for my whole life!

Fix your heart and mind upon a good thing and a good work also, and pray for it to the Lord.

Uncle Jan has been to Etten, and says that my little room is already waiting for me. Mr. Braat has somebody in mind for my place, so in May I shall probably be able to put my hand to the plough.

I will hang the prints you gave me in that little room, and so they will remind me of you daily.

Underneath the print after Rosenthal, that monk, I have written: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light; if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up my cross, and follow me - in the Kingdom of Heaven they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”

Underneath the pendant, “The Imitation of Jesus Christ” (after Ruyperez), I wrote what I heard Pa say, “Lord, I long so much to be earnest.”

This morning I heard a beautiful sermon by the Reverend Mr. Keller van Hoorn; this afternoon Görlitz, Mager, ten Broek and I went to the museum to see the pictures by Scheffer - how beautiful they are.

Did I already tell you that Görlitz has been to Etten to apply for the teaching position at De Leur? He came back full of everything he had seen there. Father's sermon was about Jacob who slept in the field at Bethel, and it had touched him so. I wish he could get that place - then he would be able to marry soon.

Last week I had a letter from Harry Gladwell; he is in dangerous surroundings - the birdcatchers there are numerous and cunning. I hope to hear more soon, and we will talk it over sometime.

I know very little about Taine's life; I suppose he has travelled much in France, Italy, England, and also in Holland - so one would gather from his writings. He is surely an artist. I still have the first volume by Burger, Musées.

Well, Theo, I hope you have a good Sunday today. If I go to Amsterdam, I hope to see you beforehand.

To each day brings sorrow for “the sower of the Word” that I hope to become, as one that sows wheat in the fields - and the earth will produce nevertheless a pile of brambles and thistles. Therefore keep one for the other a good endorsement and cultivate our fraternal love.

À Dieu, give my regards to Roos, and receive a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

It is raining here today, and one could almost fancy oneself in London. When I go to post this letter, I hope to walk down the little path behind the station where we walked together.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Dordrecht, 30 April 1877

Dear Theo,
Many happy returns of the day; I hope you will have a good time, and great prosperity in the year that is to come. Time passes so quickly, the days fly by; still, something must remain, and the past is not totally lost. We may become richer and firmer of mind, of character, of heart; we may become richer in God; we may become richer in the pure gold of life, the love for each other, and the feeling “I am not alone, for the Father is with me.”

So be it with us all; that prayer of our father's is a good one: “Unite us closely, O Lord, and let love toward Thee strengthen this bond more and more.”

I hope to see you soon, for I intend to stop off at The Hague before going on to Amsterdam. Don't breathe a word to anyone, for my only wish is to be close to you. Next Wednesday morning I am leaving for Etten where I intend to spend several days; then, I put my hand to the plough.

I wish you had been here yesterday; in the morning I heard the farewell sermon of the Reverend Mr. Hooyer in the French church. The church was crowded, and he spoke with fire and enthusiasm; the sight of that grave, distinguished congregation struck me - the whole had an extremely serious atmosphere. He expressed his thanks for the love he had been shown by many, particularly during the trying times in the beginning, four years ago, when he had to wrestle with the difficulties of preaching in the French language; for he is a Dutchman. Several of the other preachers were here in the church. Yesterday's sermon happened to be on the same words he had preached about that first time. “Now we look through a mirror into a dark reason, now I only know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known myself.”

In the afternoon I was in the Great Church to hear the reverend Mr. Keller van Hoorn; his text was, “Our Father.” In the evening I heard the Reverend Mr. Greeff, whom I also heard the first Sunday night I was here in Dordrecht. May the Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace. The Lord make thee pray high prayers and think high thoughts. The Lord be thy keeper and the shade upon thy right hand. May He be with thee always until the end of the world.

After church I walked along the path behind the station where we walked together; my thoughts were full of you, and I wished we might be together. I walked on to the churchyard at the end of a black cinder track through the meadows --they looked so beautiful in the twilight. The churchyard reminds me of that drawing by Apol in Eigen Haard; a moat surrounds it, and there is a house circled by pine trees - last night a light was shining kindly through the windows - it is an old house, and looks like a parsonage.

Much good may be in store for us in the future; let us learn to repeat with Father: “I never despair,” and, with Uncle Jan “If black is the devil, it is always better to look him in the eyes.”

Write again soon; next Wednesday I shall be in Etten. Do you have De Plancy's Légendes des Artistes, with wood engravings after Rochussen? I hope to bring it for you. Between times I have worked through the whole story of Christ from a catechism book of Uncle Stricker's and copied the texts; they reminded me of so many pictures by Rembrandt and others. I hope and believe I will not repent my choosing to try to become a real Christian and a Christian worker. Yes, everything in my past experience may contribute to it: through the acquaintance of cities like London and Paris and life in schools like those at Ramsgate and Isleworth, one is strongly drawn and attached to many things and books from the Bible, e.g.. Acts of the Apostles. Knowledge of and love for the work and the life of such men as Jules Breton, Millet, Jacque, Rembrandt, Bosboom and so many others may become a source of new thoughts. What a resemblance there is between the work and life of Father and that of these men; I value Father's higher still. May God help us, boy. A handshake and once more the very best wishes from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Kind regards to the Roos family.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 19 May 1877

Dear Theo,
What a fine day we spent together, one we shall not easily forget. I want to make sure you find a letter on your return from Etten. You no doubt had a good time at home too, so write soon and tell me how you spent the day.

I am enclosing something for your portfolio, *viz.* a lithograph after J. Maris, which might well be called “A Poor Man in the Kingdom of God,” and a lithograph after Mollinger - have you ever seen it before? I have not. At a Jewish bookseller's, where I buy all the Latin and Greek books I need, I had the chance of picking prints cheaply from a large batch, 13 pictures for 70 cents. I thought I would take a few for my little room, to give it some atmosphere, which is needed if I am to get new ideas and freshen my mind.

I will tell you what they are, so that you can have some idea of what it looks like now and what I have hanging up. 1 after Jamin (which is also hanging in your room), one after M. Maris: that little boy going to school. 5 pictures after Bosboom. Van der Maaten, Funeral Procession in the Cornfields. Israëls, a poor man on a snowy winter road, and Ostade, Studio. Then Allebé as well, a little old woman on a winter morning fetching hot water and coals with the snow lying on the streets - I sent that one to Cor for his birthday. The Jewish bookseller still had a great many more excellent ones, but I cannot afford any more, and though I do hang up one or two things I am not, after all, making a collection.

Yesterday Uncle Cor sent me a batch of old paper, like the sheet I'm using to write to you, won't it be wonderful for working on? There's a lot of work to do already and it isn't easy, but with steadfastness one should get used to it. I hope to keep in mind the ivy “which stealeth on though he wears no wings” as the ivy creeps along the walls, so the pen must crawl over the paper.

Every day I do some walking. Recently I went through a very pleasant district - when I walked down the Buitenkant to the Dutch railway station one could see men working there and alongside the Ij with sand carts - and went along all sorts of little narrow streets with gardens full of ivy. It had a feel of Ramsgate about it. At the station I turned left, where most of the windmills are, on to a road along a canal with elm trees. Everything there reminds me of Rembrandt's etchings.

One of these days I shall make a start with Streckfuss's Algemene

Geschiedenis , or rather I have started it already. It isn't easy but I certainly hope that taking it one step at a time and doing the best one can will pay off. But it will take time - many testify to that, and not just Corot alone: “Il n'a fallu pour cela que quarante ans de travail, de ensée et d'attention.” [It took only forty years work, thought and attention.] The work of men such as Father, the Rev. Mr. Keller van Hoorn, Uncle Stricker and so many others requires a great deal of study, *and the same is true of painting*. And a man may well ask himself: how shall I ever manage *that*?

For one's own work, thoughts and observation are not enough, we need the comfort and blessing and guidance of a higher power, and that is something anyone who is at all serious and who longs to lift up his soul to the light is sure to recognize and experience. Pining for God works like leaven on dough. May it also prove to be true in the story of both our lives.

Let us just believe in God and, clinging to that belief, confide in Him:

God said: Set there on rock and mountain,
this in eternal writ,
Let all who there behold it
Read what it was He said:
One day hard rock will crumble
The greatest mount cave in,
Yet My covenant with you
In truth it wavers not.
(Evangelical Hymns 188: 1 - 2)
Who but the good Lord leaves to care
And trusts in Him in direst need,
Is safe and sheltered in Him,
Is godly, marvellously spared,
Who but in God on high does trust,
Cannot have built on sand.
(Evangelical Hymn 194 :1)

Doing what needs to be done, and, if we are thrust in the right direction and, as it were, a door is opened for us, proceeding in that direction, we may acquire something of the old faith which God pours into many a heart, into that of the simple no less than into that of the great, into that of Aertsen no less than into that of Father or Uncle Jan or Uncle Cor - the same also happened to Rembrandt, Miller, Bosboom and who knows how many others, indeed, we can discover it in greater or lesser measure in almost everyone, or at least traces of it. He is not far away from any of us.

Is Mrs. Tersteeg still keeping well and have you been round to see Mauve yet?

Keep your spirits up, as you are no doubt doing, good times may be in store for us, if God spares us and bestows His blessing on what we do.

Will you ever be joining me in some little church or other? God grant that you may, and I believe that He will grant it. Meanwhile, let us be grateful for our ordinary lives - if nothing out of the ordinary ever happens to us, and the only thing we know is a good prayer, let us then pray it, as Father once prayed on a New Year's Eve, when it was bitterly cold and the winter not easy for anybody, our own family included. That prayer came from the depths of his heart: “Bind us, O Lord, closely to one another and let our love for Thee strengthen these bonds ever more, preserve us from all evil, above all from the evil of sin. Father, we do not pray Thee to deliver us from the world, but to preserve us from evil. Preserve us from too much self-reproach. Grant us favour in the eyes of those to whom we are most closely bound and in the eyes of those who shall come after us.”

When I see a painting by Ruysdael, Van Goyen, Bosboom, or so many others, I am reminded again and again of the words, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” - of *wee-moed*. [Melancholy]

Will you come to my little study again some Sunday and shall we go together to the little church in Scheveningen again? I hope so.

Regards to everyone at your place and accept a handshake in my thoughts from

Your very loving brother, Vincent

Yesterday, I saw a portrait of Michelet and I studied it attentively, thinking of his life of ink and paper.

I am so tired at night that I no longer get up as early as I would want. But that will pass and I trust I shall be able to force myself to do it.

I hope to be at Uncle Stricker's on Whit Monday afternoon and evening.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 21-22 May 1877

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and for the church certificate. It is a pity you were not in Etten at Whitsuntide: I certainly hope you will be able to go some other Sunday. Was it easy to get that certificate? Thanks for the trouble.

Yesterday morning, I went to church; in the sermon was the text: “I quarrel eternally with mankind,” I heard an explanation that after a period of disappointment and pain, one gets to a time of life where our fervent desires and wishes are fulfilled at a stroke. At ten o'clock in the morning I heard Uncle Stricker speak on Acts 2:1-4 - a very fine, sincere, warm sermon. This morning I am going to hear Uncle again; I must go now, and when I come back I will write you what the text was.

It is rainy today, and it was a long walk along the Buitenkant to the North Church. Near the Schreyers tower, where there is a view of the Ij, the city looked like a picture by J. Maris. The text was I Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”

There are some beautiful churches here. This week I walked to the Zuider Zee; along the dike to Zeeburg, one passes the Jewish churchyard, and I visited it. It is very simple, full of elderberry trees and old headstones with Hebrew inscriptions; occasionally the latter are covered with high dark-green grass.

Yesterday (Sunday) afternoon I went to Baarn with Uncle Jan. How beautiful it is there! We walked through the avenues of pine trees and beeches in the wood, and saw the sun set behind a coppice. You can imagine how beautiful the wharf and the docks and the banks of the Ij are in the evening; for instance, yesterday when we came home, there was such a delightful smell of tar, it reminded me of the pine woods.

Do you know that old English engraving, “The Vicar's Daughter,” which hangs at Uncle Cor's? I was struck by it yesterday; look at it when you go to Baarn someday. Its mood reminds one of “Die Abendglocke” [The Curfew].

This morning, I glimpsed at church a little old woman, probably the chair-renter, who made me think of the etching by Rembrandt where there is a sleeping woman, her head resting in her hand, after a reading of the Bible. Ch. Blanc has said really well, and with a lot of truth, like Michelet, if my memory serves me correctly: *There is no such thing as an old woman.* There is also a poem by Genestet : “*She ends her life alone*.”

Do you think we too shall be at the evening of our life before we know it, so to speak? If we feel the days are flying past us faster and faster, it sometimes does me good to believe so and to remember that l'homme s'agite et Dieu le mène. [Man proposes and God disposes.]

Did you have to go to the office in the mornings during Whitsuntide? I hope you still had a good time.

22 May

Last night I was at Uncle Stricker's, where it was very pleasant. I came home after eleven and sat down to write until twelve; how I wish we could visit here and there together - I wish you had been with us last night. Write soon if you have a moment.

Again I have lots of work this morning; I tell you that it is not easy and that it will get more and more difficult; nevertheless, I hope to succeed, and I am also convinced that the habit of study will come to me through practice, and that my work will improve and become more thorough. I am engrossed in the study of the Bible, but only in the evenings, when my day's labours are done, or in the early morning - after all, it is the Bible that is essential - although it is my duty of devote myself to my other studies, which I do not neglect.

Yesterday at Stricker's they asked me to tell them about London and Paris. When I do, I see it all again before me: all that past time can be of help in my present work. I love so many things over there, and oh! it was so wherever I lived; how I feel it when I walk through the streets of The Hague or in Zundert, for instance - I shall never forget that last visit there.

Before I went to Stricker's I just stepped in the Trippenhuis to look at some of the pictures. You know which. Well, Theo, give my regards to the friends you may meet, write soon, be as happy as possible, a firm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 28 May 1877

Dear Theo,
Today was stormy. When I went this morning to my lesson, I stood on the bridge looking toward the Zuider Zee. There was a white streak on the horizon (against which the long line of houses with the East Church stood out); over it hung dark grey clouds from which in the distance the slanting rain came pouring down.

Yesterday Uncle Jan went to Leyden, so I was alone for the day; in the morning I went to the East Church, in the afternoon I walked toward the seaside, and I have been working the rest of the day. The work does not come to me so easily and quickly as I could wish, but practice makes perfect, I hope; only if I could, I should like to skip a few years, my boy. I think one only gets some peace after one has accomplished a few years of study and feels one is getting on.

This morning I was in Uncle Stricker's study. It is a beautiful room, and a portrait of Calvin by Ary Scheffer hangs there; yet I should like to see more prints on the wall.

Last week, I got as far as Genesis 23, where Abraham buries Sarah in the cave of Machpelah, the plot he had bought, and without really thinking about it I drew a little sketch of how I imagined the place; it is not worth much, but I enclose it herewith.

Yesterday I had a good letter from home and answered it today; I hope you will write soon, I am looking forward to it.

Just now the men from the wharf are going home - such an intriguing sight. I hear them already early in the morning; I think there are about 3,000 of them, and the sound of their footsteps is like the roaring of the sea.

This morning I bought a small engraving, “Tobias,” after Rembrandt, from a Jew for 6 cents.

Uncle Jan sends you his compliments.

How is Mrs. Tersteeg? I am also eager to hear if you have been to Mauve's.

Aunt Mina is gong to Etten in a few days, which will be nice for Mother. Father wrote me that the church has been whitewashed and the organ painted. Yesterday he baptized three children. L — is not yet better, and W. v. Eeklen's wife is also very ill. Did you hear that Uncle Vincent has bronchitis again, and it seems to be very bad? It's lucky that he is not abroad, but in his own house, and that Father and Mother can visit him almost daily.

Well, boy, be as happy as you can; my compliments to the Roos family, write soon, with a firm handshake,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 30 May 1877

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter that arrived today, I am very busy and write in a hurry. I gave your letter to Uncle Jan, he sends you his greetings and thanks for it.

There was a sentence in your letter that struck me, “I wish I were far away from everything, I am the cause of all, and bring only sorrow to everybody, I alone have brought all this misery on myself and others.” These words struck me because that same feeling, just the same, not more nor less, is also on my conscience.

When I think of the past, - when I think of the future of almost invincible difficulties, of much and difficult work, which I do not like, which I, or rather my evil self, would like to shirk; when I think the eyes of so many are fixed on me, - who will know where the fault is, if I do not succeed, who will not make me trivial reproaches, but as they are well tried and trained in everything that is right and virtuous and fine gold, they will say, as it were by the expression of their faces: we have helped you and have been a light unto you, - we have done for you what we could, have you tried honestly? what is now our reward and the fruit of our labour? See! when I think of all this, and of so many other things like it, too numerous to name them all, of all the difficulties and cares that do not grow less when we advance in life, of sorrow, of disappointment, of the fear of failure, of disgrace, - then I also have the longing - I wish I were far away from everything!

And yet I go on, but prudently and hoping to have strength to resist those things, so that I shall know what to answer to those reproaches that threaten me, and believing that notwithstanding everything that seems against me, I yet shall reach the aim I am striving for, and if God wills it, shall find favour in the eyes of some I love and in the eyes of those that will come after me.

There is written: “Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,” and when the disciples had worked all night and had not caught any fish, they were told “go out into the deep and cast your nets again into the sea.”

My head is sometimes heavy and often it burns and my thoughts are confused - I don't see how I shall ever get that difficult and extensive study into it - to get used to and persevere in simple regular study after all those emotional years is not always easy. And yet I go on; if we are tired isn't it then because we have already walked a long way, and if it is true that man has his battle to fight on earth, is not then the feeling of weariness and the burning of the head a sign that we have been struggling? When we are working at a difficult task and strive after a good thing we fight a righteous battle, the direct reward of which is that we are kept from much evil.

And God sees the trouble and the sorrow and He can help in spite of all. The faith in God is firm in me - it is no imagination, no idle faith - but it is so, it is true, there is a God Who is alive and He is with our parents and *His eye is also upon us*, and I am sure He plans our life and we do not quite belong to ourselves as it were - and this God is no other than Christ of Whom we read in our Bible and Whose word and history is also deep in our heart. If I had only given all my strength to it before, yes, I should have been further now, - but even now He will be a strong support, and it is in His power to make our lives bearable, to keep us from evil, to let all things contribute towards a good end, to make our end peaceful.

There is much evil in the world and in ourselves, terrible things, and one does not need to be far advanced in life, to be in fear of much and to feel the need of a firm faith in life hereafter, and to know that without faith in God one cannot live, one cannot bear it. But with that faith one can go on for a long time.

When I found myself in front of the corpse of Aerssen the calmness and dignity and solemn silence of death contrasted with us, who still live, to such an extent, that we all felt the truth Of what his daughter said with such simplicity: “he is freed from the burden of life, which we have to go on bearing.” And yet we are so much attached to the old life, because next to our despondent moods we have our happy moments when heart and soul rejoice, like the lark that cannot keep from singing in the morning, even though the soul sometimes sinks within us and is fearful. And the memories of all we have loved stay and come back to us in the evening of our life. They are not dead but sleep, and it is well to gather a treasure of them.

A handshake and write soon to

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 31 May 1877

Dear Theo,
It is already late and everyone is asleep, but I feel that I must write you once more.
You tell me in your last letter that you dream of going to another city, if you get the chance, and you mention London or Paris. That isn't bad, I think, old son; I love those towns with all my heart, I know that I like certain aspects and that I detest others, or better, that I do not like certain things about the hawthorn hedges, green grass and the little grey churches. No, it is not a bad idea.

Remember only that we both have to reach the cape of thirty to keep us from sin. Since the life that is given us, we have had to fight the good fight and to become men; but, we are not them anymore, neither one nor the other. My conscience tells me that there is a lot more to do to become perfect, we are far from the worth of others, but we have the ability to strive. You know I have the ambition. If I one day have the joy to become a pastor and to acquit my task like our father, I will thank God.

I have strong hopes of success: once somebody who was more advanced in life than I and who was no stranger to Jerusalem - meaning he had sought after it and found it - said to me, “I believe you are a Christian.” It did me so much good to hear this! Whatever you wish for yourself, too, hold firm to the thought of Christ and treasure His word - just as you do. It is good to believe that there is a God who knows what we want better than we do ourselves, and Who helps us whenever we are in need of it. And it is also good to believe that now, just as in olden days, an angel is not far from those who are sad - strengthened unto God - not only to those who are nearly angels themselves, but particularly to those who want the help of a higher power to be preserved from the evil, from the badness which we know is in the world and not far away from us - not far from those who are broken-hearted and dejected in spirit. I have often read the story of Elijah with care; so often has it fortified me even to this day:

And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again a second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, … What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a small still voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts! … And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way …

And this story is not the only one; we read of the angel who, in Gethsemane, gave strength unto Him Whose soul was sorrowful even unto death; of the angel who awakened Peter from his sleep in prison; of the angel who appeared to Paul in the night, and said, “Fear not.” And we, even if we should not see an angel, even though we are not like men of old, should we not know that there is strength from above? This afternoon there was a gale blowing here, and it rained, and I walked to the sea along the Jewish cemetery, and a few days ago I also took a walk to the spot of the Buitenkant near the East Railway where they are working on that sand embankment, *etc.* How beautiful and inspiring is that story of Jesus walking on the sea, Matthew 14 : 22 - 33.

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou little of faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

Believe in God; through faith we may become “sorrowful yet always rejoicing” and ever green, and we need not complain when our youth flies with the maturing of our strength.

Herewith something else by Esquiros. Be as happy as possible, write soon again; compliments to the Roos family and other acquaintances you may meet, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from His Parents to Theo van Gogh

Zundert, 1877

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

7 May 1877

We are having an agreeable time with Vincent, it is very cozy. On Monday morning [14th May] he will leave us. This morning again a nice letter from Uncle Jan; very kind and friendly also from Uncle Stricker; he has found a capable teacher, so that we now start the undertaking with courage, hoping for God's blessing.

We have improved his appearance a little bit with the help of the best tailor from Breda. Would you be so kind as to do another work of mercy and have his chevelure metamorphosed by a clever hairdresser - here in Etten we don't have such people. I suppose a barber of The Hague might be able to do something about it, therefore try to coax him into coming with you to one.

It is not clear how we will manage; the teacher costs 1.50 guilders per lesson, and every day a lesson makes nine guilders per week, and lessons in other subjects will probably also be necessary. We insist that Vincent pays visits to Tersteeg, Haanebeek and Mauve. Please collaborate! We hope Mrs. Tersteeg will be all right. Vincent hopes to arrive in The Hague on Monday afternoon around six o'clock. We wish him all the best!

Mrs. van Gogh to Theo.

7 June 1877

Theo, Uncle [Vincent] loves you so much, I believe that after the disappointment with Vincent, the thought that you may succeed in his old favourite trade gives him a hope in life, something that is so important to him. Write him from time to time; that will give him pleasure, and tell him about everything; he is so nice to us that we should cooperate as far as we can to give him some joy in life.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 4-5 June 1877

Dear Theo,
You remember that night at Dordrecht when we walked together through the town, around the Great Church and through so many streets, and along the canals - in which the old houses and the lights from the windows were reflected? You spoke then about the description of a day in London by Théophile Gautier, the coachman for a wedding party in front of the door of a church on a stormy foggy day: I saw it all before me. If that struck you, you will also appreciate the pages I enclose. [Lamartine's Cromwell. Vincent copied three full pages, part of which is added to this letter.] I read them on a very stormy day last week: it was in the evening, and the sunset threw a ruddy glow on the gray evening clouds, against which the masts of the ships and the row of old houses and trees stood out; and everything was reflected in the water, and the sky threw a strange light on the black earth, on the green grass with daisies and buttercups, and on the hushes of white and purple lilacs, and on the elderberry bushes of the garden in the yard.

In London I had read that book of Lamartine's, and I was very much struck by it; the last pages especially made a deep impression on me again. Tell me what you think of it. These places mentioned in it - Hampton Court with its avenues of linden trees full of rookeries; Whitehall overgrown with ivy at the back; and the square bordering St. James's Park where one can see Westminster Abbey - they are all before me, and the weather and the gloomy atmosphere: cela m'empêche de dormir. [It keeps me from sleeping.]

Were you in Etten Sunday? I certainly hope so, and that you had a pleasant day. I gathered this from a sentence in the last letter from Etten, “We expect Theo probably next Sunday.”

This evening I have to go to Uncle Stricker's. Went to early service yesterday morning, heard a sermon on the text: “Do you want to be healthy?” - how they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. After that I heard Uncle Stricker in the well-known Amstel Church on II Cor. 4: I 8: For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Toward the end there was a passage in which he spoke with much rapture and exclaimed, “But love remains”; how we are tied together by God with bonds that are in His hand, and in them lies our strength, for they are old and do not easily break.

I am very busy, so à Dieu; perhaps I will continue this letter tonight, a handshake from

Your loving brother,

Vincent

Today when I passed the flower market on the Singel, I saw something very pretty. A peasant was standing selling a whole bunch of pots with all kinds of flowers and plants; ivy was behind it, and his little girl was sitting between it all, such a child as Maris would have painted, so simple in her little black bonnet, and with a pair of bright, smiling eyes. She was knitting; the man praised his ware - and if I could have spared the money I should have liked only too well to buy some - and he said, pointing unintentionally at his little daughter also, “Doesn't it look pretty?”

5 June

Yesterday evening I was at Stricker's. M. M., who is engaged to Paul, was also there; she reminds me of Ellen in The Wide, Wide World. Her father was a very clever clergyman, an extraordinary man, an intimate friend of Uncle Stricker's. We walked along the Buitenkant and the embankment near the East railway. I cannot describe to you how beautiful it was there in the twilight. Rembrandt, Michel and others have sometimes painted it: the ground dark, the sky still lit by the glow of the setting sun, the row of houses and steeples against it, lights in the windows everywhere, and the whole mirrored in the water. And the people and the carriages like little black figures, such as one sees sometimes in a Rembrandt. We were so struck by the beauty of it that we began to talk about many things.

I sat up writing late last night and was up again early this morning, it was such beautiful weather. At night there is also a beautiful view of the yard; everything is dead quiet then, and the lamps are burning and the starlit sky is over it all.

“When all sounds cease, God's voice is heard under the stars.”

Write me soon and tell me if that part about Cromwell isn't taken from the very heart of London.

Youth of Cromwell [Quoted in French]

The family soon lost its wealth. He retired to a small estate he possessed amidst the marshes of Huntingdon. The barren, rough and morose character of this shore district, the monotonous horizon, the muddy river, the clouded skies, the meager trees, the infrequent cottages, the rude habits of the inhabitants, were such as to make the young man's nature concentrated and gloomy. The soul of a land seems to enter into that of man. Often a lively, ardent and profound faith seems to emanate from a poor and dismal country; like country, like man. The soul is a mirror before it becomes a home.

One domestic grief overtook Cromwell, touching him deeply in this period of growing ascendancy in his life; one is astonished to see tears in the eyes of a man who had watched, dry-eyed, the unfortunate Charles I being torn from the arms of his children to die. He lost his ninety-four-year-old mother…

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 12 June 1877

Dear Theo,
I received your letter of June 7, and was glad to learn from it that you had been to Etten and spent Sunday there; it was fine that Father and little brother accompanied you back to Dordrecht.
And then you tell me that you spoke with Father and Mother about your plans for the future; when I read that my heart went out to you; I think you are quite right. Launch out into the deep. But I only hope that you will go to London before you see Paris. But we must calmly wait and see how things turn out. I have loved so many things in these cities; I often recall them with tender melancholy, and I almost wish to go back there with you. When I occupy a small place in that large Dutch Protestant church, those recollections will furnish many a topic for sermons. Let us go on with faith and confidence, you and I. Who knows, we may shake hands one day, as I remember Father and Uncle Jan did one time in the little Zundert church when Uncle returned from his journey; many things had happened in both their lives, and they finally felt, as it were, firm ground under their feet.

As soon as you hear any particulars, be sure to write at once. I hope we shall spend some quiet hours together before you go. Though there does not seem to be any immediate opportunity, such a thing can happen overnight. But I repeat, brother, when I think of you, my heart goes out to you. I think it is a very fine plan - my past comes to life again when I think of your future. “Behold, I make all things new,” will perhaps soon be your experience also.

Blessings on you during these days. Take a last good look at the things around you and do not forget them, “walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it,” as the Bible says.

I am very busy every day, so time passes quickly and the days are almost too short, even when I stretch them very little. I have such a great longing to make progress, and also to know the Bible well and thoroughly - and also to know many things like what I copied for you about Cromwell. “Not a day without a line”; by writing, reading, working and practicing daily, perseverance will lead me to a good end.

This week I visited the cemetery here outside the Muiderpoort; in front of it is a little wood where it is very beautiful, especially when the sun shines through the leaves in the evening. There are many beautiful graves and all kinds of evergreens, and roses and forget-me-nots are in bloom. I also walked to the Zuider Zee again; it is forty minutes from here, along a dyke from which one can see meadows and farms all around; it always reminds me of Rembrandt's etchings.

Amsterdam is a beautiful city; today I again saw a little corner for Thijs Maris or Allebé to paint - houses behind the East Church on a little square. I had to speak to the sexton about Uncle's seat in church, and I was in his house; next door there lived a cobbler, etc.; but you will find *it* everywhere, the world is full of it. That sexton reminded me of a woodcut by Rethel I think, I suppose you know it too - “Der Tod als Freund.” [Death as a Friend] That picture has always struck me; when I was in London one could see it in the show windows of almost every art shop. There is a sequel to it, “The Cholera in Paris,” and the “Dance of Death” is also by Rethel.

Sunday morning I heard the Reverend Mr. Laurillard at early morning service; he spoke about, “Jesus walked in the newly sown field.” He made a deep impression on me. In that sermon he spoke also about the parable of the sower, and about “the man who should cast seed into the ground and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and he knows not how.” He also mentioned the “Funeral Procession through the Cornfields” by Van Der Maaten. The sun was shining through the windows; the few people in the church were mainly working men and women. Later that morning I heard Uncle Stricker in the East Church on, “praise not from men but from God,” also referring to the death of the Queen.

This morning at a quarter to five there was a terrible thunderstorm here; shortly after, the first gang of workmen came through the gates of the yard in the pouring rain. I got up and went out into the yard, taking a few copybooks with me to the summerhouse. I have been sitting there, looking out over the whole yard and dock; the poplars and elderberry and other shrubs were bowed down by the heavy storm, and the rain poured down on the piles of wood and on the decks of the ships. Boats and a little steamer were sailing back and forth, and in the distance, near the village across the Ij, one saw swift-moving brown sails and the houses and the trees on Buitenkant and the more vividly-coloured churches. Again and again one heard the thunder and saw the lightning; the sky could have been from a picture by Ruysdael, and the seagulls were skimming the water. It was a grand sight and a real relief after the oppressive heat of yesterday. It has quite refreshed me, for I felt very tired when I went upstairs last night.

Yesterday I visited the Reverend Mr. Meyes and Mrs. Meyes - Father had asked me to - and had tea with them.

When I arrived, his reverence was taking a nap and I was asked to come back in half an hour, and I did; fortunately, I had the little book by Lamennais in my pocket, and read it walking under the trees along the canals, where the evening sun was mirrored in the dark water. Then I went back, and they reminded me of “Winter” by Thorwaldsen. Father and Mother remind me of it even more, but I repeat that they did, too.

The days fly by. I am four years older than you are, and probably they seem to go more swiftly to me than to you, but I fight against it by stretching them a little in the morning and evening.

Will you write soon? It's a pity that Mager will not come now after all. The weather has cleared: the sky is blue and the sun is shining and the birds are singing - there are many of them in the yard, all kinds. In the evening I generally walk up and down there with the dog, and then I often think of that poem, “Under the Stars.” The roses against the house are in bloom, and in the garden, the elder bushes and the jessamine also.

A little while ago I went again to the Trippenhuis to see if those rooms which were shut when we were there were open again; but it will be another fortnight before they are open to the public. There were many foreigners there, French and English; hearing them speak called up many memories in me. Yet I am not sorry to be back here. “Life has quicksands, life has snares,” is a true saying.

How is Mrs. Tersteeg? If you meet Mauve or go to see him, give him my best regards; also at Haanebeek's and Roos's.

Now I must set to work again; I have no lessons today, but tomorrow morning, two hours, so I have a great deal to prepare. I have studied through the Old Testament up to Samuel; tonight I begin with the Kings, and when that is finished it will be something worth while.

Now and then when I am writing, I automatically do a small drawing, such as I sent you lately. I did one this morning representing Elijah in the desert under an orange sky, with some hawthorns in the foreground. It is nothing special, but I see it all so clearly before me, and I think that at such moments I could speak about it enthusiastically - may it be given me to do so later on.

I hope you are having a good time; when you go to the woods at Scheveningen or to the beach, say hello to them for me. When you come here again, I shall be able to show you some fine spots here, too. When I go to Mendes's, I pass the Jewish quarter every day. And now à Dieu, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 9 July 1877

Dear Theo,
Well, what have you got to say about Anna? I was surprised, I can tell you, and it seems to be serious too - and it just might come off. The difficulties connected with occupying a subordinate position - especially if you have to persevere in it for a long time, as she has done for so many years in all honour and decency - are very great, at times becoming a severe struggle making what seems easy, extremely hard.

Yet there is much poetry in it, and such years are a treasure which one does not easily lose, and if, particularly at first, one denies and humbles oneself, one attains a glorious feeling of inner peace. For all that, one could well understand - even if this were so - that at times the future may have seemed dark to her, too. As far as she is concerned, her decision on this step may seem sensible. Also I am inclined to believe she loves him sincerely. I am firmly confident of this, else things would not have gone so far. And therefore with all my heart I hope she will not be disappointed, but that, with God's guidance, she may have found the road toward enduring happiness. May the Lord grant that she might find rest, that dearest sister, and may He bless her, and give her all good things in life. I congratulate you, too, on this occasion - likewise Anna, Father, and Mother.

How are you, my dear fellow? I should have liked to write you sooner in answer to your last letter, but I have such a lot to do, and the work is not easy. Besides, I often go to church; there are beautiful old churches here and excellent preachers. I often hear Uncle Stricker; what he says is very good, and he preaches with much warmth and true feeling. I have heard the Reverend Mr. Laurillard three times; you would like him too, for it is as if he paints, and his work is at the same time high and noble art. He has the feelings of an artist in the true sense of the word, for instance, like Andersen, when he said:

Elke avond kwam de maan, en fluistrend sprak zij mij
Van wat zij in de stille, stille nacht…
[Translation of the whole stanza]
Every night the moon came, whispering to me
What she had seen in the silent, silent night
From her high observatory in the heavens;
She who remembers the ages - she wandered on

High above the foam of the deluge, and shone
On the floating ark with a gentle silvery glow,
As she does now on my solitary window.
And also, when Israel with overflowing eyes
Bowed down by Babylon's streams,
With a sad lustre she cast her rays
Onto the stringless harp hanging on the willows.

The moon is still shining, and the sun and the evening star, which is a good thing - and they also often speak of the Love of God, and make one think of the words: Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

À Dieu, Theo, a warm handshake in thought, good luck to you, and believe me, often thinking of you,

Your so loving brother, Vincent

Herewith another little contribution to your scrapbook, how is it progressing? Regards to the family, and to anyone who inquires after me.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 15 July 1877

Dear Theo,
I am eager to write you again - you will also let me hear from you soon, I hope? This morning I went to the early service, the text was Ephesians 5:14, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” It was raining as I left the house, and also when the service was over; but during the sermon the sun was shining brightly through the windows.

Father had an early-morning service today at Etten, and after that he had to go to Zundert. Later on I heard good Uncle Stricker in the Oudezijds Chapel on the text, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees,” - namely, a warning against attaching too much importance to outward forms and ceremonies without true and sincere religious feeling in the heart and, on the other hand, life without belief in anything more than material things. There were very few people in church, except the boys and girls from the orphanage in their red and black clothes; they filled a great part of the little old church.

When you come here again, I hope to take you there someday. The Oudezijds Chapel is on a very narrow street called the Old Teertuinen, and also the Warmoes Straat. It is a very curious part of town, and reminds one of the heart of London - Bookseller's Row, for instance.

May it be given to me in time to preach as well as many I have heard in the past and hear now. I am trying my utmost to prepare myself for it. I am very busy making a summary of the Reformation; the history of those days is quite stimulating and intriguing.

Last week I spent an evening with the old Reverend Mr. Meyes and met his son, the Reverend Mr. Jeremie Meyes, with his wife, a daughter of Professor Tilanus, and two of their sons; one is here at the gymnasium, and the other is studying to be an engineer. The latter has helped to build those sheds here in the yard (in which they build the ships, like we saw with Uncle that afternoon when you were here) and also he has helped to build that new Kattenburg bridge. It was a pleasant evening and we spoke about many things abroad. He [the Reverend Mr. Jeremie Meyes] is a very gifted man, and has great talent and great faith. I heard him in the West Church. I watched him leave the pulpit and pass through the church after the sermon; that tall, noble figure, that pale, tired face and the noble head, and the hair already mixed with grey, made a deep impression upon me. It seems to me a blessing to be tired from your work in that way.

Perhaps you will go to Scheveningen today. I hope you will have a pleasant Sunday - how I should like to be with you in your little room. I heard from home that you will probably soon visit Mauve's house in the dunes and stay there overnight. In my mind's eye I can see you sitting there, and also know what you two will be taking about.

Mendes told me last week about a very interesting part of the city - namely, the outskirts extending from the Leidsche Poort, near the Vondel Park, to the Dutch Railway Station. It is full of windmills and sawmills, workmen's cottages with little gardens, also old houses, everything; it is very populous, and the quarter is cut up by many small canals and waterways full of boats and all kinds of picturesque bridges, *etc.* It must be splendid to be a clergyman in such a quarter.

The study is very difficult, boy, but I must keep on.

If you see Mauve and Jet one of these days, give them my best regards. Have a good time there and say hello to the dunes and the sea for me. And tell Mauve that the photograph of his drawing, “The Plough in the Field,” is hanging in my little room, and reminds me of him every day.

Are you reading a nice book? There are so many books I should like to read, but I must not. If you can get John Halifax, read it again. Although it's depressing to read, we must not say, “This is not for me,” for it is good to keep your faith in everything that is good and noble. I heard that the man whose life and character inspired the author of this book died not long ago; his name was Harper, and he was the head of a large publishing firm in London.

Once I met the painter Millais on the street in London, just after I had been lucky enough to see several of his paintings. And that noble figure reminded me of John Halifax. Millais once painted “The Lost Mite,” a young woman who early in the morning, at dawn, is looking for the mite she has lost (there is also an engraving of “The Lost Mite”), and not the least beautiful of his paintings is an autumn landscape, “Chill October.”

À Dieu, boy, a firm handshake in thought and believe me, with kind regards to the family,

Your loving brother, Vincent

The room in the Trippenhuis where Rembrandt's “Drapers' syndicate” is hung is open again. Coming from church, I went inside for a moment; right next to the Rembrandt hangs a portrait by Van der Helst.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 27 July 1877

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your last letter. From home I heard that you have visited Mauve already; it must have been a pleasant day - sometime I hope to hear the particulars from you.

Enclosed is a contribution to your collection, three lithographs after Bosboom and two by J. Weissenbruch; I found them this morning at a bookstall. Do you think the one after Bosboom can be the church in Scheveningen? The other one is the Great Church at Breda, and the third is after his picture at the Great exhibition in Paris. Those two by Weissenbruch struck me; perhaps you have them already, but maybe not. Keep right on collecting such prints, and books too. I am making a collection of Latin and Greek themes, also that of texts that report on history, *etc.* I am at the moment copying one on the Reformation, which is quite long.

The other day I met a young man who had just passed his entrance examination for Leyden University. It is not easy - he told me what they had asked him. But I must keep courage; with God's help I will pass, and the other examinations too. Mendes has given me hope that at the end of three months we shall have accomplished what he had planned we should if everything goes well. But Greek lessons in the heart of Amsterdam, in the heart of the Jewish quarter, on a hot and stifling summer afternoon, with the feeling that many difficult examinations await you, arranged by very learned and shrewd professors - I can tell you they can be more oppressive than the Brabant cornfields; which are lovely on a day like today! But as Uncle Jan says, we must always “push on.”

A few days ago two children fell into the water near the Kattenburg Bridge. Uncle saw it and ordered out a boat from the Makassar which was tied at the dock. They dragged the little boy out. Two ship's doctors whom Uncle sent for and I accompanied the men who carried the little boy to the drugstore; every effort was made to revive the child, but in vain. Meanwhile, the father, who is stoker at the yard, recognized the little body, and they carried it home in a blanket. They continued searching for an hour and a half, thinking the little girl had also been drowned, but fortunately that seems not to have been the case.

That evening when I went to see those people once more, it was already dark in the house; the little body was lying so still on a bed in the little parlour - he was such a pretty little boy. The sorrow was great; he had been the light of the house, as it were, and the light had now been extinguished. Though rough people express their sorrow crudely and without dignity, like this mother, one still feels deeply in a house of mourning, and the spell remained with me the whole evening, while I took a long walk.

Last Sunday morning I took a fine walk. First I went to morning service - the Reverend Mr. Posthumus Meyes in the North Church - then to Bicker's Island, where I walked along the dyke by the Ij until it was church time again, and then to the Island Church, where Uncle Stricker preached.

So time passes - and quickly, too - we are almost at the end of the week. How are you, boy? Every day I think of you so very often. May God help us in our struggle to keep straight; you are right in associating with good artists - I, too, cling fast to the memory of many of them.

It is written, “Conquer the evil with the good.” We may strive after that, and God can help us. He can make the days bearable for us with many good things, and He can spare us too much self-reproach.

The afternoon of the accident when Uncle Jan ordered the boat and the doctors to the rescue, I saw him in his element.

Before I go to work, I want to fill this sheet of paper. Generally I get up at a very early hour; before the sun rises over the naval yard and the labourers arrive, my window offers me a magnificent spectacle, I wish you were here. Will it be given me one day to work on a morning such as this to write a sermon on these themes: “He makes the sun shine on the wicked and the good,” or, “Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light,” or “It is right to praise the Lord in the early morning and it is good for the eyes to see the sun” [sic. 1 Chron. 23:30; Eccles. 11:7]. I think the sun never shines more beautifully than in a parsonage or in a church. It is delightful to study the Bible so early in the morning.

If you have time and a stamp and paper, write me soon. Uncle Jan sends you his compliments.

The evening in the dunes which you describe must have been fine. In the gallery at Uncle Cor's the other day I saw “The Evangels” by Bida [Painter of Eastern subjects, pupil of Delacroix's]; how beautiful it is - it is impossible to describe. Much of it reminds one of Rembrandt.

With best wishes and a handshake in thought, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 3 August 1877

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your last letter, which made me very happy, many thanks. So you have been to Mauve's and had a good time. Did you do any drawing while you were there? I was once at Weissenbruch's studio, a few days before I first left for London, and the memory of what I saw there, the studies and pictures, is still as vivid as that of the man himself. When you write again, tell me something about the exhibition which opened yesterday; how many picture subjects could the artists find here on the wharf?

The reverend Mr. Meyes was here a few days ago with two of his sons, and Uncle gave us permission to visit the yard and the workshops; the forges, etc., were in full swing. When we were there together that Sunday, everything was closed. I also visited the training ship, the Wassenaar, with Uncle Pompe and Uncle Jan; that was very interesting, too.

This week the house here was full of people: Uncle and Aunt Pompe and Jan, Uncle Cor, Vincent, and Bertha van Gogh from Haarlem. This last is a very nice little girl.

Last Sunday I was at the early-morning service of the Reverend Mr. Hasebroek, and later that morning in the Oudezijds Chapel which I told you about before. So each day I try my best to get on with my work, especially Latin and Greek. I have already done a great many exercises, composed of sentences that remind me of the old school days, for instance: “which very excellent philosopher has been condemned to death by the Athenians? The very noble and very wise Socrates. Our life greatly resembles a journey and is exposed to very many and very great dangers. The nature of Odysseus, and the grapes of the vineyard.”

This morning I got up very early. It had been raining overnight, but very soon the sun broke through the clouds; the ground and the piles of wood and beams in the yard were drenched, and in the pools the sky's reflection was quite golden from the rising sun. At five o'clock I saw those hundreds of workmen scatter like little black figures.

I often visit Uncle Stricker in his study. He is very clever and possesses a great many fine books; he loves his work and his profession deeply.

Last Monday Father wrote me a very cheerful letter from Helvoirt. I also heard from home that you had a 40-guilder bill from Dr. Coster; that is a big sum, and paying it will remind you of the feeling of having a tooth pulled. If only I could help you a little, but you know that I possess neither gold nor silver. I often have to resort to all kinds of devices to get money for the collections in church - by changing stamps for pennies in a tobacco shop, for instance. But, my boy, by struggling we can keep on, and you know that it is written that the poor will be blessed in the Kingdom of God.

Whenever I see Uncle Vincent, I am struck anew by something indescribably charming and, I should say, something good and spiritual in him; I do not know what to call it. Father has it even more; Uncle Jan, in another way; and it is also in Uncle Cor. Even in a hundred people you would not always find one like them, so let us carefully treasure their memory and their image. Can it be what Fénelon described in Télémaque?

He to whom he had chanced to address himself was a stranger who had an impressive air, but at the same time a sad, depressed quality: now and then he seemed to be thinking of the past; he had something very resolute about him, or was deeply moved and agitated. At first he hardly listened to Telemachus's question, but at last he answered, “You are right, Ulysses has been received by King Alcinous as in a place where they fear God and offer hospitality; but he is no longer there, and your search for him would be in vain; he has started for Ithaca, if the angry gods will at last allow him to come back to his penates.”

Telemachus looked at him fixedly; the longer he looked at him, the more moved and astonished he was. “That stranger,” said he to Mentor, “has answered me like a man who hardly listens to what is said to him and who is full of bitterness. I pity those who are unhappy because I am, too, and my heart is drawn to him without my knowing why. He has received me badly enough - he has scarcely deigned to listen to me or to answer.”

Then Mentor said to him, “Personally, I am not astonished, dear Telemachus, to see you so moved. The cause of your sorrow is unknown to you, but not to Mentor. It is nature speaking, making herself felt - it is she who softens your heart: the stranger who touched you so deeply is the great Ulysses. He is going straight to Ithaca; already he is quite near the port, and at last he again sees the place so fervently longed for.

“Your eyes have seen him, but without knowing him; soon you will see and know him, and he will know you, but now the gods cannot permit your knowing each other outside of Ithaca. His heart has been no less moved than yours, but he is too wise to reveal himself to any mortal in a place where he is exposed to treachery. Ulysses your father is the wisest of all men; his heart is like a deep well - one cannot fathom its secrets. He loves truth and never abuses it, but he tells it only when it is necessary and wise; his lips are sealed to vain words at all times. How moved he was when speaking to you! How he has had to force himself not to reveal himself, what he has suffered in seeing you. That was what made him dejected and sad.”

And now, boy, a warm handshake in thought. My regards to Mauve and others you may meet, especially to the Roos family; have a good time, I certainly hope you find a way to pay that bill, à Dieu, and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 5 August 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for yesterday's letter; it was a good one - there was so much in it, it was quite refreshing to me.

I found a few stamps enclosed, for which many thanks, and then you say you will send a money order so that I can come to The Hague to see the exhibition of drawings. The money order arrived today, Sunday; many thanks for it and for your kind offer, but I am sending it back and will not come, much as I should like to see the beautiful and interesting things which you write about.

I have already refused to go to Baarn, first, because I'd rather spend my Sunday in going to church a few times, in writing, and in studying a little; second, because I should have to ask Uncle Stricker for the money for the journey. He has money from Father which is at my disposal in case of need, but I hope to use it as little as possible. If I go to The Hague, I must also go to Baarn, and then once is not enough - quoi qu'il en soit - I had rather not. Besides, boy, I know you need the money yourself. But many, many thanks, you know.

I do not regret in any way not always having money in my pocket. I do have a craving for thousands of things that, if I had money, I would spend it perhaps on books or other things which I can very well pass by and which would distract me perhaps from my studies. Even in my current situation it is not always easy to resist distractions; if I had books in reach of my hand it would only make it worse. I understand that, the same as the pauper and needy of the world, one can be enriched in God and that this treasure, nothing can take it from you. Perhaps, one day, we will have leisure for all books: we would then have regretted spending our youth only in our personal satisfaction - particularly if we had a hearth and a family which would be necessary for us to take care of and to preoccupy us.

In the midst of life we are near death, that is a phrase which touches each one of us personally, it is a truth we see again confirmed in what you tell me about Carolien van Stockum, and formerly we saw it in another member of the same family. It has touched me, and with all my heart I hope she may recover. Oh! what sorrow, what sadness and suffering there is in the world, in public as well as in private life. How everything is changed in that house, compared to what it was a few years ago, “das war vor langen Jahren, wenn [sic] wir beisammen waren” [that was many years ago, when we were together]; that was the time of Der Wirthin Töchterlein. Longfellow says, “There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak,” but above all it is written, “Let him who puts his hand to the plough not look back, and be a man.” I often look at that engraving after the picture by Ruysdael, “Haarlem and Overveen”; that painter knew, too.

If she should soon recover enough to be moved to The Hague, and if you see her then, remember me to her. If you can find words which will cheer her or give her courage, remind her of how much she is needed in this world and of the right and reason she has to live, especially for her children's sake, say them; you will be doing a good deed. Spoken in time, forceful words from the heart can cheer and comfort.

This morning I was up rather early and left the house about six o'clock to go to early morning service. Then I walked through all kinds of old streets where I wished you were with me; you know the picture (at least the lithograph and wood engraving after it) by Daubigny, “Le Pont Marie” - it reminded me of that. I like to walk on old, narrow, and more or less gloomy streets, with drugstores, lithographic and other printing offices, sea-chart shops and stores with ship's victuals, etc., which one finds there near the Oudezijds Chapel and the Teertuinen and at the end of the Warmoes Straat; everything is interesting there. I just stepped in to say good morning to Vos and Kee, and then went on to the Island Church, where the Reverend Mr. ten Kate, the poet of “The Creation” and author of many beautiful books, preached on Romans 1:15-17. The church was very crowded, and one saw an expression of *faith* written on many faces, men's as well as women's, but written in different characters. Sometimes his intonation and expression were like Father's. He spoke very well and from a full heart, and though the sermon was not short, the service was over almost before one knew it, for his words were so interesting that one forgot the time.

For a change last week I made an excerpt from the journeys of Paul and drew a map of them; it is a good thing to have.

The other day Uncle Stricker gave me a book on the geography of Palestine (in German, by Raumer) of which he had a duplicate copy.

The following is a fine fragment from Télémaque. Mentor says:

The earth is never ungrateful, she always bestows her fruit on those who cultivate her with care and with love; she refuses her wealth only to those who fear to labour for her. The more children the peasants have, the richer they are - if their lords do not tax them too heavily - for from their earliest childhood the children begin to assist them. The youngest tend the sheep in the meadows; those who are a little older have large herds entrusted to their care; the oldest work with their father. Meanwhile the mother prepares a simple meal for her husband

and her dear children, who will come home tired from the day's toil. She milks the cows and the goats, and streams of milk are flowing; she makes a big fire, around which the whole innocent, happy family sits singing of an evening, until the time comes for peaceful repose.

It is more beautiful still when one thinks of it illustrated with etchings by Jacque.

Your postcard arrived just now, thanks for the quick news. I hope you had a good Sunday. Cousin Fanny and Betty and Bertha are still here and are like flowers in the house. Bertha especially is a nice little girl. My compliments to the Rooses and a handshake in thought from

Your loving brother, Vincent

I cannot get a money order, so I must send back the amount in stamps.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 18 August 1877

Dear Theo,
I long to write to you again, perhaps it will be a rather long time before we see each other; at all events I hope we shall be in Etten together at Christmas. It was Aunt Mina's birthday last Sunday, and being there that evening, Uncle Stricker asked me a few things about my work, and did not seem to be dissatisfied…I feel that I have made some progress.

Thursday I had a nice morning; Uncle Jan had gone to Utrecht, and I had to be at Stricker's at seven o'clock because Jan was going to Paris and I had promised to see him off. So I got up early and saw the workmen arrive in the yard while the sun was shining brightly. You would be intrigued by the sight - that long line of black figures, big and small, first in the narrow street where the sun just peeps in, and later in the yard. Then I breakfasted on a piece of dry bread and a glass of beer - that is what Dickens advises for those who are on the point of committing suicide, as being a good way to keep them, at least for some time, from their purpose. And even if one is not in such a mood, it is right to do it occasionally, while thinking, for instance, of Rembrandt's picture, “The Men of Emmaus.” Before I went to Stricker's, I walked through the Jewish quarter and along the Buitenkant, the Old Teertuinen, Zeedyk, Warmoes Straat, and around the Oudezijds Chapel and the Old and the South churches, through all kinds of old streets with forges and coopers' shops, etc., and through narrow alleys, like the Niezel, and canals with narrow bridges, like those we saw that evening at Dordrecht. It was interesting to watch the start of a new day's work there.

I have written a composition in which all the parables are arranged in proper order, and the miracles, *etc.* I am doing the same in English and French, and expect to be able to write it later in Latin and Greek too. In the daytime I have to prepare for Mendes, and so I am doing it late in the evening, or for instance as today, deep in the night or early in the morning. After being in England and France so long, it would not be right if I did not acquire a thorough mastery of their languages at last, or at least keep them up. It is written, “Polissez-le sans cesse [sic] et le repolissez” [Polish it (your work) all the time, and polish it again], and also, “Travaillez, prenez de la peine” [Work, take pains].

How are you, boy? Write soon if you can. You thought I was right in returning the money, didn't you? You know that I would have just loved to come and shake hands with you, and also to see the exhibition, but for the present I do not go out of town on Sundays, I must not.

This morning I had a talk with Mendes about M. Maris, and showed him that lithograph of those three children, and also “A Baptism,” and he understood them very well. Mendes reminds me now and then of the “Imitation of Jesus Christ,” by Ruyperez.

Have you heard anything about Carolien? I had to go to Utrecht on the day of Hendrik's wedding reception; I congratulated them for you, too. It was a very stylish affair; the room was very beautifully decorated, and the bride looked lovely.

In Utrecht I saw the Cathedral and another old church, and the university building, which reminds one of the cloisters near Westminster Abbey. Goodbye, Theo, have a good time, my compliments to the Roos family. Uncle Jan sends you his regards, à Dieu, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 27 August 1877

Dear Theo,
It will soon be Mother's birthday, therefore I am enclosing a money order for 1.25 guilders; I should like it if you and I could give her something together. It is not much, but it is all I have; if you contribute the same amount we can buy a good photograph. You must choose one yourself; “Christ Walking on the Sea” by Jalabert is more expensive, otherwise I should have liked that; and “The Men of Emmaus” by Rembrandt is considerably more expensive. Well, you know what to get as well as I do and will make a good choice, but just write a postcard with the title of what you have chosen. Thanks for your letter, which made me happy, as did a cheerful letter from home I received yesterday.

Yesterday was a rainy morning, so I had to put on my overcoat to go to early service in the North Church. The Reverend Mr. Posthumus Meyes, Jr., preached there on Acts 4:11, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.”

His son came here yesterday and spent some time in my little study; he came to invite me to spend this evening with them, which I readily accepted. Last week I visited the old clergyman, his father. Yesterday morning I was also in the Island Church, where Uncle Stricker preached on Luke 11:28. The afternoon and part of the evening I spent at Uncle Stricker's, so I had a pleasant Sunday; I often thought of what you would be doing.

Will you be going on a business trip this autumn, and will you come to Amsterdam then? I certainly hope so; write as soon as you know anything about it. And we must arrange things so that you come and stay here; there is room enough at the house, and it will cost us only one word to Uncle. We must make the most of our chance to be together. I still have a great deal of work to do today, are you very busy at the office?

Last week a ship was launched in the yard (a monitor The Dragon); it was an interesting sight and a joyous occasion for the workmen. Bicker's Island also has many shipyards, but for smaller vessels. When I go there, I look at them carefully; he who must learn to work must watch the workers, especially if he has a little study right among the workshops; for just as large and small ships are under construction in a shipyard, gradually finished and then launched, so in a study, large and small works are planned, carried on by “patient continuance in well doing,” and finished with God's help.

I am longing so much to see you again, boy; come soon and try to arrange for us to spend some time together. Would it be possible for you to stay here over a Sunday? I should like so much to show you the Oudezijds Chapel and have you hear someone preach there, Uncle Stricker, for instance. Do try to arrange it.

I do not know the book by Daudet you mentioned. Well, I must write my Greek exercises; my regards to the Rooses and to Mauve and Jet when you go there. À Dieu, brother dear, a warm handshake in thought, I wish I could have sent you more for Mother's birthday, but it is impossible. Have a good time, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Uncle Jan intends to go to Helvoirt on the first of September for a week; I hope to take advantage of it by staying up late in the sitting room to write. I can do it now, but Uncle's bedroom is quite near, so I have to be careful; I can sit in my bedroom, but there the temptation to go to bed when it is getting late is too strong, and there is no gas in my little study.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 4 September 1877

Dear Theo,
Enclosed is a short note for A. and L.; please add a word and send them in time for Mother's birthday. (I must tell you that I am sending them to you because I'm afraid of having no stamps by that time, except for a letter home. If you should write later, these can also wait.)

Uncle Jan left for Helvoirt on Saturday and intends to stay away until September 10. It is very quiet here in the house now, but still the days go by rapidly, as I have lessons daily and must prepare for them. I wish the days were longer so I could accomplish more, for it is not always easy work, and even continuous plodding gives but meager satisfaction. Well, I am convinced that what is difficult is right, even though one sees no results.

I am also copying the whole of the Imitation of Christ from a French edition which I borrowed from Uncle Cor; the book is sublime, and he who wrote it must have been a man after God's own heart. A few days ago such an irresistible longing for that book came over me - perhaps because I so often look at the lithograph after Ruyperez - that I asked Uncle Cor to lend it to me; now I am copying it in the evening: it means much work, but I have finished most of it, and I know no better way to study it. I also bought Bossuet's Oraisons Funebres once more, for 40 cents. I feel it is necessary to work as hard as I can. I often think of that phrase, “The days are full of evil”; one must arm oneself and try to be filled with as much goodness as possible in order to be prepared and be able to resist. As you know, it is no small undertaking, and we do not know the result; but at all events I will try to fight the good fight.

Thomas a Kempis' book is peculiar; in it are words so profound and serious that one cannot read them without emotion, almost fear - at least if one reads with a sincere desire for light and truth - the language has an eloquence which wins the heart because it comes from the heart. You have a copy, haven't you?

There is something I cannot resist telling you, Theo - you, from whom I have no secrets - there is much, much that is good and beautiful in Uncle Jan's, Uncle Cor's and Uncle Vincent's lives, but still something is lacking. Don't you think that when the first two sit together, as often happens of an evening, in that lovely, restful room which you also know, it is a sight which warms the heart, especially if one looks at them with love, as I do? And yet “The Men of

Emmaus” by Rembrandt is even more beautiful, and it might have been the same. Now it is almost so, but not quite. Father possesses what they lack, “It is good to be a Christian, to try to be one, to be one entirely, for that is Eternal Life.” Now I will even go further and say, What they lack, their homes and families also lack. Perhaps you will think or speak of the man who saw the mote in his brother's eye and did not see the beam in his own, and then I will answer, That may be so, but this at least is true, “It is good to be a Christian, to try to be one, to be one entirely.”

A few days ago I spent an evening in the study of the Reverend Mr. Meyes, not the old clergyman, but the one whose appearance in church struck me so. It was a pleasant evening; he asked me a few questions about London which I could answer well, and he told me of his work and the blessing which apparently had fallen to his share. In the room hung a very good charcoal drawing representing a religious meeting he used to hold in his home on winter evenings; it was very well done - Israëls would have liked it. Those who attended were workmen and their wives. You also find these kinds of subjects in Doré's book on London.

I also spent an evening at Stricker's, and last Sunday I heard Uncle preach on I Corinthians 3 : 14, “If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.” It often seems to me that I already feel a blessing and a change in my life.

How I should love to show you several things here in the Jewish quarter, and also in other places. I often think of De Groux: there are interiors with woodchoppers, carpenters, grocery stores, forges, chemists, etc., etc., which would have delighted him. This morning I saw a big dark wine cellar and warehouse, with the doors standing open; for a moment I had an awful vision in my mind's eye - you know what I mean - men with lights were running back and forth in the dark vault. It is true you can see this daily, but there are moments when the common everyday things make an extraordinary impression and have a deep significance and a different aspect. De Groux knew so well how to put it in his pictures and especially in his lithographs.

Your letter arrived just as I was writing this. Many thanks. I was greatly surprised to read that Gladwell was at The Hague; give him my best love. Oh! how I should like to see him here; I immediately sent him a postcard asking him to try his very best to come to Amsterdam - do try to persuade him also. You know yourself how interesting it is for a foreigner to see the city, the yard and this quarter, too - and how I should like to show him around as much as I can. I long to see the brown eyes that could sparkle so when we looked at pictures by Michel and others, and talked about “many things.” Yes, it would be fine if he came and stayed as long as possible, and I think that we should feel that our former friendship was sincere and not superficial; as time goes by one does not always continue to feel it so strongly, “but it is not dead, but it sleepeth,” and it would be good to see each other again to wake and bring it to life again. Enclosed is a little note for him; I don't think he should leave Holland without seeing the Trippenhuis and Van der Hoop's; try your best to make him come, at least if it is possible and he would like to.

I must sit up as long as I can keep my eyes open tonight, so I will close this, but if I have any time left, I will fill up the page later.

I hope your acquaintance with Gladwell will deepen and leave some good behind; it is a long time since I saw him last.

Á Dieu, a handshake in thought, have a good time, greet Gladwell for me, and believe me always,

Your loving brother,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 7 September 1877

Dear Theo,
It was a delightful sensation to hear Gladwell's voice in the hall while I sat working in my room upstairs, and to see him enter a moment later, and to shake hands with him. Yesterday we took a long walk through the principal streets and past most of the churches; this morning we got up before five o'clock to see the workmen enter the yard, and then we walked to Zeeburg. We have been to the Trippenhuis twice, and he went alone to Van der Hoop's; he was also at Uncle Cor's gallery (but Uncle was out of town) and went with me to Mendes's. Now we intend to go to Uncle Stricker's (for I am asked there for dinner today, and will risk bringing him with me). I should also like to go with him to Haarlem to see the pictures by Frans Hals, and now he is going there and not to Antwerp as he intended; he'll go to Belgium another time, and limit himself to Holland now.

We also spent a great deal of time in my little study and talked about many things, new and old. Once more as he sits here beside me, I experience the same feeling that drew me to him so often - as if he were a son of the same house and a brother in faith because he loves the “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” Who is our God and in Whose teachings and resurrection we believe, Whose spirit we seek, and Whose love we beg, that it may suffuse our entire being throughout life and that nothing may ever separate us from it - neither things present, nor things to come. The sorrowing unto God will bring about in him what it has brought about in many men - and is bringing about and shall bring about - that never-to-be-lamented choice of the good part, which shall not be taken away, and the one thing needful to choose; bringing forth the fruits of repentance, worthiness of conversion. He is a Christian and will become more and more so. This morning we read together the story of Elijah by the brook Cherith and in the house of the widow woman, for when we were fellow boarders in Montmartre, we found that the barrel of meal did not waste, nor the cruse of water fail; and yesterday evening, the parable of the sower, and more.

Now he will spend some days with you and is looking forward to seeing your little room and the prints you have.

He gave me Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, which is as great an acquisition as Bossuet's Oraisons Funèbres, which I bought very cheaply sometime ago, and a Latin edition of Imitation by Thomas a Kempis which Vos gave me and which I hope to be able to read in the original someday. He read several bits here of Bungener, Esquiros, Lamennais, Souvestre, Lamartine (Cromwell) and has enjoyed the lithographs after Bosboom; we bought one from a Jew, and he has asked me to buy some more for him when I get the chance.

I do hope you have a pleasant evening with him, and I believe that the more you try to find in him, the more you will find.

We talked about many things, and the gist of it was: Many people, arriving at the moment in life when they must make a choice, have chosen for their part “the love of Christ and poverty,” or rather, “give me neither poverty or riches; feed me with food convenient for me.”

The time passed only too quickly for me, and I wished that we might have been together longer; but that was impossible - each of us must go his different way and continue to do whatever comes to hand, according to his call. For my part, I am thankful from the bottom of my heart that it has been given me to see him again and to find in him still what first attracted me. He told me that you would certainly go on that business trip in at least four weeks, so I hope to see you again, too. With all my heart I hope he will keep a pleasant and good memory of his stay in Holland; it was brave of him to carry out his plan in spite of objections.

Give my regards to the Roos family, have a pleasant evening with Gladwell and imagine a firm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

I suppose you have learned that Mrs. Richard is dead; it must have been a fearful night.

Would it not be very desirable to know the Bible well and thoroughly and lovingly?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 18 September 1877

Dear Theo,
The time approaches when you will go on your business trip for Messrs. Goupil and Co., and I am already savouring the prospect of seeing you again. I want to ask you one thing: could not you arrange it so that we could be quietly and calmly together for at least one whole day?

This week Mendes is out of town, spending a few days with the Rev. Schröder at Zwolle, a former pupil of his. So having some leisure I could carry out an old plan to go and see the etchings by Rembrandt in the Trippenhuis, I went there this morning and I am glad I did so. While there, I thought, could not Theo and I see them together some day? Think it over, whether you could spare a day or two for such things. How would a man like Father, who so often goes long distances even in the night with a lantern, to visit a sick or dying man, to speak with him about One whose word is light even in the night of suffering and agony, how would he feel about the etchings of Rembrandt, for instance “The Flight to Egypt in the Night” or the “Burial of Jesus”? The collection in the Trippenhuis is splendid, I saw many I had never seen before, they also told me there about drawings by Rembrandt at the Fodor Museum. If you think it possible, speak about it with Mr. Tersteeg and drop me a line when you are coming, then I can finish my work and shall be free and quite at your disposal when you come.

I never see things of that kind, etchings or paintings too, but I think of you and all at home.

But I am up to my ears in my work, for it is becoming clear to me what I really must know, what *they* know and what inspires *those* whom I should like to follow. “Examine the Scriptures” is not written in vain, but that word is a good guide and I should like to become the sort of scribe, who from his treasure brings forth old and new things.

I spent Monday evening with Vos and Kee; they love each other truly, and one can easily perceive that where love dwells, God commands his blessing. It is a nice home, though it is a great pity that he could not remain a preacher. When one sees them side by side in the evening, in the kindly lamplight of their little living room, quite close to the bedroom of their boy, who wakes up every now and then and asks his mother for something, it is an idyll. On the other hand, they have known days of anxiety and sleepless nights and fears and troubles, too.

Walked back over the big piles of sand near the East Railway - you know where I mean - and along the Buitenkant; the moon was shining, and everything was full of Matthijs Maris and Andersen. From there you get such a superb view of the town and the towers, and here and there lights on one side, and on the other, the Ij and Bicker's Island. And that deep silence, “e'en the withered leaf rustles not, the stars alone do speak.” [Quoted in English: “When the sounds cease, God's voice is heard under the stars.”]

Last Sunday I went to the Oudezijds Chapel and heard the Reverend Jeremie Meyer's sermon on Ecclesiastes 11:7-12: 7:

Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

Rejoice, O young man…and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap…he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting .

In the same chapel I once heard the Reverend Mr. Laurillard in the early sermon on Jer. 8:7, “Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming.” In connection with this he told that once he saw a swarm of birds of passage when he was walking along a road where the leaves were already falling from the trees; and he said that one day every man shall be as a bird of passage, migrating to a warmer land. He treated this subject in the manner of Michelet or Rückert or the many painters who have painted it, among others, Protais, "Souvenirs de la patrie."

Father wrote me that you had been to Antwerp, I am longing to hear what you saw there. Long ago I too saw the old pictures in the Museum, and I think I even remember a beautiful portrait by Rembrandt; if one could remember things clearly, that would be fine, but it is like the view on a long road, in the distance things appear smaller and in a haze.

One evening there was a fire here on the river - a boat loaded with arrack, or something like it, was burning: I was with Uncle on the Wassenaar, there was, relatively speaking, no danger as they had removed the burning steamer from between the other ships and had fastened it to the moorings. When the flames rose high one saw the Buitenkant and the black row of people that stood looking there, and the little boats that were hovering around the blaze of the fire looked also black in the water in which the flames were reflected; I do not know if you remember the photographs after the works of Jazet that were in the Galerie Photographique at the time, but have been destroyed since, "Christmas Eve," "The Fire," and others, this was something like them.

Twilight is falling, "blessed twilight," Dickens called it and indeed he was right. Blessed twilight, especially when two or three are together in harmony of mind and like scribes bring forth out of their treasure things old and new.

Blessed twilight, when two or three are gathered together in His name and He is in the midst of them, and blessed is the man who knows these things and follows them too.

Rembrandt knew that, for from the rich treasure of his heart he brought forth among other things that drawing in sepia, charcoal, ink, *etc.* which is at the British Museum, representing the house in Bethany. In that room twilight has fallen, the figure of our Lord, noble and impressive, stands out serious and dark against the window through which the evening twilight is shedding itself. At the feet of Jesus sits Mary who has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her, and Martha is in the room busy with something or other, if I remember well she stirs the fire or something like it. That drawing I hope never to forget nor what it seems to tell me: "I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Like the figure of John Halifax, who said that he was a Christian, his figure outlined against a white-curtained window in a room at Rose Cottage, I think, on an evening like so many that are described with so much feeling in the book….the light of the Gospel preached unto the poor in the Kingdom of my Father shining like a candle on a candlestick, upon all that are in the house . I am come that they may have life, and that they might have it in abundance . I am the Resurrection, and the life, and he that believeth in me shall never die. Whomsoever loveth me my Father shall honour him, and we will come and make our abode with him [John 14:23]; we shall come unto him and have Supper with him.

Such things twilight tells to those who have ears to hear and a heart to understand and to believe in God - blessed twilight! And in that picture by Ruyperez, the “Imitation of Jesus Christ”, it is also twilight, and also in another etching by Rembrandt: “David in Prayer to God.”

But it is not always blessed twilight, as you can see from my handwriting, I am sitting upstairs by the lamp, for there are visitors downstairs and I cannot sit there with my books. Uncle Jan sends you his compliments.

Last week Hendrik and Marie were here for a day; they have gone now. Monday a telegram arrived, saying that the Madura had arrived in Southampton. The day they left, Uncle took a train to Nieuwendiep at six o'clock in the morning to see them off, together with Mr. Vos, who had come here from Utrecht the night before.

Oh, boy, how glorious it must be to have a life behind one like Pa's; may God grant us to be, and to become increasingly, sons after the spirit and his heart. He can raise man above his nature, His strength may be fulfilled in our weakness .

Have a good time, write soon and come soon, for it is well to see each other again and to talk things over, perhaps this summer we can go and see the exhibition that will be opened a few days from now. Compliments to the Rooses, à Dieu, a handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 21 October 1877

Dear Theo, I want you to hear from me soon again. Yesterday I had a good letter from Etten, from which I learned that you had already been there and are expected back Saturday night to spend Sunday at home also; probably you are there at this moment, and it will be a good Sunday.

This morning I was at early service in the North Church. Afterward I just took a walk through the city, the canals are especially beautiful now that the leaves of the trees have their autumn hues. Then I went to the English church and heard a very good sermon on, “Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed, *etc.* .

I love that little church, and probably many a person there has memories of things and places which are known to me, also. Have you ever seen or read a book by Esquiros, Life in England (or England and the English Life)? I haven't, but I think it must be an interesting book.

When you have a chance, don't forget that fragment by Jules Breton and that other one by Michelet.

Did you have a good journey? Let me hear from you soon. It was a delightful surprise when you came here that evening (N.B. the young woman at the station had already been wondering about our hurried departure). It was nice that we saw Mauve there too.

After coming home I sat up working a long time. That is already a week ago now, the days fly by.

How beautiful that engraving after Ary Scheffer, “The Holy Women at the Tomb of Christ,” is - I am so glad I have it. The old woman especially is splendid.

Have you got something new for your collection? Go on with it, for it is a good thing.

This morning I saw the Minister of Marine, Taalman Kip, who visited Uncle and lunched here; how much character is in that face and in those grey eyes - he reminded me of old Mr. Goupil or somebody like Guizot.

I do not know why, but for a whole week I have been thinking of that picture and the etching after it, “A Young Citizen of the Year V” by Jules Goupil. I saw the picture in Paris, indescribably beautiful and unforgettable. The many pictures about the days of the Revolution - for instance, “The Girondins” and “Last

Victims of the Terror” and “Marie Antoinette” by Delaroche, and that “Young Citizen” and other pictures by Goupil, and the ones by Anker and so many others - what a beautiful unity they form, together with books like those by Michelet, Carlyle, and also Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities. In all of them there is something of the spirit of the resurrection and the life - that lives though it seems dead, for it is not dead, but sleepeth.

I should like to read more widely, but I must not; in fact, I need not wish it so much, for all things are in the word of Christ - more perfect and more beautiful than in any other book.

That etching by Jules Goupil was hanging in my room in London for a long time, in the days when I was so full of Michelet and other French authors; I think Harry Gladwell has it now. I had a short note from him after he arrived back in Paris. On a day like this I should like to walk again with him in the twilight, along the Seine, around Notre Dame. Paris is so enchantingly beautiful in autumn, and that spot above all. How pretty the winter chrysanthemums will be in the little gardens in London - they continue to bloom there all the winter through.

Have you planned this winter to read any books, “coûte que coûte”? Sometimes it is right to carry a thing through and to do it with a will. Uncle Jan has also read widely, and there is much that is fine in him. A spiritual affinity and an attachment and love like that between Father and Uncle is a good fruit of life. Though the fire may occasionally merely smoulder because of the pressure of daily cares and troubles, sometimes it flares brightly and brilliantly and gloriously - for instance, as it did that evening last winter when those two went to the Hoeve together.

De top van de Hekla is wit van sneeuw,
Maar `t vuur in zijn binnenst gloeit eeuw na eeuw.
Gij, schoon het winter op `t grijzend hoofd,
De liefde, Gods vlam, is in `t hart niet verdooft.
[The top of the Helka is white with snow,
But the fire within her glows century after century.
Although it be winter on thy greying head,
Love, the flame of God, is not extinguished in thy heart.]

We have seen what this means, and we know something about it. Such a fire of spirit and love is a force of God's opposed to the dark and evil and terrible things of the world and the dark side of life; it is a force of resurrection stronger than any act and a ray of hope which gives consciousness and security to the depths and the secret of the heart. It is expressed in words which are simple but eloquent, “I never despair.”

Well, boy, I have still some work to do and must wind this up. Have a good time, try to find something in art and in books; it is written, “Seek and ye shall find,” and, “He who needeth wisdom, desireth it from God.” And that is what we need.

How is Carolien? Remember me to her and also to the Roos family, and Mauve and Tersteeg if you meet them; a warm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

The portrait of Johan van Gogh reminds one a little of the “Young Citizen.” It makes me think of “sorrowful yet always rejoicing,” a quality one can find in many things.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 30 October 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your last letter, which I enjoyed very much. Yes, boy, that etching after Jules Goupil is splendid, and with all that is linked to it, it makes a good and beautiful whole, which is a good thing to treasure in one's heart. I almost envy your having read Carlyle's French Revolution; I have read a little of it, but not all - I found fragments of it in a book by Taine.

I am busy making an excerpt from Motley, including “The Conquest of Den Briel,” and the siege of Haarlem, Alkmaar and Leyden; I also drew a map of it, thus making a whole of the two.

I keep my work together, to help me to pass the examinations; I consult Mendes in everything and arrange my studies according to what he has done, for I should like to do it in the same way. The history of the Eighty Years' War is magnificent! Whoever should make such a good fight in his life, would do well. In truth, life is a battle, it is necessary to defend and protect ourselves, and we must plan and calculate with a cheerful and brave spirit in order to make progress.

As we get older, it becomes more and more difficult, and it may rightly be said:

Does the road go uphill all the way?
“Yes, to the very end.”
And will the journey take all day long?
“Yes, from morn till night, my friend.”

But the inmost strength of the heart is developed by fighting the difficulties. On grandit dans la tempête [one grows in the storm], if only we always strive after keeping the heart - out of which all that goes forth into life is good and simple and rich - in God, so that we may have a clear conscience before God and man.

Even as we look at others, so we in turn are watched by the many eyes belonging to that conscience - God's greatest gift and the proof that His eye is upon us, but is the shade of our right hand, and when He delivers us from evil, then that light enters the darkness of life and of the world. And if we feel, as it were, that there is an eye looking down upon us, it would be well for us to lift up our eyes at times, as if to see the Invisible.

I know the history of Frederick the Great, illustrated by Menzel; it is a good acquisition. Go on with your collection; I also know that wood engraving after Jacque, “The Sheepfold.” Don't forget to bring these things with you when you come home for Christmas.

I bought from a Jew a lithograph after L. Steffens; you once showed me the picture - an old and a young clergyman talking together in a garden - it is a good lithograph. The scene reminded me of a picture by Jacquand - I think it is called “The New Vicar” - it has the same sentiment; it also reminded me of “The Novice” by G. Doré.

Old son, the study of Latin and Greek is arduous; nevertheless, it still makes me happy, I have finally dived into studies of which I have always dreamt. I cannot sit up so late in the night any more - Uncle has strictly forbidden it. Still, the legend under the etching by Rembrandt continues to haunt me: “In medio noctis vim suam lux exterit” [the light shines better in the middle the night]. All night, I leave the gas light on low, and often it comes to me to contemplate this poor light in medio noctis, while planning my work for the next day and thinking of the best means to study.

I hope to light the fire early in the morning this winter, the winter mornings have something peculiar about them, Frère painted it in his picture of the workman, “Un Tonnelier” [a cooper]; the etching is hanging in your room, I think.

Remplis mon âme d'une sainte amertume qui te soit agréable, et je passerai humblement toutes les années de ma vie dans ton service, dans l'amertume de mon âme [fill my soul with a holy bitterness as it may please Thee, and I shall spend all the years of my life in Thy service, in the bitterness of my soul; immediately after this, written in English], “yea, even in Thy service, O man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” This certainly is a good prayer, and I thought of it when in simplicity I said to you that it is a good thing in this world to soak oneself in coffee. Man is full of needs, and requires strength and reinvigorating in order to be able to work. What cannot be cured must be endured, and one must use the weapons within one's reach and the means at one's disposal to make the most of one's powers and gain advantage. (You see by the handwriting that it was getting dark; now the lamp is burning.)

One afternoon at Uncle Stricker's, I ate hotchpotch, and on this occasion it occurred to me to make an excerpt from Motley; I'll show it to you at Christmas. Because I have such a frightful number of stone thresholds and church floors and stone stoops of houses under my eyes and feet, I hit on the idea of making those maps of rocky Scotland and colouring them (red and green). I thought of those pickles which Uncle is so fond of and which I have learned to like too. The soul of man is singularly strange, and I think it is excellent to have one - like a map of England, made with loving devotion - and to have in it as much as possible of the love which is holy in all things and believes in all things and hopes all things and suffers all things, and never perishes. This love is the light of the world, the true life which is the light of man. Surely knowledge of languages is a precious possession, and I am anxious to grasp something of it too.

When one eats a crust of black rye bread, it is well to think of the words, "Tunc justi fulgebunt ut sol in regnum Patris sui" [then the righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father], or, too, when one often has muddy boots or wet black clothes. May all of us someday enter the kingdom which is not of this world, where they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, where the sun shall no longer be the light of day, and the moon shall no longer shine to be a brightness, but where the Lord will be a light eternal, and God our glory, where the sun shall no more go down; and the light of the moon shall not wane, for the Lord shall be there as an eternal light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended, and God shall wipe away all tears . And thus we can be leavened with the leaven of "sorrowful yet always rejoicing," being what we are by the Grace of God, and carrying in the secrecy of our hearts the words, "I never despair," because we have faith in God. And then "set your face as a flint" is a good precept in many circumstances, and also "as a pillar of iron or as an old oak tree." It is a good thing to be fond of thorns, like the thorn hedges around English country churches, or of the roses in a churchyard - they are so beautiful these days - yea, if we could make ourselves a crown of the thorns of life, wearing it before men and so that God may see us wearing it, we should do well.

Maybe you know the wood engravings by Swain; he is a very clever man, his studio is in such a pleasant part of London, not far from that part of the Strand where the offices of the illustrated papers (The London News, Graphic, etc.) are, nor from Bookseller's Row, which is full of all kinds of bookstores and shops where one sees everything - from etchings by Rembrandt to the Household Edition of Dickens and the Chandos Classics. Everything there has a greenish tone, especially during foggy weather in autumn or the dark days before Christmas; it reminds one of Ephesus as it is described so remarkably and simply in the Acts. (The bookshops in Paris are very interesting, too, including those in the Faubourg St. Germain.)

Oh, boy, I shall be too glad for words if I can pass my examination; if I can overcome the difficulties, it will be in all simplicity of heart but also in prayer to God, for I often pray fervently to Him for the wisdom I need. And then that He may once grant that I write and preach many sermons - the more, the better - resembling our father's, and finish a work in my life, with every day bringing some improvement.

I spent Monday evening at Uncle Cor's, and saw Aunt and the whole family; all send you their kindest regards. Uncle showed me that book, L'Oeuvre Gravé de Ch. Aubigny.

From there I went to Uncle Stricker's and had a long talk with him and Aunt, for Mendes had been to see them a few days ago (one must not talk too lightly about genius, even though one believes there is more of it in the world than many suppose, but Mendes certainly is a very remarkable person, and I am and will remain grateful for my contact with him). I am glad to say he did not make an unfavourable report about me, but Uncle asked me if I did not find it very difficult, and I acknowledged that I did indeed, and that I tried my best, in every possible way, to remain strong and keep myself alert in all possible ways. He told me not to lose heart.

But now that terrible algebra and mathematics still remain; well we must see - after Christmas I must have lessons in those also, it is necessary. Besides, I cling to the church for aid and to the bookshops; I invent some errand to go there whenever possible. Today I was at Schalekamp's and at Brinkman's in the Hartestraat (that shop of Schalekamp's is very interesting), and I bought a few Teacher's Society maps - there are about a hundred of them at a penny apiece, including the Netherlands in every different historical period. So often, in the past too, a visit to a bookshop has cheered me and reminded me that there are good things in the world.

The picture by Israëls which you describe must have been very beautiful; I can imagine it well from your vivid description. I saw a small picture by him at Uncle Cor's, also a very fine one by Mauve - a shepherd with a flock of sheep crossing the dunes.

I had a nice, cheerful letter from home; I was glad to hear that things are somewhat better at Prinsenhage. How I look forward to Christmas; bring as many things as you can with you, it will be good for us all. Take your time about sending the tobacco, *I have some left*; it is a good and necessary help in studying.

I wrote a long letter to Harry Gladwell, who left today; I sent your regards, too.

When you have a chance, don't forget Michelet, you know, and J. Breton; but you know what it's for, and that there is no hurry and Christmas will be soon enough. Now I must set to work, this sheet is almost covered. Have a good time, and write me soon. Uncle sends you his greetings, also Uncle and Aunt Stricker. Give my compliments to the Roos family, also to Mauve and his wife and to Tersteeg and Van Stockum - how is Carolien?

A blessing on all you undertake, keep courage and good cheer during these autumn days, and may Christmas come soon and you and I be together again before we know it. À Dieu, a handshake in thought and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Saw two photographs of pictures by Gabriel von Max, the raising of Jairus's daughter and a nun in a convent garden; the former was particularly fine.

[Written in the margin] I also have an abridged edition of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and am working all day, every day, so I shall get something done, too.

Do you know an engraving after Landseer, “The Highlander” it is called, I think - a highlander in a snowstorm at the top of a mountain, with an eagle he has shot in his hand?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 19 November 1877

Dear Theo,
I am eager to write you again, because I often think of you and I wish it were Christmas, when we shall see each other again.
Here, the dark days before Christmas are as a long procession at the end of which shines such a light, the feast of the Nativity: the friendly lighthouse behind the rocks, when the water comes crashing against them on a dark night. This feast of Christmas has always been for us a bright spot, and may it always remain so.

For the first time there has been an entrance examination at the university, I, too, shall have to take it here in this city. Besides the ordinary subjects, Latin, Greek, algebra and mathematics, one has to pass examinations on history, geography and Dutch grammar.

I have been looking for an algebra and mathematics teacher; I have found one, the cousin of Mendes, Teixeira de Mattos, who teaches religion at the Jewish pauper school. He has given me hope to cover all the programs before the month of October of next year.

If I should pass the examination, I will be able to congratulate myself, because they told me at the start of my studies that a minimum of two years would be necessary for me to deepen my knowledge of these four subjects. If I succeed in October, I will have made up in a lot less time. May God grant me the necessary wisdom and grant my wishes, that He will allow me to end my studies as early as possible in order that I become ordained, so that I can perform the duties of a clergyman.

The preparatory studies, which precede theological studies proper, which will be exercises in preaching and recitation, consist of history, Dutch grammar, the geography of Greece, Asia Minor and Italy. I apply myself to these studies with the tenacity of a dog that gnaws a bone; I should also like to know the grammar, history and geography of the Nordic countries, particularly those countries that border on the North Sea and the Channel.

At last I succeeded in making a map of Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, rather a large one (on which the travels of Paul are also indicated) and one of England which finally has the quality I wanted - Mendes, for one, sees it - namely that it has been made with feeling and love. The names I put on it came from a map in the Atlas Antiquus by Sprüner Menke, which Mendes has; it is one used for history. Do try your best to get a look at that atlas, and also at the one by Stieler especially, for it is the work of *real* artists.

I spent two evenings at Uncle Cor's looking over old books, including volumes of L'Illustration, in which I found many old friends (what an interesting magazine it is!). Among others, there was an old portrait of Dickens and a woodcut by De Lemud, “ Cup of Coffee” - a young man with rather severe, sharp features and a serious expression who looks just as if he were pondering over a fragment from *l'imitation de la vie monastique* or planning some difficult but good work, as only une âme en peine can do. Such work is not always the worst, for what is wrought in sorrow, lives for all time. “Heureux celui que la vérité instruit, non par des mots fugitifs, mais par elle même en se montrant telle qu'elle est” [Happy the one who is taught by truth, not by fleeting words but by itself, showing itself as it is] is a good saying.

I was also at Uncle Cor's on Aunt's birthday last Friday. They played cards that evening, and as I cannot play, I read in Aug. Gruson, Histoire des Croisades (Pantheon Classique 50 cmes.). It is a fine little book, I should almost say written with the sentiment of Thijs Maris - for instance, when he paints an old castle on a rock with the autumn woods in twilight, and the black fields in the foreground, with a peasant and a white horse ploughing. It also reminded me of Michelet and Carlyle.

I should like very much to have Father know that etching, “A Young Citizen of the Year V.” Shall we send it on or before Father's birthday, with some other small photographs on the subject of the Revolution, so that they form a whole and Father can see what occupies our thoughts so often?

You have heard, I suppose, that sad news arrived from Brussels today and that Father has gone there already. Uncle Jan, who received a telegram from Mother with this information, wired Father and received the answer, “*Condition unchanged, do not come yet, I am here*.” Uncle Jan and Uncle Cor were ready to start for Brussels together, but now they are waiting for more news from Father. Will that long and terrible suffering come to an end at last?

Goodbye, Theo, write soon, boy, if you can. May God keep us in health and give us the lucidity, strength and cheerfulness which we need every day. A warm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

The news about Uncle Hein came while I was writing this.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 25 November 1877

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your nice letter, and also for that page from Michelet; I have copied it on the back of the map of Normandy and Brittany. How noble and beautiful it is - with a peculiar, weird beauty, the finest expression of which we find in that story of Elijah near the brook Kishon and with the widow - it is written in simplicity of heart and simpleness of mind by one who was sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

I am glad you are going to the library to see those maps by Stieler and Sprüner Menke; they have the same kind of beauty. Last night I was at Uncle Cor's and looked at them again; when you look through the Atlas, notice also the maps of Denmark, Sweden and Norway and especially that of Greece.

Father wrote from Brussels, and later wired both the uncles to come. When the letter came, Uncle Jan had just gone to the Leidsestraat , and I went there, too, to bring him the letter, though rather afraid that Uncle might have just gone home and that we should miss each other. On the Dam I found Uncle standing under the light of a street lamp, waiting for a bus. We then entered the parcels express office of v. Gend & Loos there on the Dam and read the letter. Next day they both left for Brussels.

Uncle Cor has already come back. Things in Brussels are very, very sad. When one hears such things - so terrible, and yet they may befall us too, for what are we, and what distinguishes us? - one begins rather to realize why He said, “If a man hate not his life, he cannot be my disciple,” for there is reason to hate that life, and what is called “this body of death.” And with reason it is written, “Si vous désirez apprendre et savoir utilement quelque chose, aimez à rester inconnu at à n'être compté pour rien, et l'étude la plus élevée et la plus utile, c'est de se bien connaître et de se mépriser” [If you want to learn and have a useful knowledge of something, prefer to remain unknown and to be counted for nothing; the most sublime and useful study is to know oneself well, and to despise oneself.]

I had to draw for Mendes a map of ancient Italy, or rather two, for I drew also one of middle Italy, just about from Rome to Naples.

When I saw Uncle Jan standing on the Dam that evening, his figure reminded me of Landseer's “The Highlander” (or is that engraving called “The Mountain

Top”?).

This week I paid a visit to the Reverend Mr. Jeremie Meyes. I went there when it was raining, hoping to find him at home, but he was out; perhaps he had gone to visit somebody else for the same reason. But his wife was at home, and was sewing in a little room, like the little back room in Etten (but this one looks out on the street). She reminds me of Mrs. Jones. They are such nice people; I ran into them lately at a lecture, and they differed from the other people like an old moss-covered apple tree or a rosebush differs from all kinds of unnatural exotic plants.

Uncle Cor told me about the walk he took with Uncle Jan in the Bois de Cambre - you know its gnarled brushwood and trees with their weird forms; the sky was stormy, with big clouds reflected in the pools on the ground. It has been a deeply melancholy journey for them both, and for Father also. On the ninth day there is sometimes a change in such a condition; Uncle Jan will wait for that, and will probably stay until Monday.

The tidings from Prinsenhage are not very favourable either.

Next month I hope to send you the little book about the Crusades by Gruson; when you have read it, we can give it to Father together.

And so Brion is dead too; well, he left some beautiful work behind. Do you know his “Un enterrement sur les bords du Rhin” [A Funeral on the Banks of the Rhine], an old picture? I also like the one at the Luxembourg, “Noah,” so much; how many things has he done! He had a great talent and has made the most of it, and gained by it. There are many illustrations by him in the illustrated edition of Erckmann-Chatrian. “The Invasion” is also one of his most beautiful pictures.

Tomorrow Martyn Aerssen is going to be married, and Father will officiate. Aerssen is a fine man - Brion would have painted him well.

If you find in the store an old lithograph, “A Church Meeting Somewhere in Lapland,” and also the pendant by Meyer van Bremen, “Mothers with Children” - they are hanging at home - please put them aside and tell me what they cost.

How beautiful that portrait of De Ruyter is; it's an old aquatint, which hangs in Uncle's room. I look at it so often; it has a stormy or thundery expression, a look such as I think Cromwell must have had.

At Uncle Cor's I saw a new engraving after Erskine Nicol, “Sabbath,” an old woman going home in the rain; it is very fine and well engraved.

Tomorrow morning I shall go to the little English church I told you about. In the evening it lies so peacefully in that quiet Beguinage, between the hawthorn hedges; it seems to say, “In loco isto dabo pacem,” which means, In this place I will give peace, saith the Lord.

The view of the yard in the morning is intriguing now that the sun rises so late in the dark days before Christmas and the workmen do not arrive until seven o'clock. It is stormy outside; we have quite enough wind and rain these days.

In studying the history of Ancient Rome, I read that if a crow or an eagle landed on the head of anyone, it was a sign that heaven approved of them and blessed them. It is good to know this history; I am happy because it has given me a chance to understand what happened during this time.

Uncle Cor has offered me A Child's history of England by Dickens; I don't remember if I have written you that this book is fine gold, and that I have read notably the description of the Battle of Hastings. I know that when one attentively reads books of this genre, for example Motley, Dickens, and Gruson's Les Croisades, they convey to us a simplified but precise idea of history in general.

Old son, if I can pass my examinations, it will be a blessing! If I pass the first examination with all those subjects which seem simple but are difficult enough, I shall have good courage for what must follow…

I must set to work now, Latin exercises for tomorrow morning and other things. Write me soon if you can, and have as good a time as possible. I hope to have copied a few more of those maps by Stieler before Christmas. Now I am studying, though it may cost a little more effort, *it must be done well*, and I will try to do it the way I see others who take their work seriously do; *it is a race and a fight for my life* - no more, no less. Whoever gets through this course of study and perseveres in it to the end will not forget it as long as he lives; to have done this will be something to treasure.

What a good employee that Wierda is; he is very clever too, I think. There are a great many nice people in the book business; Uncle Cor, Mr. Braat, Schröder here (that is where Mendes gets his books, and I, too, sometimes). One might also count Mr. Tersteeg among them, and you, too, are in it; hold on to what you have, for you are also in the battle.

My compliments to the Roos family; à Dieu, boy, we must try to travel together at Christmas. A warm handshake in thought from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 4 December 1877

Dear Theo,
I have just returned from a visit to the Reverend Mr. Jeremie Meyes. I found him at home this time, but he had to go to the church-warden's committee, so I only saw him for a moment. I also saw his wife and the two youngest children, and Mrs. Meyes read aloud part of a letter from their son, who is at the Naval institute at Den Helder. Now that I myself am in for examinations, I sympathize with others who have to take them; judging from some expressions, I can imagine how they feel. Everybody who wants to reach a social position must go through a time of great difficulties and exertion - success may depend on trifles. If one says or writes a word amiss at an examination, it may cause failure. But it is better to think of those who succeed and overcome the obstacles than of those who fail.

Of course you know that Uncle Hein has died; we must thank God that the end was comparatively calm and that he is at rest at last.

Write me as soon as you can when you intend to go to Etten and if we can arrange it so that we can travel together. I should like very much to use this opportunity to stay over one train in Haarlem, and especially to stay over at Dordrecht - couldn't we go together at Dordrecht?

I had a few writings, which I wanted to keep in good condition, bound; it was a pleasant feeling to get them home. I had it done at a nearby bookbinder's, in one of the narrow streets of Kattenburg where they publish all kinds of religious works. The shop belongs to two brothers whose looks remind me of two things, namely a barn owl and the lion's head on doorknockers.

I have walked a great deal this week; there is no harm in knowing the city well.

Today while I was working I had in front of me a page from the Cours de Dessin Bargue (the drawing examples) part 1, No. 39, “Anne of Brittany.” It was hanging in my room in London with No. 53; “A Young Citizen” was hanging in between. What I liked and admired in the beginning, I like and admire still. The expression on Anne of Brittany's face is noble, and reminds one of the sea and rocky coasts. I should like to know her history someday. She is a real king's daughter. De Lemud would have drawn her figure well.

I should like so much to be with you in Haarlem; anyway, write when and for how long you get leave. Oh, boy! I long so much for Christmas and for home and for you. Bring all the prints you can with you; even though I know them, I shall enjoy seeing them again.

So another year has almost passed by, in which many things have happened to me; I look back on it with thankfulness. When I think over the time I spent at Braat's and the months of study here, upon the whole they have really been two good things. Boy, if next Christmas I might be at the university and had overcome the difficulties at the start, as I am now over the beginnings of Latin and Greek, how happy I should be.

“Indefessus favente Deo” [unwearied by God's favour] is a good state to be in; it is a saying that Mendes loves. He spoke to me about it last Saturday.

Today I wrote to Harry Gladwell, and also sent your regards. I hope that he will go home for Christmas.

Today I sent you for your St. Nicholas two maps from Stieler - the British Isles, and Normandy and Brittany. Put them up in your room for a while, promise that you will; I copied them both carefully, as you know, that of England even twice. On the one that turned out best I wrote the divisions of the country and the names in Latin and changed the surrounding countries to the way they were in the time of the Romans - for example, Lake Flevo instead of the Zuider Zee. In order to do this I went earlier than usual to Mendes's for a few mornings, and there compared my map with that of Britannia, Caledonia, and Ierne in the Atlas Antiquus by Sprüner Menke. I do not need these any more, and it is a good thing for you to have them to look at for a time. At the Reverend Mr. Meyes's I also heard about Stieler's maps; the son who is at the Naval Institute at Den Helder owns a complete Atlas, and one of the things he wrote in his last letter was that he had copied the map of the world.

You know, perhaps, that Uncle Cor also has an Atlas; it is kept in the room where the large picture by Bernier hangs. Some time ago I saw at Uncle's a large drawing by Bosboom, “The Vestry,” also two by Miss van Bosse that were very beautiful, especially the one representing a farmyard.

Along with the maps you will receive Gruson's Histoire des Croisades. I gave this same little book to Mendes, who was glad to have it. Even if you have no time to read it from the beginning to the end, you might look through it; the most eloquent passages will strike you instantly. If the work of Thijs Maris is beautiful, this is, too.

As Uncle Jan sent a box to Etten, I sent Cor for his St. Nicholas a lithograph after J. Maris, representing a little girl returning from the churchyard. There is a proverb, “Quand il n'y a plus rien, il y en a toujours encore” [when there is nothing left, there is always something still], and I experienced it this morning when I thought I could not give a St. Nicholas present to anyone. I have found something for everybody, though it is not much; Father and Mother are getting a map which I drew.

Twilight is falling, and the view of the yard from my window is simply wonderful, with that little avenue of poplars - their slender forms and thin branches stand out so delicately against the grey evening sky; and then the old arsenal building on the water - quiet as “the waters of the old pool” mentioned in the Book of Isaiah - down by the waterside the walls of that arsenal are quite green and weather-beaten. Farther down is the little garden and the fence around it with the rosebushes, and everywhere in the yard the black figures of the workmen, and also the little dog. Just now Uncle Jan with his long grey hair is probably making his rounds. In the distance the masts of the ships in the dock can be seen, in front the Atjeh, quite black, and the grey and red monitors - and just now here and there the lamps are being lit. At this moment the bell is ringing and the whole stream of workmen is pouring toward the gate; at the same time the lamplighter is coming to light the lamp in the yard behind the house.

You will probably be very busy these days, but if you have a moment, write me; let me know as soon as you can when you will go to Etten. Couldn't we go together to Dordrecht, Friday or Saturday before Christmas? One must take as much advantage as one can of the journeys and trips one makes.

My kindest regards to the Roos family, also to the Haanebeeks and v. Stockums if you happen to go there; does Mr. Tersteeg know these maps by Stieler? À Dieu, Theo, if I do not write again before we meet safe and sound, goodbye for the present, a warm handshake in thought, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 9 December 1877

Dear Theo,
I feel I must write you without further delay, especially because I have to thank you for three things. In the first place for your nice four-page letter; it was the greatest treat for me, for it does one good to feel that one still has a brother living and walking on this earth. When one has many things to think of and to do, one sometimes gets the feeling, Where am I? What am I doing? Where am I going? And one's brain reels. But then a well-known voice such as yours, or rather a well-known handwriting, makes one feel firm ground under one's feet again.

Then I must thank you for that number of the Galerie Contemporaine about Edouard Frère; it is very interesting, and I am glad to have it. I also thank you for the ten stamps - it really is too much, and you ought not to have done it. A warm handshake for everything.

Now, I still have something to tell you about St. Nicholas: I received a very good letter from Etten, and enclosed was some money for a pair of gloves. As I still have a pair, I bought something else with it, another map by Stieler, of Scotland alone. At present I can get them separately at Seyffardt's, but probably I shall not always have such an opportunity. I have copied the map, so I have a duplicate, and as I wished to give a Christmas present to Harry Gladwell, I hope to send it to you so you can enclose it for him in the first box that goes to Paris. *One must build the house on a rock*; Scotland, Normandy and Brittany are rather rocky, as you will see if you look at that big map of Scotland when you get it. When I compare my studies to the building of a house, with these months as the foundation of it, then these rocks are the base.

But all this business is in parenthesis - I must still tell you about St. Nicholas Eve. Uncle Cor gave me the Bossuet's Oraisons Funèbres in a very pretty and handy edition, very complete; the beautiful sermon about Paul on the text, “When I am weak, then I am strong,” is included. It is a noble book, you will see it at Christmas; I was so happy to get it that I carried it in my pocket all the time, but I must stop doing it, lest I damage it. Mendes gave me the works of Claudius, also a good, serious book; I had sent him Thomae Kempensis, De Imitatione Christi, and on the flyleaf I wrote: “In him there is neither Jew nor Greek, nor servant nor master, nor man nor woman, but Christ is all and in all.” Uncle Stricker gave me a box of cigars - do you know what I did with them? The

Rooses have always been so kind to me, and I was wondering if I couldn't find something to send them when that box of cigars helped me out of the difficulty. And in the evening Uncle Jan had put my almond-paste initial on the table. I stepped in for a moment at Vos's, where Uncle and Aunt Stricker were spending the evening; I could not stay, however, as I had a lesson from Teixeira from eight to ten.

Uncle Jan spent the evening at Uncle Cor's.

It is a good idea of yours to write those names on the map of Brittany. Bring it with you at Christmas, then we can compare them. You talk about my coming to The Hague on my way to Etten, and I should like to do so - would there be room for me at Roos's for one night? If so, you need not write to me, then I will count on it if necessary. I should love to see your little room again, and the ivy-covered tree; I hope it may happen. I cannot tell you how I long for Christmas. I do hope Father will be satisfied with what I have done.

It was such delightful weather today, and it was so beautiful between the hawthorn hedges around the little church when the twilight began to fall.

This week I had a conversation with Mendes about “the man who hates not his own life, cannot be my disciple.” Mendes asserted that the expression was too strong, but I held that it was the simple truth; and doesn't Thomas a Kempis say the same thing when he speaks about knowing and hating oneself? When we look at others who have done more than we and are better than we, we very soon begin to hate our own life because it is not as good as others'. Look at a man like Thomas a Kempis, who wrote his little book with a simplicity and sincerity unequalled by any other writer, either before or since; or, in another sphere, look at Millet's work or Jules Dupré's “The Large Oaks” - that is *it*.

I hope you are having a pleasant Sunday today - how I should like to be with you. Uncle Jan has gone to Haarlem, so I am alone tonight, but I have a lot of work to do.

You have given me a great deal of pleasure by sending that article about Edouard Frère. Once I saw the artist himself at Goupil's, his appearance is very simple. “Enfin il vainquit” says his biography; so it may be with us sometime - it may happen, and one should say, “I never despair.” One does not get it all at once, and most people who have attained something have passed through a long and difficult time of preparation - the rock upon which their house was built.

Now I must hurry, for I have to set to work so that next week I can probably come to The Hague for a day, for instance Thursday, perhaps later. I must see how I can arrange my work. From The Hague I hope to go to Dordrecht; if you could leave on Saturday night, we could meet at the Dordrecht station. Then I should spend only two nights at Roos's; once at The Hague, I should like to stay somewhat longer there and visit some people.

It is a pity that Mauve is going to move to the country. I hope that we can go there together once more, like that evening last spring; it was so pleasant then.

At best, man is a thief by nature, but under the guidance and blessing of God, he may rise above it; thus the day came for Paul when he could say with boldness and confidence to Herod [sic]: I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were such as I am, except these bonds .

Thanks for your comments about the lithographs. Another thing, you sent "Christus Consolator" and pendant, for which I was very glad.

It would not be a bad thing for you to have that map of Scotland, too; then you will have three out of that atlas, and as the proverb goes, "Third time is lucky." So count on getting it, and don't buy it in any case; I should have liked to send you this one, which will now go to Gladwell, but I think it my duty to make sure he hears from me once in a while; I hope he will be able to go to Lewisham at Christmas. You know the picture by Carp, here in the museum, an early Dutch family; when he saw it, he stopped and looked at it for a long time, and then he spoke of "the house built on the rock," and of his home in Lewisham. I, too, have my memories of his father's house, and I shall not easily forget it. Under that roof dwells much love, strong and great, of which there is something left in him; it is not dead, but sleepeth.

I have hung that page from the Cours de Dessin Bargue, "Anne of Brittany," in my room again. Yes, a man is evil-minded by nature, but in the battle for life he may rise above it; that thought came to my mind after I had been looking at the expression on the face of that royal child, Anne of Brittany, for a long time - the expression reminds one of the phrases, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," "sorrowful yet always rejoicing."

À Dieu, my regards to the Rooses and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

P. S. If I do not hear from you, I shall come Thursday or Friday, December 20 or 21.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 30 December 1877

Dear Theo,
With all my heart I wish you a Happy New Year, may it be a blessed year for you in many ways. The days when you were here were good, but they did not last long. My vacation will soon be ended too, but I am going to stay for at least one more day, as Pa is so very busy these days, and it will be good to talk things over quietly together and discuss how to set about my further studies.

On New Year's Eve Pa will also have to preach in Prinsenhage, for the Reverend Mr. Kuylman fell and hurt himself, dislocating his arm, and he is unable to fulfill his preaching engagement on New Year's eve; and Pa has offered to take his place. Thus Pa will be preaching nine times in ten days.

If you have not sent the postcard in question to Harry Gladwell yet, please don't for a while; I heard he is not in Paris any longer. Today I wrote to his father; perhaps I shall get a reply, and then I shall have something to add to the roll. You forgot to take the etching after Meissonier with you; I shall send it to you one of these days, together with the lithograph after Jules Breton, “The Fields in Winter,” for I refuse to accept it, seeing that it is an indispensable part of your collection.

Last week it snowed, and Cor had great fun with the sled - and I, too - for I went sledding on the road with him and a little girl who was staying with the Stackstroos. Today Father, Mother, Cor and I went for a lovely walk; I wish you could have been with us. Yesterday I went to see Mother's sewing class, which she teaches nowadays in the vestry; it is really lovely - one would like to have a painting of it; already quite a number of children go to it.

By chance I remembered another painting bearing on Brittany, namely Ribot's “La Prière” - a number of children kneeling in the corner of a church at twilight; there is also a big etching of it done by the artist himself, which you may know. Jacque once etched the same subject, but on a smaller scale.

Today I made a list of everything I can remember concerning the French Revolution, to write on the back of the little map of France. I hope to extend the work gradually; for instance, I might write down the most important things about the Middle Ages and the period of the Eighty Years' War, *etc.* One must hold on to what one has seen or what one knows, for it can always come in handy. If you make similar lists yourself, please send them to me once in a while so we can compare notes; it is wise to do this - with knowledge, it is important to hold on to what one has and to make it as clear in one's mind as possible. Especially when one is short of money, it helps to fill up the gaps in this and similar ways.

Regards to the family, and wish them happiness in my name. It may be that on my way to Amsterdam, I shall stop at The Hague to bring you the prints you left behind; but don't count on it. Again à Dieu; very best wishes and a warm handshake in thought from

Your so loving brother, Vincent

[Vincent's sisters had written at the bottom]

My beloved brother,

A happy New Year, and I wish you lots of good luck. We are all quite anxious to hear about the decisions of the “High Court” in the matter of Goupil, and we hope they will prove favourable to you in every respect. How nice it is to have been together again, but it's a pity the little words *have been* must be used, don't you think? Well, I am looking forward to Easter, and I suppose it is the bright spot on your horizon, too. What do you say to that preaching? Isn't it a shame? The Reverend Mr. Kuylman did not even half know what a foolish thing he did, to go and hurt his arm at such an inopportune moment. And now adieu. Wil wants some space, too, so I am stopping in a hurry.

Ever your affectionate sister, Lies

Dear Theo,

My warmest wishes for the New Year. Lies tells me to write that she wrote “my beloved brother” *by accident*. We must go to bed now, good night, a pleasant day.

With much love, Wil

1878

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 9 January 1878

Dear Theo,

I am so anxious to know if you are feeling better that I am writing at once to beg you to send at least a postcard, to let me know whether you are all right again.

I arrived here safe and sound on Monday night. Tuesday morning, I began my lessons again. I intend to do the exercises I have already done all over again - at least as much as I have time for in addition to my other work. Father advised this, for once one is well grounded in grammar and the verbs, translation comes easier. I shall find time for it as soon as the sun rises earlier and it is less cold, so that I can begin early. If one works from early morning until late at night, one can accomplish a great deal in a few months, and so I hope to be ready for the examination by October.

I saw a great many fine drawings at Uncle Cor's, also a new and very clever one by Rochussen, “A Soriée of Diplomats.” Tonight Mauve is showing his drawings in Arti. I should have liked to go there, but probably I saw most of the drawings when we spent that evening at his house. Uncle Cor also had a very pretty picture by Valkenburg, “Interior of a Homestead,” with four little figures.

I will hang those prints you gave me, “Le Four” [The Oven], by Th. Rousseau, and “The Road to Rijswijk” by Weissenbruch, in my room.

I'm sorry that I did not take a later train from The Hague - we could have been together a little longer - but now I hope to see you again in the spring when you go on your business trip. It is very cold here these days, and this morning everything was covered with snow. I am glad Uncle Vincent has gone abroad - he will be in Paris tonight. When you see Mauve, remember to ask him for that poem by Jules Breton, “Le Laboureur,” and send it to me when you get it.

Uncle Cor asked me today if I didn't like “Phryne” by Gérôme. I told him that I would rather see a homely woman by Israëls or Millet, or an old woman by Édouard Frère: for what's the use of a beautiful body such as Phryne's? Animals have it too, perhaps even more than men; but the soul, as it lives in the people painted by Israëls or Millet or Frère, that is what animals never have. Is not life given us to become richer in spirit, even though the outward appearance may suffer? I feel very little sympathy for the figure by Gérôme. I can find no sign of spirituality in it, and a pair of hands which show they have worked are more beautiful than those of this figure. The difference is greater still between such a beautiful girl and a man like Parker or Thomas a Kempis or those Meissonier painted; one can no more love and have sympathy for two such disparate things than one can serve two masters.

Uncle Cor then asked me if I should feel no attraction for a beautiful woman or girl. I answered that I would feel more attraction for, and would rather come into contact with, one who was ugly or old or poor or in some way unhappy, but who, through experience and sorrow, had gained a mind and a soul.

There was also a beautiful drawing by Maris at Uncle Cor's, a view of the city with water in the foreground and a big sky. I suppose you know it. Write again soon, and have a good time. My regards to the Rooses; à Dieu, a warm handshake in thought, and believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 10 February 1878

Dear Theo,
It is Sunday night and I am going to write to you again, for I would so like to get another letter from you; write again soon, my thoughts are so often with you. I certainly hope you have had a pleasant Sunday.

As you know, father has come to see me. That gave me a great pleasure. Together we went to see Mendes, to Uncle Stricker's, to Uncle Cor's and at the two Meyes families. The most agreeable part to remember of Father's visit is the morning we spent together in my bedroom correcting some of my work and a heap of other things. You can imagine how the days flew by. After having taken father to the station, after having watched the train until it disappeared and the smoke was no longer visible, I returned home; Father's chair was still near the table with the books and copybooks we had examined that day; and though I know that we shall see each other again pretty soon, I cried like a child.

This morning I was in the English Church, and met Wierda as I was leaving. We walked part of the way together, and he asked me if I would come to see his room - he lives on the Weeringstraat. I went home with him and stayed for lunch, until about three o'clock, and saw his books and heard various things about his life. Then home again, and translated a page or so from Caesar. This afternoon I was at Uncle Stricker's; I go there rather often now that Uncle Jan is out of town and the house is lonely again with Father gone.

It is foggy here today; luckily the weather was fine during Father's visit so that we could take many walks. Probably Uncle Jan will come back on Tuesday.

I suppose you are very busy at the beginning of the year, like most people; things are becoming more and more serious for me as the examination draws nearer; I shall be glad when it gets light earlier in the morning.

Has Father thought of giving you that photograph of that picture by Maris? The wood engraving after Van Goyen, “Dordrecht,” is hanging in its place; the other day I went to see the picture again at the museum - it is very, very fine. When you come back here I should like to look through the etchings by Dürer at the museum with you, the way we did Rembrandt's last time. Scheveningen must be beautiful these grey days, do you go there often? Perhaps it is like the picture by Ruysdael in the museum at The Hague. Have you got the lithograph of it which appeared in the Kunstkronyk long ago? It is a very good one.

How is Mauve? I hope he is well; have you seen him lately?

I have lessons from Uncle Stricker twice a week now. I profit a great deal from it, as Uncle is very clever, and I am glad he has found time for it.

Well, boy, a warm handshake in thought; I must set to work, write soon and believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Remember me to Mauve when you see him. Good night, boy, I have been writing until twelve o'clock.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 18 February 1878

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter of February 17; it made me very happy, as I had been looking forward to it so much. And I am answering it at once, boy, for I think of you and long for you so often, and every morning the prints on the wall of my little study remind me of you - “Christus Consolator”; the woodcut after Van Goyen, “Dordrecht”; “Le Four” by Rousseau, *etc.* - for I received them all from you. So the pot was calling the kettle black when you wrote me that I ought not to send you a print for your room sometimes when I find one that I think you will like. In my turn I say, Enough of that; but tell me if you have got some new acquisitions for your collection lately.

Last evening at Uncle Cor's I saw a whole volume of that magazine, L'Art; you have the issue with the wood engravings after Corot. I was especially struck by wood engravings after drawings by Millet, including “Falling Leaves,” “The Ravens' Wedding,” “Donkeys in a Marsh,” “The Woodcutters,” “Housewife Sweeping Her Room,” “A Farm Courtyard” (night effect), *etc.* Also by an etching after Corot, “The Dune”; and “St. John's Eve” after Breton; and others by Chauvin; and another after Millet, “The Beans.”

Last Sunday Uncle Jan and I spent the whole afternoon and evening at Uncle Cor's. It was a very pleasant day for me. I got up very early and went to the French church in the morning. A clergyman from the neighborhood of Lyons preached here - he had come to collect money for an evangelical mission. His sermon was mainly stories from the lives of the working people in the factories, and though he was not particularly eloquent and one could even hear that he spoke with some difficulty and effort, his words were still effective because they came from the heart - only such are powerful enough to touch other hearts.

At one o'clock I had to be at the Sunday school of an English clergyman, Adler, in the Barndesteeg; he has a small but very neat old church there. However, the school was held in a little room where even at that hour, in the middle of the day, the gaslight had to be turned on. There were perhaps twenty children from that poor section. Though he is a foreigner, he preaches in Dutch (but the service is in English); he teaches his Bible class in Dutch too, and does it very well. I had brought with me a sketch of the map of the Holy Land which I made for Father's birthday, in red crayon and on strong brown paper, and I gave it to him; I thought that little room would be a nice place for it, and I am glad it hangs on the wall there now. I had met him at Mr. McFarlane's, the incumbent of the English church in the Beguinage whom I had ventured to call on; he received me kindly and I hope to repeat my visit someday.

Besides this English clergyman, I also ventured to call on the Reverend Mr. Gagnebin. He took it in good part, and told me to come again some evening; as he suggested tonight, I must go there in a little while. I hope to write you all about it. Father has also advised me to try and make some acquaintances. I was so glad to speak French and English again - it is a peculiar sensation when one hasn't for a long time.

The last two mornings I got up very early to work on a sketch of the map of Paul's travels which I had begun and have now finished; it looks well now (with the names in French), even better than those I made for Father and for my own room. I plan to give it to the Reverend Mr. Gagnebin, as I want to emphasize that visit if possible: he is a learned man who can perhaps give me some good advice later on if he realizes that my intentions are serious….

I have just been to Gagnebin's, but I was told that he was too busy to receive me (yet he had fixed this hour and this day for my visit). I heard music in the house, so probably there was something going on. I left what I had made for Gagnebin with the servant, requesting that it be given to him. I want to do such things now and then, for it certainly is very doubtful that I shall ever succeed, I mean, shall ever pass all the examinations. Five years at the least is a very long time; if one begins earlier, it is so much easier. It is true I can work longer and concentrate better, and things that many others care about have no attraction for me; but, after all, the work costs me great effort. Even if I fail, I want to leave my mark here and there behind me.

There are so many, many things one has to know, and though they try to reassure me, it constantly gives me a terribly anxious feeling. There is no remedy but to set to work again, since it is clearly my *duty* to do this, whatever it costs. So I must push on, for standing still or going back is out of the question: it would make things even more difficult and cause confusion - and the end would mean the necessity of beginning all over again.

I had a nice letter from home; the journey seems not to have done Father any harm. It is pretty late, and I am not a little tired, for I have walked quite a distance today. Have a good time, and blessings on your work and on all you undertake; write soon if you can. My regards to all at the Rooses', and a warm handshake in thought. Good night and sleep well, believe me,

Your loving brother,
Vincent

Tuesday morning. It is beautiful weather this morning, I have to go to Mendes's in a few minutes.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 3 March 1878

My dear Theo,
It is time to write to you again. How I should have liked to be with you today. It is such lovely weather here and one has the feeling that spring is on its way. The lark can probably already be heard in the country, but that's unlikely to happen in the city, unless one can detect its call in the voice of some old clergyman, whose words come from a heart that's in tune with the lark's.

Heard the Reverend Mr. Laurillard preaching this morning in the Oudezjide Chapel. Uncle Stricker was at church as well and I had coffee with him. Uncle Jan had gone to the Nieuwe Diep this morning but is back again now. Then to a Sunday School in the Barndesteeg and then walked around the outer embankments and, in passing, called in on three Roman Catholic churches.

Went round to see Vos last night, who is none too well. It was such a sad sight to find him sitting there moodily in front of the window, hollow-eyed and with his feet on a stove - he is afflicted with cold feet. Kee too is so pale and looks so tired. I went on from them to Uncle Cor's. He has had the salon repapered and a new grey carpet laid on the floor. Now those beautiful bookcases with the complete Gazette des Beaux Arts, etc., in their red bindings, stand out better than before. Uncle told me that Daubigny had died. I freely confess that I was downcast when I heard the news, just as I was when I heard that Brion had died (his Bénédicité hangs in my room), because the work of such men, if it is understood, touches us more deeply than one realizes. It must be good to die in the knowledge that one has done some truthful work and to know that, as a result, one will live on in the memory of at least a few and leave a good example for those who come after. A work that is good may not last forever, but the thought expressed by it will, and the work itself will surely survive for a very long time, and those who come later can do no more than follow in the footsteps of such predecessors and copy their example.

Speaking of good works, would you like to have a Flemish Imitation of Christ? I hope to send it to you shortly, in a small book which, if need be, can easily be slipped into the pocket.

When Uncle told me about Daubigny, I thought of his etchings after Ruysdael (Le buisson and Le coup de soleil), and Uncle has promised to get hold of them, as he did not know them at all.

I was at the Reverend Mr. Gagnebin's last Monday night and met his wife and daughter as well and also went to his study, where we talked until about 11 o'clock. He told me, amongst other things, 'That at certain times in his life it did him good to forget himself completely and to throw himself into his work without reservation, that he then achieved a great deal and later felt strengthened and further along the road on which he had set out, and enlightened in spirit. For all that, no one knows even how much effort his sermons cost him.'

I have worked my way through the history of the Netherlands and have done an abstract of 30 closely written pages. (I was pleased to come across the battle of Waterloo and the 10-day campaign in it once again.) Do you know that Rochussen once painted the siege of Leyden? I mean the picture owned by Mr. De Vos. Am now also working on general history.

I am looking forward more than a little to your coming here again. Do try your best to stay as long as possible. And if you can, write again soon, for you know how much pleasure your letters always give me.

Have you read anything good lately? Be sure to get hold of the works of George Eliot somehow, you won't be sorry if you do, *Adam Bede, Silas Marner*, Felix Holt, Romola (the life of Savonarola), *Scenes from Clerical Life*. I shall reread them once more. Both the Reverend Mr. McFarlane and Adler spoke to me about them, that is, they advised me to read them.

Wrote to Harry Gladwell this week, as he had not replied to my last letter and I so wanted to know what he was doing and what he was planning to do. I am still hoping he will become a clergyman, and if he does he will do a good job, of that I am certain. But it won't be an easy thing for him to achieve.

Did you ever see an original etching by Millet of a man wheeling a barrow full of manure into a garden on a day like today, in early spring? And remember as well that he made an etching, `*Les becheurs'*. If you ever do come across it you are unlikely to forget it in a hurry. I was thinking of the first this morning when Uncle Stricker was looking for texts in which the word manure, or dung, appears, e.g., `Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it'. Made a list recently of all the pictures by Brion I could remember. When you come here, you must tell me whether I have forgotten many of them. Lord, keep my memory green! That is something one should say over and over again.

Last Sunday went to see Cousin Vrijdag at the timber yards. There are still 7 children at home, a pleasant little bunch, most of them very young. Could you perhaps give me notice somewhat in advance of your arrival? Then I can do some of my work beforehand so that we'll have more time to spend together.

Goodbye, a handshake in my thoughts, and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Uncle Jan sends you his regards.
Remember me to everyone at your house.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, 3 April 1878

[In this letter Vincent in his haste omits the “Dear Theo.”]
I have been thinking over what we were discussing, and the saying sprang to mind, `Nous sommes aujourd'hui ce que nous étions hier.' [We are today what we were yesterday] That does not mean that one must stand still and may not try to improve oneself, on the contrary, it is a compelling reason for doing so and for being glad to do so. But to be true to the saying, one must not backslide, and once one has started to look at things freely and openly, one must not face about or stray.

Those who said: “We are the same today as we were yesterday,” were “honnêtes hommes” [honest men], as is apparent from the constitution they drew up, which will remain for all time and of which it has been well said that it was written “avec le rayon d'en haut et d'un doigt de feu.” [With a ray of light from on high and a fiery finger”].

It is a good thing to be an “honnêtes homme” and to try increasingly to be one, partially and wholly, and one does well to understand that this entails being an “homme intéreur et spirituel.” [An inward and spiritual man].

He who is firmly convinced he is one of their band will always go about his business quietly and calmly, never doubting that all must end well. There once was a man who went to church and asked: “Can it be that my ardour has deceived me, that I have taken a wrong turning and managed things badly? Oh! if only I could be rid of this doubt and know for certain I shall come out victorious and succeed in the end.” And then a voice answered him: “And if you were certain, what would you do then? Act now as if you were certain and you will not be disappointed.” Then the man went on his way, not unbelieving but believing, and returned to his work no longer doubting or wavering.

As for being an `homme intéreur et spirituel' might one not be able to develop into one through knowledge of history in general and of certain individuals from all ages in particular, from the history of the Bible to that of the Revolution and from the Odyssey to the books of Dickens and Michelet? And could we not learn something from the work of such men as Rembrandt and from Breton's Mauvaises Herbes or Millet's The Hours of the Day, Le Bénédicité by de Groux or Brion, or The Conscript by de Groux (or else by Conscience) or his Apothécaire or The Large Oaks, by Dupré, or even by Michel's mills and sandy plains?

It is by continually holding fast to these thoughts and deeds that we are filled with a good leaven at the last, that of being sorrowful yet always rejoicing, which will become apparent when our lives have come to fruition, bearing the fruits of good works.

Le rayon d'en haut does not always shine upon us and may well be hidden behind clouds, but without that light a man cannot live and is worth nothing and can do no good, and those who claim that man can live without faith in that higher light and need not trouble to acquire it, are sure to have their hopes dashed.

We have talked a good deal about our duty and how we may attain the right goal, and we have properly concluded that our first objective must be to find a specific position and a profession to which we can wholly devote ourselves. And I believe that we also agreed on this point, *viz.* that one must pay particular attention to the end, and that a victory gained after a whole life of work and effort is better than one gained with greater dispatch.

Anyone who lives an upright life and experiences real difficulty and disappointment and yet is not crushed by them is worth more than one for whom everything has always been plain sailing and who has known nothing but relative prosperity. For who are the most obviously superior to us? Those who merit the words: “Laboureurs, votre vie est triste, laboureurs, vous souffrez dans la vie, laboureurs, vous êtes bien-heureaux,” [Labourers, your life is sad, labourers, your life is full of suffering, labourers, you are blessed]. It is they who bear the marks of “toute une vie de lutte et de travail soutenu sans flêchir jamais.” [a whole life of struggle and labour borne unflinchingly] It is right to try to become like that. So we go on our way, “undefessi favente Deo.” [Should be *indefessi favente Deo*, (by the grace of God unwearied)]

As for me, I must become a good preacher, who has something to say that is right and is of use in the world, and perhaps it is as well that I should spend a relatively long time on preparation and be securely confirmed in an unwavering faith before I am called to speak to others about it. (It is fitting that before one embarks upon that work, a treasure should be gathered up that others can enjoy). Let us but go forth quietly, testing everything and holding fast to what is good, and trying all the time to learn more of what is useful and adds to our experience. *Weemoed* [Melancholy] may be a good experience, provided we write it as two words: *wee* [woe], which is in every man, each of us having reason enough, but it must be allied to *moed* [courage], and the more the better, for it is good to be someone who never despairs.

If only we try to live righteously, we shall fare well, even though we are bound to encounter genuine sadness and real disappointments and shall probably commit real mistakes and do things that are wrong, but it is certainly better to be ardent in spirit, even though one makes more mistakes, than to be narrow-minded and over-cautious.

It is good to love as many things as one can, for therein lies true strength, and those who loves much, do much and accomplish much, and whatever is done with love is done well. If one is affected by some book or other, let us say by Michelet's L' hirondelle, L'alouette, Le rossignol, Les aspirations d'aut-omne, Je vois d'ici une dame, J'aimais cette petite ville singulière - to mention just a few, then it is because that book is written from the heart in simplicity and meekness of spirit. Better to say but a few words, but filled with meaning, than to say many that are but idle sounds and as easy to utter as they are useless

Love is the best and the noblest thing in the human heart, especially when it is tested by life as gold is tested by fire. Happy is he who has loved much, and is sure of himself, and although he may have wavered and doubted, he has kept that divine spark alive and returned to what was in the beginning and ever shall be. If only one keeps loving faithfully what is truly worth loving and does not squander one's love on trivial and insignificant and meaningless things then one will gradually obtain more light and grow stronger.

The sooner one tries to become accomplished in a certain position in life and a certain field and adopts a relatively independent way of thinking and acting, and the more one keeps to set rules, the stronger in character one will grow, and that does not mean becoming narrow-minded. It is a wise thing to do this, because life is short, and time passes quickly. If one is accomplished in one single thing, understanding one single thing well, then one has insight into and knowledge of many other things into the bargain.

It's as well to go out into the world from time to time and mix with other people (and sometimes one feels, in fact, obliged and called upon to do so) - or it may simply be *one* way `de se jeter dans le travail sans arrière pensée et de toutes ses forces' [Of throwing oneself into work unreservedly and with all one's strength] - but one who prefers to be quietly alone with his work and seems to need very few friends will go safest in the world and among people. One should never feel secure just because one has no difficulties or cares or handicaps, and one should never be too easy-going. Even in the politest circles and the best surroundings and circumstances one should retain something of the original character of a Robinson Crusoe or of primitive man, for otherwise one cannot be rooted in oneself, and one must never let the fire in one's soul die, for the time will inevitably come when it will be needed. And he who chooses poverty for himself and loves it possesses a great treasure and will hear the voice of his conscience address him ever more clearly. He who hears that voice, which is God's greatest gift, in his innermost being and follows it, finds in it a friend at last, and is never alone!

Happy is he who has faith in God, for he will in the end be tided over all life's difficulties, albeit not without trouble and sorrow. One cannot do better than hold on to the thought of God come what may, in all circumstances, in every place and at all times, and try to get to know Him better. One can learn this from the Bible as well as from all other things. It is good to go on believing that everything is more miraculous than one can ever begin to understand, for that is the truth; it is good to remain sensitive and humble and tender-hearted even though one may have to hide one's feelings, as is often necessary. It is good to be well versed in the things that are hidden from the wise and the learned of this world, but that are revealed as if by nature to the poor and simple, to women and little children. For what can one learn which is better than that which God has given by nature to every human soul and which goes on living and loving, hoping and believing, in the depths of every soul, unless we wantonly destroy it.

The need is for nothing less than the infinite and the miraculous, and a man does well to be satisfied with nothing less, and not to feel easy until he has gained it.

That is what all great men have acknowledged in their works, all those who have thought a little more deeply and searched and worked and loved a little more than the rest, who have plumbed the depths of the sea of life. Plumb the depths, that is what we too must do if we want to make a catch, and if we sometimes have to work the whole night through without catching anything, then we do well not to give up and to cast the net once more at dawn.

So let us go forward quietly, each on his own path, forever making for the light, `sursum corda' [lift up your hearts], and in the knowledge that we are as others are and that others are as we are and that it is right to love one another in the best possible way, believing all things, hoping for all things and enduring all things, and never failing. And not being too troubled by our weaknesses, for even he who has none, has one weakness, namely that he has none, and anyone who believes himself to be consummately wise would do well to be foolish all over again.

`Nous sommes aujourd'hui ce que nous étions hier'*, that is, *`honnêtes hommes', yet men who must be tested in the fire of life to become fortified inwardly are confirmed in what, by the grace of God, they are by nature.

So may it be with us, my boy, and may you fare well along your path, and may God be with you in all things and help you to succeed, which, with a warm handshake on your departure [Theo had been temporarily transferred to the

Goupil house in Paris], is the wish of

Your very loving brother,

Vincent

It is only a very small light, the one in the little Sunday-school room in Barndesteeg, but let me keep it burning. Even if I should not, however, I do not think that Adler is the man to let it go out.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam, May 1878

Dear Theo,
It is time for you to hear from me again. I have already heard from Father of your safe arrival and how you walked all over the city during those first days. I am very curious to hear what your first impressions were, so as soon as you can find time to write, your letter will be welcomed. It is true, however, that first impressions often change, for we know only too well that all is not gold that glitters and that though there may be a bright dawn, there is also a dark midnight and a burning, oppressive heat at noon. But just as the morning hour is blessed and is worth much gold, so first impressions keep their value even though they pass, for sometimes they prove to have been right after all, and one comes back to them. So write me what you saw these first days and what your thoughts have been.

Just now we are having bad weather here, and probably it is the same in Paris. You will soon perceive that it is much warmer there in summer than in Holland, and you will also see thundery skies like the ones Bonington painted. The quarter of town where you live is rather interesting. When one walks through the streets there, or towards Montmartre in the morning or evening, one sees many a workshop, and many a little room that reminds one of “Un Tonnelier” or “Les Couturières” or other pictures by Édouard Frère. At times it is good to see such simple things when one sees so many people who for different reasons have strayed from all that is natural and so have lost their real and inner life, and when one also sees so many who live in misery and horror - for in the evening and at night one sees all kinds of black figures wandering about, men as well as women, in whom the terror of the night is personified, and whose misery one must class among the things that have no name in any language.

Last week one of the clergymen here died; he was known all over the country (Pantekoek). He was buried last Saturday; that procession on the path along the green borders of the Amstel reminded me of “In Memoriam.” He was the father of six children, the eldest about twenty years old. A large crowd followed and they literally jostled each other. A memorial service was held in almost all the churches yesterday. I heard Uncle Stricker, who had known him very well. He preached in the Oudezijd Chapel, where the boys from the orphanage and those from the sailors' training school usually go. The sermon was full of sentiment.

Uncle's text was, “I am greatly distressed and what shall I say?” He had undergone terrible and long suffering. One night I heard one of his last sermons, and it was clear from what he said that he shuddered and shrank from each new day and night, especially from the one which followed the exertion of preaching. Even then one could not hear him without feeling with him and shuddering involuntarily, for the road leading to the eternal home is dark, and happy is he who is strengthened by the hope of a better life when the darkness and night approaches.

Do not let all the new distractions keep you from reading some good book, for instance, the one by Michelet on the Revolution, or something by Thoré or Th. Gautier on Paris and the time of the young painters and authors. Oh! boy, how I should like to wander with you through the city.

Today I hope to take a long walk through the section of town where I have not often been. I finally found the house in the Breestraat where Rembrandt lived - you know we spoke about it when you were here. Think of that particular picture in the Luxembourg, “Qui vous reçoit me reçoit, et qui me reçoit, reçoit celui qui m'a envoyé” [He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me], and tell me who painted it.

Paris is so beautiful in autumn; you will begin to notice it toward the end of September.

Give my kind regards to all at Soek's, I so often remember an excursion I made with his family to Ville d'Avray. Entering the little church there, it struck me to find more than one picture by Corot - you know he was there often.

Give also my compliments to Braat and Mutters. Have a good time and write soon, and imagine a warm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

I still have to thank you for your photograph; it is very good and I am glad to have it, many thanks.

Letter from His Parents to Theo van Gogh

Zundert, 1878

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

2 March 1878

The concern about Vincent oppresses us heavily. I foresee that again a bomb is going to burst. It is apparent that the beginning of his studies are disappointing to him, and his heart seems to be torn by conflicting forces. He has now tied up connections with English and French clergymen of ultra-orthodox views - and as a result the number of faults in his work has increased again. I am afraid he has no idea what studying means, and now I fear the remedy he will choose will be again a proposal for a change, for instance to become a catechist! But that doesn't bring in any bread! We sit and wait, and it is like the calm before the storm.

To us, it is a vexation of our souls, and yet we believe in relief that God can accomplish. He creates light in the darkness! But also, there is a close relation between human errors and sad results. Does this happen also under God's guidance? - and it is amazing that we experience pain and sorrow when he always goes his way as with bowed head, while we have done everything we could to lead him to an honorable goal? It is as if he purposely chooses the ways that lead to difficulties.

Mrs. Van Gogh

2 March 1878

You know, he is always a faithful writer, and now we haven't had a letter for a fortnight. You will remember that Pa was not quite reassured when he had seen him; Pa wrote him about it once more, and then we received such a strange conflicting reply…But how unhappy he must be, poor boy, you can well imagine how it worries us. He probably doesn't want anything else but a position with the church but without study; what a prospect for his living and his honour!

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

April 1878

I am afraid he is very unhappy, but what can we do about it? We encourage him and give him the opportunity of continuing his studies, although we hardly know how to manage. It is a sickly existence he has chosen, I'm afraid, and how much he will still have to endure, and we together with him.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

11 May 1878

So your work will be of a somewhat different kind from what we had thought, and you will have to be at the exhibition most of the time.

[Mother] Our whole heart travelled after you and keeps following you and praying for the Lord's blessing. Do not start a single day without the good Lord, my child. In that big world full of distraction and temptation you can't do without Him, just as little as we in our quiet spot in Etten; and whatever the circumstances, don't forget life is earnest, then you will increase not only in knowledge, but also in firmness, which is the basis and source of a happy life - something we wish you above all.

[Reverend van Gogh] You say that among the young people there they do not understand why you have been picked for the job. Is it possible that they are jealous? Then take care, do not trust *unconditionally* every friendship that is being offered. Think of intrigues! Which are somehow ascribed to that metropolis! If one should tempt you to any spending beyond your means: be *doubly* on your guard! When one plans someone's downfall, the system of making him *run up debts* is fairly customary to throw a net over his head! But do not think I look at things too darkly. Only watch out. I do know that you do not intend anything else, we trust you! But is it surprising that we - who *know what disappointment is* - also think a little further ahead?

Mrs. van Gogh to Theo.

12 May 1878

Dear Theo, do remain the crown for us old ones, which is shaken so often.

[Reverend van Gogh] You evidently enjoy life and are well able to overcome your difficulties. It is really a stroke of luck to be able to look at that colossal world around you and observe representatives of all nations and people behaving at their best and less than best, and then with so much art around you…and far, very far away so many who think of you with love and interest and confidence, and already look forward to receiving a word or two from you.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

7 June 1878

We don't know yet where this crisis will lead to…Because I did not want to rush things, I told him that for the time being he should go on with his lessons for three months, giving me time to think things over. In the meantime I have written to the Reverend Van der Brink, who is now a parson at Roesselaere in Belgium, asking him whether he might be used in that country. The reverend Van der Brink thinks it not impossible that a post as evangelist might become available for which knowledge of English and French would be an asset. He will keep me informed and try to help.

[…] Perhaps we should risk this experiment as a last resort, but everything is still so uncertain. It is a problem that worries us seriously, but let us not lose courage. You have always said: who knows whether he will not pull through some day and succeed. May God grant it.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

8 July 1878

[Vincent has come home] last Friday evening [5th July].

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

28 July 1878

It was last Tuesday and Wednesday that we were there, and we have seen a lot of people. What we have decided now is that we will arrange for a try-out period of three months - against payment for board on our side - to see whether he would have a chance in succeeding. Vincent spoke perfectly well and made a good impression as far as I know. After all, his staying abroad has not been completely fruitless, nor has the year spent in Amsterdam, when he is called upon he is able to prove that he has learned and observed a lot in the school of life.

However, the cause of evangelization in Belgium cannot boast of a solid monetary base; it is started and continued in faith. But most of the time, if money was necessary, there was no lack of it. The reverend Pietersen from Malines joined us and led us to the Reverend de Jong in Brussels, who had asked us to stay with him.

[…] It was a pleasant coincidence that the Reverend Jones, with whom Vincent had been in England, could accompany us. He had arrived the preceding Saturday, and stayed till Tuesday, when he went to Brussels with us. He is a nice human being, who has made a good impression upon us all. In Brussels he spoke well of Vincent, and his presence caused the discussion to be held mostly in English; this gave Vincent the opportunity to show us that he could speak it quickly and correctly, for which they gave him a compliment. We now wait for further instructions about when and how he will start work.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

August 1878

[Vincent will depart for Brussels on the 24 August].

[Mother] May everything go well with Vincent, but Oh, Theo, it isn't clear yet, he is more absent-minded than ever. Probably also because he really concentrates on his thoughts on his sermons, of which he is making a whole stock. On Saturday he will go, and so will Lies, and then it will be very quiet here.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

24 November 1878

I am on the point of going to Brussels. Mr. Plugge wrote me about Vincent. He is weak and thin - it seems he was not given any prospects, and I am worried. According to Mr. Plugge's letter, he cannot sleep and seems to be in a nervous condition. Therefore I want to go and see for myself what we should do.

[Mother] Tomorrow is the end of the three month period; we are almost sure he will not be accepted. We don't talk about it to anybody, don't do that either. We say to the people who know that Father will go on a journey that Vincent is ill. You can well imagine what a sad journey. Mr. Plugge asked us to come and take him home. What is going to become of all this?

Reverend van Gogh to Reverend Péron, Protestant Minister at Dour.

5 December 1878

Dear Sir, Having received a letter from my son Vincent, who wrote that he had addressed himself to you to ask for some work, and who said to you, Sir, wished to have some more information about him from me, his father, I hasten to comply with your request by telling you: That it is really my son who, having been looking for a place as evangelist in Belgium for three months now, came to see you in the hope that you might give him some light, giving him the advice and information which he needs.

[…] May God grant him to find with you the possibility of gaining his bread by practical work of an honest kind.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 22 July 1878

Dear Theo,
I add a little word to Father's letter; I was glad to hear that you are getting on well in the foreign country and that you enjoy your life; how I should like to walk with you there sometime.
I suppose Father has written you that we went to Brussels last week, along with the Reverend Mr. Jones, of Isleworth, who stayed the day here over Sunday.

The impression of that journey was satisfactory in that we think I shall find my work there sometime - the course certainly is shorter and less expensive than in Holland; so it will be necessary to keep Belgium in mind and to look around there till we find something.

We saw the Flemish training school; it has a three-year course, while, as you know, in Holland the study would last for six years more at the least. And they do not even require that you quite finish the course, before you can apply for a place as an evangelist. What is wanted is the talent to give popular and attractive lectures to people, more short and interesting than long and learned. So they require less knowledge of ancient language and less theological study (although everything one knows is an asset), but they value more highly fitness for practical work and the faith that comes from the heart.

Still, there are many obstacles to overcome. First, one does not acquire at once, but only by long practice, the ability to speak to the people with seriousness and feeling, fluency and ease; what one says must have meaning and purpose and some persuasiveness to rouse one's listeners so that they will try to root their convictions in truth. In short, one must be a popular orator to succeed there.

Ces meissieurs in Brussels wanted me to come for three months to become better acquainted, but that would again cause too much expense, and this must be avoided as much as possible. Therefore I am staying in Etten for the present, doing some preparatory work; from here I can occasionally visit both the Reverend Mr. Pietersen in Mechlin and the Reverend Mr. De Jong in Brussels, and in that way become mutually better acquainted. How long this will take depends entirely on what they will say over there. Father and I have just written them again.

Now I will try to write as well as I can some compositions which will prove useful to me later; I am writing one now on Rembrandt's picture, “The House of the Carpenter,” in the Louvre. Yesterday Father had to preach in Zundert, and I went with him. The aunts send you their love. I was also at the house of Jan Doomen, who suffers much from rheumatism in his leg and complains that he cannot even walk to Breda any more; but when he is walking in the fields or the garden, it does not trouble him so much, except the pain forces him to get up very early in the morning. Old age is accompanied by many ailments, as the old Reverend Mr. Meyes used to say.

What a beautiful, excellent wood engraving there was in L'Illustration the other day of “A Young Citizen of the Year V” by Jules Goupil - did you see it? I have got hold of it and it is hanging on the wall of the room which is my own now, namely the old schoolroom which looks out on the garden and where the ivy climbs up around the windows. This is what was written in the magazine about that picture: ”Un regard qui a vue le spectacle de l'affreuse guillotine, un pensée qui a survécu à toutes les scènes de la révolution. Il est presque étonné de se trouver encore vivantt après tant de catastrophes” [A look (in the eyes) that has seen the spectacle of the horrible guillotine, a way of thought that has survived all the scenes of the revolution. He is astonished to find that he is still alive after so many catastrophes]. It has been a remarkable feature in art and will continue to have a great influence on many people, and it will always have an attraction for those who have a keen sense for high art, just as, for instance, a portrait by Fabritus does, or some more or less mystical pictures of the Rembrandt school.

That evening when we drove back from Zundert across the heath, Father and I got out and walked awhile. The sun was setting red behind the pine trees, and the evening sky was reflected in the pools; the heath and the yellow and white and grey sand were so full of harmony and sentiment - see, there are moments in life when everything, within us too, is full of peace and sentiment, and our whole life seems to be a path through the heath; but it is not always so.

This morning I went with Cor, who is on vacation, to the heath and the pine wood way beyond the mill; we gathered heather for his rabbits, who seem to be very fond of it, and also enough to fill a flower basket. We sat for some time in the pine wood, and together we drew a little map of Etten and surroundings with the Bremberg, Sprundel, t' Heike and De Hoeve.

Will you give my kindest regards to Soek and his family when you go there? Also to Frans Braat and Ernst and the others when you happen to see them. I often think of you, and am so glad that you are doing well and that you find things there which cheer you and feed your inner life. For this is what great art does, and the works of those who apply themselves heart, mind and soul - as do many whom you know and perhaps meet personally, whose words and deeds are full of spirit and life.

A warm handshake in thought,

Your loving brother, Vincent

The words on the little map, written by Cor, mean: “Vincent and I did this in the pine wood - Cor - I must go to bed. Good night.”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, early August 1878

Dear Theo,
I enclose a note in Father's letter. I, too, am eager to hear from you again. I certainly hope that you are getting on as well as possible in Paris, and that you see and hear many interesting things.

I just received a postcard from the Reverend Mr. Pietersen; about the middle of August I shall have to go to Brussels. But as no date has been fixed and as Father and Mother think it better for me to stay until Anna's wedding, I shall wait until all that is over and then start for Brussels. The other day I made a little drawing after Émile Breton's "A Sunday Morning," in pen and ink and pencil. How I like his work! Has he made anything new this year? Do you see much of his work? Yesterday and today I wrote a composition on the parable of the mustard seed and it is 27 pages long; I hope there is some good in it. As you can imagine, Father and I walk about the parish a great deal, or to De Hoeve and De Leur, and I also take many a long walk across the heath with Cor.

Of course I am very curious to know how it will be in Brussels. I hope the work may prove successful and be blessed.

The fields here are so beautiful now; they are reaping the wheat, and the potatoes are getting ripe and their leaves beginning to wither, and the buckwheat is full of beautiful white blossoms.

Well, boy, I am writing to you by the light of a little lantern, and the candle is getting too short. À Dieu, have a good time, and if you can, tell me something about the painters whenever you hear something interesting about one of them; but best of all, I shall enjoy hearing any of your own impressions. Good night, a warm handshake in thought from

Your loving Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 15 August 1878

Dear Theo,

I enclose a little word in Father's letter to say good morning to you. It is raining outside, as it has been doing often lately, and it is stormy too.

I wrote to the Reverend Mr. de Jonge that I am ready to go at once to Brussels whenever work or duty calls, but if there is no urgent reason for my coming immediately, I should like to stay a week longer here (because of Anna's wedding) and then arrive on Sunday 25th August.

I wonder if the exhibition of pictures there will still be open then - I should like very much to see it. I am eager to hear from you. I hope to write you more as soon as I am in Brussels; also about the exhibition - at least if it isn't already closed.

My compliments to Braat and Soek when you see them. À Dieu, have a good time. We speak about you at home every day. Write again soon, and receive a warm handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Laeken, 15 November 1878

Dear Theo,

On the evening of the day we spent together, which passed only too quickly for me, I want to write to you again. It was a great joy for me to see you again and to talk with you, and it is a blessing that such a day, that passes in a moment, and such a joy that is of so short duration, stays in our memory and will never be forgotten. When we had taken leave I walked back, not along the shortest way but along the tow-path. Here are workshops of all kinds that look picturesque, especially in the evening with the lights, and to us who are also labourers and workmen, each in his sphere and in the work to which he is called, they speak in their own way, if we only listen to them, for they say: Work while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work.

It was just the moment when the street cleaners came home with their carts with the old white horses. A long row of these carts were standing at the so-called Ferme des Boues, at the beginning of the tow-path. Some of these old white horses resemble a certain old aquatint engraving, which you perhaps know, an engraving that has no great art value, it is true, but which struck me, and made a deep impression upon me. I mean the last from that series of prints called “The Life of a Horse.” It represents an old white horse, lean and emaciated, and tired to death by a long life of heavy labour, of too much and too hard work. The poor animal is standing on a spot utterly lonely and desolate, a plain scantily covered with withered dry grass, and here and there a gnarled old tree broken and bent by the storm. On the ground lies a skull, and at a distance in the background a bleached skeleton of a horse, lying near a hut where lives a man who skins horses. Over the whole is a stormy sky, it is a cold, bleak day, gloomy and dark weather.

It is a sad and very melancholy scene, which must strike everyone who knows and feels that we also have to pass one day through the valley of the shadow of death, and “que la fin de la vie humaine, ce sont des larmes ou des cheveux blancs.” [the end of human life is tears or white hairs.] What lies beyond this is a great mystery that only God knows, but He has revealed absolutely through His word that there is a resurrection of the dead.

The poor horse, the old faithful servant, is standing there patiently and meekly, yet bravely and unflinchingly; like the old guard who said, “la garde meurt mais elle ne se rend pas," [the guard dies, but never surrenders] it awaits its last hour. Involuntarily I was reminded of that engraving, when I saw tonight those horses of the ash carts.

As to the drivers themselves with their filthy dirty clothes, they seemed sunk and rooted still deeper in poverty than that long row or rather group of paupers, that Master de Groux has drawn in his "Bench of the Poor." It always strikes me, and it is very peculiar, that when we see the image of indescribable and unutterable desolation - of loneliness, of poverty and misery, the end of all things, or their extreme, then rises in our mind the thought of God. At least this is the case with me and does not Father also say: "There is no place where I like better to speak than in a churchyard, for there we are all on equal ground; not only that, there we always *realize* it." I am glad that we had time to see the museum together and especially the work of de Groux and Leys, and so many other interesting pictures, like that landscape of Cooseman's for instance. I am very pleased with the two prints you gave me, but you ought to have accepted from me that small etching, "The Three Mills." Now you have paid it all yourself, and not allowed me to pay half as I wished to do. But you must keep it for your collection, for it is remarkable, even though the reproduction is not so very good. In my ignorance, I should ascribe it rather to Peasant Breughel than to Velvet Breughel.

I enclose the little hasty sketch, "Au Charbonnage." I should like to begin making rough sketches from some of the many things that I meet on my way, but as it would probably keep me from my real work, it is better not to begin. As soon as I came home I began a sermon about the "barren fig tree," Luke xiii 6-9.

That little drawing "Au Charbonnage" is nothing specially remarkable, but the reason I made it is that one sees here so many people that work in the coal mines, and they are rather a characteristic kind of people. This little house stands not far from the road; it is a small inn attached to the big coal shed, and the workmen come there to eat their bread and drink their glass of beer during the lunch hour.

When I was in England I applied for a position as Evangelist among the miners in the coal mines, but they turned me down, stating that I had to be at least twenty-five years old. You know how one of the roots or foundations, not only of the Gospel, but of the whole Bible is, "Light that rises in the darkness," *from darkness to light*. Well, who will need this most, who will be open to it? Experience has taught that those who walk in the darkness, in the centre of the earth, like the miners in the black coal mines for instance, are very much impressed by the words of the Gospel, and believe it too. Now there is in the south of Belgium, in Hainault, in the neighbourhood of Mons, up to the French frontiers, aye, even far across it, a district called the Borinage, that has a special population of labourers who work in the numerous coal mines. In a little handbook of geography I found the following about them: “The Borins (inhabitants of the Borinage, situated west of Mons) find their work exclusively in the coal mines. These mines are an imposing sight, 300 metres underground, into which daily descend groups of working men, worthy of our respect and our sympathies. The miner is a special Borinage type, for him daylight does not exist, and except on Sunday he never sees the sunshine. He works laboriously by a lamp whose light is pale and dim, in a narrow tunnel, his body bent double and sometimes he is obliged to crawl along; he works to extract from the bowels of the earth that mineral substance of which we know the great utility; he works in the midst of thousands of ever-recurring dangers; but the Belgium miner has a happy disposition, he is used to that kind of life, and when he descends the shaft, carrying on his hat a little lamp that is destined to guide him in the darkness, he trusts himself to God, Who sees his labour and Who protects him, his wife and his children.”

So the Borinage is situated south of Lessines, where one finds the stone quarries.

I should very much like to go there as an Evangelist. The three months' trial demanded of me by the Rev. de Jong and the Rev. Pietersen is almost over. St. Paul was three years in Arabia before he began to preach, and before he started on his great missionary journeys and his real work among the heathen. If I could work quietly for about three years in such a district, always learning and observing, then I should not come back from there without having something to say that was really worth hearing. I say so in all humility and yet with confidence. If God wills, and if He spares my life, I would be ready about my thirtieth year, starting out with a peculiar training and experience, being able to master my work better, and riper for it than now.

I write you this again although we have already spoken about it many a time.

There are already in the Borinage many little Protestant communities and certainly schools also. I wish I could get a position there as Evangelist in the way we spoke about, preaching the Gospel to the poor, that means those who need it most and for whom it is so well suited, and then during the week devoting myself to teaching.

You have certainly visited St. Gilles? I too made a trip there, in the direction of the Ancienne Barrière. Where the road to Mont St. Jean begins there is another hill, the Alsemberg. To the right is the cemetery of St. Gilles, full of cedars and evergreen, from where one has a view over the whole city.

Proceeding further one arrives at Forest. The neighbourhood is very picturesque there, on the slope of the hills are old houses, like those huts in the dunes that Bosboom has sometimes painted. One sees all kinds of field labour performed there, the sowing of corn, the digging of potatoes, the washing of turnips, and everything is picturesque, even the gathering of wood, and it looks much like Montmartre. There are old houses covered with evergreen or vines, and pretty little inns; among the houses I noticed one was that of a mustard manufacturer, a certain Verkisten, his place was just like a picture by Thijs Mans for instance. Here and there are places where stone is found, so they have small quarries, through which hollowed out roads pass, with deeply cut wagon ruts, where one sees the little white horses with red tassels, and the drivers with blue blouses; shepherds are to be found there too, and women in black with white caps, that remind one of those of de Groux. There are some places here, thank God one finds them everywhere, where one feels more at home than anywhere else, where one gets a peculiar pristine feeling like that of homesickness, in which bitter melancholy plays some part; but yet its stimulation strengthens and cheers the mind, and gives us, we do not know how or why, new strength and ardour for our work. That day I walked on past Forest and took a side path leading to a little old ivy-grown church. I saw many linden trees there, still more interwoven, and more Gothic so to say, than those we saw in the Park, and at the side of the hollowed road that leads to the churchyard there were twisted and gnarled stamps and tree roots, fantastical like those Albert Dürer etched in “Ritter, Tod and Teufel.”

Have you ever seen a picture or rather a photograph of Carlo Dolci's work “The Garden of Olives”? There is something Rembrandt-esque in it; I saw it the other day. I suppose you know that large rough etching on the same theme after Rembrandt, it is the pendant of that other, “The Bible Reading,” with those two women and a cradle? Since you told me that you had seen the picture by Father Corot on that same subject, I remembered it again; I saw it at the exhibition of his works shortly after his death and it deeply appealed to me.

How rich art is, if one can only remember what one has seen, one is never empty of thoughts or truly lonely, never alone.

A Dieu, Theo, I heartily shake hands with you in thought. Have a good time, have success in your work, and meet many good things on your road, such as stay in our memory and enrich us, though apparently we possess little. When you see Mauve greet him for me and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

I kept this letter for a few days; the 15th of November is passed, so the three months have elapsed. I spoke with the Rev, de Jong and Master Bokma, they tell me that I cannot attend the school on the same conditions as they allow to the native Flemish pupils; I can follow the lessons free of charge if necessary - but this is the only privilege, - so in order to stay here longer I ought to have more financial means than I have at my disposal, for they are nil. So I shall perhaps soon try that plan involving the Borinage. Once I am in the country I shall not soon go back to a large city.

It would not be easy to live without the Faith in Him and the old confidence in Him; without it one would lose one's courage.

[The sketch “Au Charbonnage” was included in the letter.]

Letter from Reverend Van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Zundert, 20 December 1878

From Reverend Van Gogh to Theo

20 December 1878

Eight days ago we received a rather nice letter from Vincent; nice in so far as he seems to have found a good boarding house with farmers in Pâturages for thirty francs a month, the reason that it is not much being that he teaches the children in the evening. He was soon accepted with goodwill by many people, and working with these people seems to give him satisfaction. Furthermore, the Reverend Péron has promised him his cooperation. In the middle of January there will be another meeting of the committee of with Mr. Péron is the secretary, and he promised him that he would try to do something for him.

In the meantime, he spends his free moments drawing big maps of Palestine which can be used for talks and catechism, and with which he tries to make some money. I received one and ordered him to make four more copies for which I gave him ten francs each.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Petit-Wasmes, 26 December 1878

Borinage, Hainaut
My dear Theo,
It is time I wrote to you again, to wish you, firstly, all the best at the start of the New Year. May many good things be your lot and may God's blessing rest on your work in the year on which we are now embarking.

I very much long for a letter from you, to hear how things are going and how you are, and also if you have *seen anything beautiful and remarkable of late*. As far as I am concerned, you'll be aware that there are no paintings here in the Borinage, that by and large they do not even know what a painting is, so obviously I have not seen anything in the way of art since my departure from Brussels. But that does not alter the fact that the country here is very special and very picturesque, everything *speaks*, as it were, and is full of character. Lately, during the dark days before Christmas, snow was lying on the ground. Everything reminded one then of the medieval paintings by, say, Peasant Brueghel, and by so many others who have known how to depict the singular effect of red and green, black and white so strikingly. And often the sights here have made me think of the work of, for example, Thijs Mans or Albrecht Dürer. There are sunken roads here, overgrown with thornbushes and gnarled old trees with their freakish roots, which resemble perfectly that road on Dürer's etching, “Death and the Knight.”

Thus, a few days ago, the miners returning home in the evening towards dusk in the white snow were a singular sight. These people are quite black when they emerge into the daylight from the dark mines, looking jut like chimney sweeps. Their dwellings are usually small and should really be called huts; they lie scattered along the sunken roads, in the woods and on the slopes of the hills. Here and there one can still see moss-covered roofs, and in the evening a friendly light shines through the small-paned windows.

Much as we have coppices and shrubby oaks in Brabant and pollard willows in Holland, so one sees blackthorn hedges around the gardens, fields and meadows here. Lately, with the snow, the effect is that of black lettering on white paper, like pages of the Gospel.

I have already spoken several times here, both in a fairly large room especially designed for religious meetings and also at the meetings they usually hold in the evenings in the workmen's cottages, and which may best be called Bible classes. Among other things, I have spoken on the parable of the mustard seed, the barren fig tree and the man born blind. On Christmas, of course, on the stable in Bethlehem and Peace on earth. If, with God's blessing, I were to get a permanent position here, I should welcome that with all my heart.

Everywhere round here one sees the large chimneys and the tremendous mountains of coal at the entrance to the mines, the so-called charbonnages. You know that large drawing by Bosboom, “Chaudfontaine” - it gives a good impression of the countryside in these parts, except that here everything is coal while to the north of Hainaut there are stone quarries and in Chaudfontaine they have iron.

I still keep thinking of the day you came to Brussels and of our visit to the Museum. And I often wish you were a bit nearer and we could be together more often. Do reply soon, I keep looking at that etching of “A Young Citizen” over and over again.

The miner's talk is not very easy to make out, but they understand ordinary French well, provided it is spoken quickly and fluently enough, for then it automatically sounds like their patois, which comes out with amazing speed. At a meeting this week, my text was Acts 16 9, “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” And they listened attentively when I tried to describe what the Macedonian was like who needed and longed for the comfort of the Gospel and for knowledge of the Only True God. That we should think of him as a workman, with lines of sorrow and suffering and fatigue on his countenance, without pomp or glory but with an immortal soul and needing the food that does not perish, namely God's word, because man liveth not by bread alone, but by all the words that flow from God's mouth. How Jesus Christ is the Master who can strengthen and comfort and enlighten one like the Macedonian, a workman and labourer whose life is hard. Because He Himself is the great Man of Sorrows who knows our ills, Who was called the son of a carpenter, though He was the Son of God and the great Healer of sick souls. Who laboured for thirty years in a humble carpenter's shop to fulfill God's will. And God wills that in imitation of Christ, man should live and walk humbly on earth, not reaching for the sky, but bowing to humble things, learning from the Gospel to be meek and humble of heart.

I have already had occasion to visit some of the sick, since there are so many of them here. Wrote today to the President of the Committee of Evangelization asking him if my case could be dealt with at the next meeting of the committee.

It is thawing tonight. I can't tell you how picturesque the hilly country looks in the thaw, with the snow melting and now that the black fields with the green of the winter wheat can be seen again.

For a stranger, the villages here are real rabbit warrens with the countless narrow streets and alleyways of small worker's houses, at the foot of the hills as well as on the slopes and the top. The nearest comparison is a village like Scheveningen, especially the back streets, or villages in Brittany as we know them from pictures. But you have travelled through these parts by train on your way to Paris and may have fleeting memories of them. The Protestant churches are small, like the one at De Hoeve though a little larger, but the place where I spoke was just a large bare room which could hold a hundred people at most. I also attended a religious service in a stable or shed, so everything it is simple and original enough.

Write soon if you can find the time, and know that you are again and again, indeed constantly, in my thoughts. Wishing once more that God's blessing be yours in the New Year, and shaking your hand in my thoughts, believe me, always,

Your very loving brother, Vincent

My regards to everyone at the Roos's, and wish them all the very best for the New Year, as well as anyone who may ask after me.

When you write, please address your letter care of M. van der Haegen, Colporteur, à Pâturages, près de Mons, Borinage, Hainaut.

I have just visited a little old woman in a charcoal-burner's home. She is terribly ill, but full of faith and patience. I read a chapter with her and prayed with them all. The people here have something unique and attractive about them thanks to their simplicity and good nature, not unlike the Brabant people in Zundert and Etten.

1879

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Petit-Wasmes, March 1879

Dear Theo,

I heard from Father and mother that you paid them a surprise visit recently, just after Father came to visit me. I am very glad Father came. Together we visited the three clergymen of the Borinage, and walked in the snow, and visited a miner's family, we saw the coal being bought up out of a mine called Les Trois Diefs [The Three Mounds]; Father also attended two Bible classes, so we did a great deal in those few days. I think that Father has been impressed with the Borinage and that he will not easily forget it; no one who visits this curious, remarkable and picturesque region can.

It is a long time since I wrote you. If with God's help my work here is a success, you must come to see me someday, perhaps when you have to go to Paris again or when you take a business trip.

The other day I found a list of all the coal veins south of Mons, 155 in all, in the house of an elderly man who has worked in the mines for many years. The country and the inhabitants charm me more every day. One has a homelike feeling here, like on the heath, or in the dunes; the people have something simple and good. Those who leave are homesick for their country; on the other hand, homesick foreigners lose their nostalgia for their own country and adapt easily.

How are Mauve and Maris? Have you seen many pictures recently? Spring is near, and it will bring fresh subject material. What has Israëls been doing this winter? They would find so many things here that would appeal to them. When the cart drawn by the white horse [l'blanc ch'val] brings an injured man home from the mines, one sees things that remind one of “The castaway” by Israëls: every moment there is something which moves one intensely.

Write again soon, and when you tell me something about painters, remember that I am still capable of understanding it, though I have not seen any pictures in a long time.

I have rented a small house that I would like to make my home, but now it serves only as a workshop or study; Father, and I too, think it preferable that I lodge with Denis. Still, I have some of my things there, including some prints on the wall. I must go out to visit a few of the sick, and some others as well.

Have a good time, and write me soon. Remember me to Mauve when you see him, and the Roos family.

Spring is coming, for the larks are singing, and in the wood the branches and buds are beginning to sprout, especially on the alder trees. When Father was here, everything was covered with snow, so that he has seen the curious effect of the black charbonnages and the many black chimneys in the snow. There are many places here that remind one of that drawing by Bosboom, “Chaudfontaine.”

À Dieu, a handshake in thought, and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Petit-Wasmes, April 1879

Dear Theo,
It is time that you heard from me again. From home I heard that you had been in Etten for a few days and that you were on a business trip. I certainly hope you had a good journey. I suppose you will be in the dunes some of these days and occasionally in Scheveningen. It is lovely here in spring, too; there are spots where one could almost fancy oneself in the dunes, because of the hills.

Not long ago I made a very interesting expedition, spending six hours in a mine. It was Marcasse, one of the oldest and most dangerous mines in the neighbourhood. It has a bad reputation because many perish in it, either going down or coming up, or through poisoned air, firedamp explosion, water seepage, cave-ins, *etc.* It is a gloomy spot, and at first everything around looks dreary and desolate.

Most of the miners are thin and pale from fever; they look tired and emaciated, weather-beaten and aged before their time. On the whole the women are faded and worn. Around the mine are poor miners' huts, a few dead trees black from smoke, thorn hedges, dunghills, ash dumps, heaps of useless coal, *etc.* Mans could make a wonderful picture of it.

I will try to make a little sketch of it presently to give you an idea of how it looks.

I had a good guide, a man who has already worked there for thirty-three years; kind and patient, he explained everything well and tried to make it clear to me.

So together we went down 700 meters and explored the most hidden corners of that underworld. The maintenages or gredins [cells where the miners work] which are situated farthest from the exit are called *des caches* [hiding places, places where men search].

This mine has five levels, but the three upper ones have been exhausted and abandoned; they are no longer worked because there is no more coal. A picture of the maintenages would be something new and unheard of - or rather, never before seen. Imagine a row of cells in a rather narrow, low passage, shored up with rough timber. In each of those cells a miner in a coarse linen suit, filthy and black as a chimney sweep, is busy hewing coal by the pale light of a small lamp. The miner can stand erect in some cells; in others, he lies on the ground (***** tailles à droit, *** tailles à plat). The arrangement is more or less like the cells in a beehive) or like a dark, gloomy passage in an underground prison, or like a row of small weaving looms, or rather more like a row of baking ovens such as the peasants have, or like the partitions in a crypt. The tunnels themselves are like the big chimneys of the Brabant farms.

The water leaks through in some, and the light of the miner's lamp makes a curious effect, reflected as in a stalactite cave. Some of the miners work in the maintenages, others load the cut coal into small carts that run on rails, like a street-car. This is mostly done by children, boys as well as girls. There is also a stable yard down there, 700 meters underground, with about seven old horses which pull a great many of those carts to the so-called accrochage, the place from which they are pulled up to the surface. Other miners repair the old galleries to prevent their collapse or make new galleries in the coal vein. As the mariners ashore are homesick for the sea, notwithstanding all the dangers and hardships which threaten them, so the miner would rather be under the ground than above it. The villages here look desolate and dead and forsaken; life goes on underground instead of above. One might live here for years and never know the real state of things unless one went down in the mines.

People here are very ignorant and untaught - most of them cannot read - but at the same time they are intelligent and quick at their difficult work; brave and frank, they are short but square-shouldered, with melancholy deep-set eyes. They are skillful at many things, and work terribly hard. They have a nervous temperament - I do not mean weak) but very sensitive. They have an innate, deep-rooted hatred and a strong mistrust of anyone who is domineering. With miners one must have a miner's character and temperament, and no pretentious pride or mastery) or one will never get along with them or gain their confidence.

Did I tell you at the time about the miner who was so badly hurt by a firedamp explosion? Thank God, he has recovered and is going out again, and is beginning to walk some distance just for exercise; his hands are still weak and it will be some time before he can use them for his work, but he is out of danger. Since that time there have been many cases of typhoid and malignant fever, of what they call la sotte fièvre, which gives them bad dreams like nightmares and makes them delirious. So again there are many sickly and bedridden people - emaciated, weak, and miserable.

In one house they are all ill with fever and have little or no help, so that the patients have to nurse the patients. “Ici c'est les malades qui soignent les malades” [here the sick tend the sick], said a woman, like, “Le pauvre est l'ami du pauvre.” [The poor man is the poor man's friend.]

Have you seen any beautiful pictures lately? I am eager for a letter from you. Has Israëls done much lately and Maris and Mauve?

A few days ago a colt was born here in the stable, a pretty little animal that soon stood firm on his legs. The miners keep many goats here, and there are kids in every house; rabbits are also very common here in the miners' houses.

I must go out to visit some patients, so I must finish. When you have time, let me have a word from you soon, as a sign of life. My compliments to the Roos family, and to Mauve when you meet him. Many good wishes, and believe me always, with a handshake in thought,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Going down into a mine is a very unpleasant sensation. One goes in a kind of basket or cage, like a bucket in a well, but in a well from 500 - 700 meters deep, so that when looking upward from the bottom, the daylight is about the size of a star in the sky.

It feels like being on a ship at sea for the first time, but it is worse; fortunately it does not last long. The miners get used to it, yet they keep an unconquerable feeling of horror and fear which reasonably and justifiably stays with them.

But once down, the worst is over, and one is richly rewarded for the trouble by what one sees.

My address is - Vincent van Gogh, c/o Jean Baptiste Denis,
Rue de petit Wasmes,
Wasmes (Borinage, Hainaut)

Letter from His Parents to Theo van Gogh

Zundert, 1879

From Reverend Van Gogh to Theo

20 January 1879

We are glad to be able to tell you that Vincent has been accepted for the evangelization in the Borinage - provisionally for six months. He gets fifty francs a month - surely not much, but his boarding house costs him thirty francs. It seems he works there with success and ambition, and his letters are really interesting. He devotes himself to that job with all his heart and an eye for the needs of those people. It is certainly remarkable what he writes; he went down, for instance, in a mine, 635 meters.

From Reverend Van Gogh to Theo

12 February 1879

We are beginning to worry about him again. I am afraid he is wholly absorbed by the care for the sick and the wounded and by sitting up with them.

[…] He also spoke about a plan of renting a workman's house and living there alone. We have tried to dissuade him from it. We are afraid he would not keep it in good shape and it would again lead to eccentricities.

From Mrs. Van Gogh to Theo

27 February 1879

Verhaegen, a colporteur, to whom Pa also sent his letters in the beginning, where Vincent had been lovingly received during the first eight days; he was the one who had found that good boarding house at Denis.

[…] And now I have to tell you that Pa has gone to Vincent this week. We were worried about all the bad weather he had, and especially because while I was away, there had been a very unpleasant letter from him, confirming what we had already suspected, that he had no bed, and that there was nobody to watch his things but far from complaining he said that that was nobody's concern, *etc.*

We were preparing a parcel for him, but we both thought that it would be so much better if Pa himself would take it to him.

Mrs. van Gogh to Theo.

May 1879

Vincent wrote that he would do his best to draw costumes and tools.

Mrs. van Gogh to Theo.

2 July 1879

This week a letter from Vincent; we are always thinking about him with anxiety; poor boy, shortly after my visit to him he wrote that he had such a melancholy feeling when we said goodbye, as if it could have been for the first, but also for the last time. But now there has been a meeting, but that they hadn't said anything to him; before, they had always found fault with him. We have the idea they still want to wait and see for some time, but if he doesn't suit himself to their wishes and adopt the behaviour they demand of him, they can't accept him. He could still achieve so much, if only he knew how to control himself. Poor boy, what a difficult, unrewarding, much missing young life, and what is he going to do next?

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

19 July 1879

You know, don't you? that Vincent's situation in Wasmes does not become any clearer. They have given him three months to look for something else. He does not comply with the wishes of the Committee and it seems that nothing can be done about it. It is a bitter trial for us. We literally don't know what to do. There is so much good in him, but he simply doesn't want to cooperate.

Reverend van Gogh to Theo.

7 August 1879

Last Friday [25 July], Vincent writes, he started on a trip to Maria Hoorebeeke in Flanders; he arrived there - on foot - on Sunday afternoon, intending to meet the Reverend Pietersen, who was in Brussels. Thereupon he went to that city, and he met him on Monday morning. After consultation with him, he is now in Cuesmes again, where he has found shelter; he hopes to find a small room there to stay for the time being. At present his address is: Chez M. Frank, Evangéliste Ã Cuesmes (prés de Mons) au Marais. In Brussels, he visited the families he had met there earlier - what impression will he have made?

From Mrs. Van Gogh to Theo

19 August 1879

But now I must tell you something new, which is that Vincent, after much pressure from our side to visit us at home because we were worrying so much about him and he had nothing to do there, suddenly stood before us last Friday [August 15th]. The girls were boating with the Gezink family, and all at once we hear, “Hello father, hello mother,” and there he was. We were glad; although seeing him again we found he looked thin; that is over now; it must have been the walking and bad food *etc.* - things, by the way, he does not talk about, but he looks well, except for his clothes. Pa immediately gave him his cherished new jacket. We bought him a pair of boots, and he now wears the little summer coat that I made for Pa's birthday every day. Some of your old underwear came in useful too, and as far as stockings, etc., are concerned, I had prepared them in advance, so that now he is quite well taken care of. He is reading books by Dickens all day long, and does not speak apart from giving answers - sometimes correct, sometimes strange ones; if only he adopted the good things from these books. For the rest, about his work, about the past or the future, not a word… Tomorrow, he and Pa will go to Prinsenhage, where CM's boys will come to see the paintings; they are going by train. Pa and Vincent will go on foot, maybe he will talk a little bit then.

From Reverend Van Gogh to Theo

11 March 1880

Vincent is still here - but alas! it is nothing but worry. Now he is talking about going to London in order to speak with the Reverend Jones. If he sticks to that plan, I'll enable him to go, but it is hopeless.

From Reverend Van Gogh to Theo

5 July 1880

Indeed that letter Vincent wrote to you gave me some pleasure. But oh! What will become of him, and isn't it insane to choose a life of poverty and let time pass by without looking for an occasion of earning one's own bread - yes, that really is insane. But we have to put up with it. None of all the things we tried has helped in any way. Maybe you should write back to him; in the last days of June I sent him 60 francs, which he acknowledged; some time later we sent him some clothes. Thinking of him always hurts, and we do think so continuously of him.

[Lines added by Mrs. Van Gogh] We can agree with what you write about Vincent, but if reading books gives such practical results, can it then be called right? And for the rest, what kind of ideas his reading gives him. He sent us a book by Victor Hugo, but that man takes the side of the criminals and doesn't call bad what really is bad. What would the world look like if one calls the evil good? Even with the best of intentions that cannot be accepted. Did you answer him? If not, do so in any case; we were so glad that he thought of you, and we were so sad that he didn't want to have anything to do with anybody when he was here. We haven't heard from him for a long time now and shall write to him again.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Petit-Wasmes, June 1879

Dear Theo,
It is already relatively late, almost twelve o'clock, but I want to write to you before the day is over. In the first place, it is so long since I wrote you - but, my dear fellow, what shall I write? I am up to my ears in work here, so that the days pass without my having time to think of or keep up an interest in many things that used to attract me.

What prompts me to write is that I heard from home that you have had an offer to go to Paris for six weeks. If you go there, you will pass the Borinage. I wanted you to consider spending a day, or more if possible, here. I should so much like to have you know this country, too, because it has so many peculiarities for one who knows how to look at things attentively. To one who had never seen a village by the sea, would it not be interesting to see Scheveningen or Katwijk, or any other such village? Well, there is no sea here, but the character of everything is interesting and worthy of notice. So if you feel inclined and have an opportunity, stay here, but do write beforehand when you are coming and where, at which station I shall find you, and on what train.

I shall give this letter to Mother when she comes, for in all probability I shall meet her when she comes back from Paris. [Their mother had been called to Paris; on his way to the South, Uncle Vincent had fallen dangerously ill there] I am looking forward to seeing her. Happily for Uncle, the danger seems past for the present.

The news of Frans Soek's death touched me deeply; if you know any particulars, I should like to hear them. Poor fellow, his life was not easy, for he had many struggles.

A few days ago we had a very heavy thunderstorm at about eleven o'clock in the evening. Quite near our house there is a spot from which one can see, far below, a large part of the Borinage, with the chimneys, the mounds of coal, the little miners' cottages, the scurrying little black figures by day, like ants in a nest; and farther on, dark pine woods with little white cottages silhouetted against them, a few church spires a way off, an old mill, *etc.* Generally there is a kind of haze hanging over it all, or a fantastic chiaroscuro effect formed by the shadows of the clouds, reminding one of pictures by Rembrandt or Michel or Ruysdael.

But during that thunderstorm in the pitch-dark night the flashes of lightning made a curious effect: now and then everything became visible for a moment. Near by the large, gloomy buildings of the Marcasse mine stood alone, isolated in the open field, that night conjuring up the huge bulk of Noah's Ark as it must have looked in the terrible pouring rain and the darkness of the Flood, illuminated by a flash of lightning. Tonight in a Bible class I described a shipwreck, still under the influence of that thunderstorm.

I often read in Uncle Tom's Cabin these days. There is still so much slavery in the world, and in this remarkably wonderful book that important question is treated with so much wisdom, so much love, and such zeal and interest in the true welfare of the poor oppressed that one comes back to it again and again, always finding something new.

I still can find no better definition of the word art than this, “L'art c'est l'homme ajouté à la nature” [art is man added to nature] - nature, reality, truth, but with a significance, a conception, a character, which the artist brings out in it, and to which he gives expression, “qu'il dégage,” which he disentangles, sets free and interprets. A picture by Mauve or Mans or Israëls says more, and says it more clearly, than nature herself. It is the same with books, and in Uncle Tom's Cabin especially, the artist has put things in a new light; in this book, though it is becoming an old book already - that is, written years ago - all things have become new. The sentiment in it is so fine, so elaborate, so masterly. It is written with so much love, so much seriousness, so faithfully. It is humble and simple, but at the same time so truly sublime, so noble and refined.

Recently I read a book about the English coal district, but it did not give many particulars. Enclosed is a wood engraving for your collection.

The other day I made the acquaintance of somebody who has been a foreman over the miners for many years. Of humble origin, he is a self-made man. Now he has a lung disease, serious enough, and can no longer stand the terribly fatiguing work down in the mine. It is very interesting to hear him speak about all those things relating to the mines. He has always remained a friend of the miner (unlike so many others who have also got on, but more for the sake of money than real distinction, and prompted by less noble and very often mean motives). He has the heart of a labourer - faithful and honest and brave - but he is far superior to most of them in intellectual development. More than once during a strike he has been the only person with any influence on the miners. They would listen to nobody, they would follow nobody's advice but his; and he alone was obeyed in the critical moment. When I met him for the first time, I thought of the etching by Meissonier which we know so well, “The Reader.” One of the Denis boys is about to become engaged to his daughter, that is why he visits the house here now and then, though rarely, and so I made his acquaintance. Since then I visited him a few times. Have you ever read Legouvé, Les Pères et les Enfants? It is a remarkable book. I found it at his house and read it with interest.

A few days ago I received a letter from the Reverend Mr. Jones of Isleworth in which he writes about building little wooden churches here in the Borinage. Is that practicable, is it desirable? He is ready to work for that end, that is, for the erection of the first of such little buildings. He even speaks of coming here in the autumn to talk it over; I certainly hope it happens. If you have time, write me a line, and if you can, stop here when you go to Paris. At all events let me know, if possible, on what train you will be passing the station nearest to Wasmes, for then I will try to be there. Blessings on your work, believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Cuesmes, 5 August 1879

Dear Theo,
I write to you in a great hurry; won't it soon be time for you to go to Paris? If so, write to me the day and the hour, and in all probability I shall see you at the station.

If you have time to stay a day, or more or less, I should be very happy; I should have some drawings to show you, types from here; it wouldn't be worth while for you to leave the train for those alone, but you would easily find something to attract you in the scenery and in the curious aspect of things - everything in this neighbourhood has such a picturesque character.

Have you read Les Temps Difficiles [Hard Times] by Dickens? I have written the title in French because there exists a very good French translation for 1fr. 25, in the Hachette edition: Bibliothèque des meilleurs Romans étrangers. [Library of the Best Foreign Novels.] It is a masterpiece, the author in this work has painted a moving and sympathetic portrait of a working man called Stephen Blackpool,

I was in Brussels recently, and in Maria Hoorebeke and in Tournay, partly on foot.

For the present I am at the following address: M. Frank, Evangelist at Cuesmes (near Mons) au Marais.

There have been many thunderstorms here lately. Do try, dear fellow, and arrange to stay over an hour or so.

Lately I have been at a studio again, namely at the Reverend Pietersen's, who paints in the manner of Schelfhout or Hoppenbrouwers, and has good ideas about art.

He asked me for one of my sketches, a miner type. Often I draw far into the night, to keep some souvenir and to strengthen the thoughts raised involuntarily by the aspect of things here.

But, boy, I have no more time. I have written to Mr. Tersteeg to thank him for the box of paints he sent me, and the sketchbook, which is almost half full already.

In Brussels I bought from a Jewish book dealer another big sketchbook of old Dutch paper.

Shall I see you? How welcome you would be. I promise you Dickens's Les

Temps Difficiles if you will come to fetch it; otherwise I will send it to you when I have a chance. À Dieu. A handshake in thought, and believe me always,

Yours truly, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Cuesmes, mid August 1879

Dear Theo,
I am writing to you especially to tell you how grateful I am for your visit. It had been quite a long time since we had seen each other or had written as we used to do. Still, it is better to be close than dead to each other, the more so as, until one is truly entitled to be called dead by virtue of one's legal demise, it smacks of hypocrisy or at least childishness to carry on as if it were true. Childish in the manner of a young man of 14 who believes his dignity and rank in society oblige him to wear a top hat.

The hours we spent together have at least assured us that we are both still in the land of the living. When I saw you again and walked with you, I had a feeling I used to have more often than I do now, namely that life is something good and precious which one should value, and I felt more cheerful and alive than I have been feeling for a long time, because in spite of myself my life has gradually become less precious, much less important and more a matter of indifference to me, or so it seemed.

When one lives with others and is bound by feelings of affection, then one realizes that one has a reason for living, that one may not be utterly worthless and expendable, but is perhaps good for something, since we need one another and are journeying together as compagnons de voyage. But our proper sense of self-esteem is also highly dependent upon our relationship with others.

A prisoner who is condemned to solitude, who is prevented from working, etc., will in the long run, especially if the run is too long, suffer from the effects as surely as one who has gone hungry too long. Like everyone else, I need friendly or affectionate relationships or intimate companionship, and am not made of stone or iron like a pump or a lamppost, and like any man of culture or decency I cannot do without these things and not feel a void, a lack of something - and I tell you all this to let you know how much good your visit has done me.

And just as I would not want us to become estranged, so I would want to keep in with all at home. For the moment, however, I am not very keen on going back there and would much rather stay on here. Yet it may well all have been my own fault and you could be right about my not seeing things straight. And so, despite my great reluctance and though it is a hard course for me to take, I may yet go to Etten, at least for a few days.

As I think back with gratitude to your visit, my thoughts return to our discussions as well, of course. I have had similar ones before, even a good many and often. Plans for improvement and change and generating energy - and yet, do not be offended, I am a little frightened by them, not least because I have sometimes acted upon them only to have my hopes dashed.

How fresh my memory of that time in Amsterdam is. You were there yourself, so you know how things were planned and discussed, argued and considered, talked over with wisdom, with the best intentions, and yet how miserable the result was, how ridiculous the whole undertaking, how utterly foolish. I still shudder when I think of it.

It was the worst time I have ever lived through. How desirable and attractive have become the difficult days, full of care, here in this poor country, in these uncivilized surroundings, compared to that. I fear a similar result if I follow wise advice given with the best intentions.

Such experiences are too dreadful - the harm, the sorrow, the affliction is too great - not to try on both sides to become wiser by this dearly bought experience. If we do not learn from this, what shall we learn from? To try “to reach the goal which was set before me,” as the expression was then; indeed, I no longer aspire to it, the ambition has greatly abated. Even if it looked and sounded well before, now I look at those things from another point of view gained by experience, although this opinion is not permissible.

Not permissible, aye, just as Frank the Evangelist thought it reprehensible of me to assert that the sermons of the Reverend Mr. John Andry are only a little more evangelical than those of a Roman Catholic priest. I would rather die a natural death than be prepared for it by the Academy, and I have sometimes had a lesson from a German mower that was of more use to me than one in Greek.

A change for the better in my life, shouldn't I long for that, or are there times when one has no need of betterment? I hope I do become much improved. But precisely because that is what I long for, I am afraid of remèdes pires que le mal [cures worse than the disease]. Can you blame a patient for standing up to his doctor and preferring not to be given the wrong treatment or quack remedies?

Is it wrong for someone suffering from consumption or typhus to insist that a more potent remedy than barley water might be indicated, might indeed be essential, or, while finding nothing wrong with barley water as such, to question its effectiveness and potency in his particular case? The doctor who prescribed the barley water would be wrong to say: this patient is an obstinate mule who is courting his own destruction because he refuses to take his medicine - no, it is not that the man is unwilling, but that the so-called remedy is worthless, because though it might well be good for something, it does not fit the case.

Can you blame a person for remaining indifferent to a painting listed in the catalogue as a Memling, but having nothing more in common with a Memling than that it has a similar subject from the Gothic period, but without artistic merit?

And if you should conclude from these remarks that I meant to suggest your advice was worthy of a quack, then you have completely misunderstood me, as I have no such thoughts or opinions about you. If, on the other hand, you believe that I would do well to follow your advice literally to become an engraver of invoice headings and visiting cards, or a bookkeeper or a carpenter's apprentice - or follow the advice of my very dear sister Anna to devote myself to the baker's trade or many other similar things (curiously at odds and hardly compatible) that other people advise me.

But you say, “I do not expect you to take that advice literally; I was just afraid you were too fond of spending your days in idleness, and I thought you should put an end to it.”

May I observe that this is a rather strange sort of “idleness.” It is somewhat difficult for me to defend myself, but I should be very sorry if, sooner or later, you could not see it differently. I am not sure it would be right to combat such an accusation by becoming a baker, for instance. It would indeed be a decisive answer (always supposing that it were possible to assume, quick as lightning, the form of a baker, a barber or a librarian); but at the same time it would be a foolish answer, more or less like the action of a man who, when reproached with cruelty for riding a donkey, immediately dismounted and continued his way with the donkey on his shoulders.

And now, all joking aside, it is my honest opinion that it would be better if the relationship between us were to become closer on both sides. If ever I came to believe seriously that I was being a nuisance or a burden to you or those at home, of no use to anyone, and were obliged to look upon myself as an intruder or to feel superfluous so far as you are concerned, so that it would be better if I were not there at all, and if I should have to try all the time to keep out of other people's way - were I really to think that, then I should be overwhelmed by a feeling of sadness and should have to wrestle with despair.

I find it hard to bear this thought and even harder to bear the thought that so much dissention, misery and sorrow between us, and in our home, may have been caused by me. Should that indeed be the case, then I might wish it were granted me not to have much longer to live.

Yet when this thought sometimes depresses me beyond measure, far too deeply, then after a long time another occurs too: 'Perhaps it is only an awful, frightening dream and later we may learn to see and understand it more clearly.'

Or is it real, and will it ever get better rather than worse? Many people would undoubtedly consider it foolish and superstitious to go on believing in a change for the better.

It is sometimes so bitterly cold in the winter that one says, `The cold is too awful for me to care whether summer is coming or not; the harm outdoes the good.' But with or without our approval, the severe weather does come to an end eventually and one fine morning the wind changes and there is the thaw. When I compare the state of the weather to our state of mind and our circumstances, subject to change and fluctuation like the weather, then I still have some hope that things may get better.

If you were to write again soon, you would make me very happy. Should you do so, please address your letter care of J. B. Denis, Rue du Petit Wasmes à Wasmes (Hainaut).

Walked to Wasmes the evening after you left. Have drawn yet another portrait since. Goodbye, accept a handshake in my thoughts and believe me,

Yours truly, Vincent

1880

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Cuesmes, July 1880

My Dear Theo,
I am writing to you rather reluctantly because, for a good many reasons, I have kept silent for such a long time. To some extent you have become a stranger to me, and I to you perhaps more than you think. It is probably better for us not to go on like that. It is probable that I would not have written to you even now, were it not that I feel obliged, compelled, to do so - because, be it noted, you yourself have compelled me to.

I heard in Etten that you had sent 50 francs for me. Well, I have accepted them. With reluctance, of course, with a feeling of some despondency, of course, but I have reached a sort of impasse, am in trouble, what else can I do? And so I am writing to thank you.

As you may know, I am back in the Borinage. Father said he would prefer me to stay somewhere near Etten, but I refused and I believe I was right to do so. To the family, I have, willy-nilly, become a more or less objectionable and shady sort of character, at any rate a bad lot. How then could I then be of any use to anyone? And so I am inclined to think the best and most sensible solution all round would be for me to go away and to keep my distance, to cease to be, as it were. What the moulting season is for birds - the time when they lose their feathers - setbacks, misfortune and hard times are for us human beings. You can cling on to the moulting season, you can also emerge from it reborn, but it must not be done in public.

The thing is far from amusing, not very exhilarating, and so one should take care to keep out of the way. Well, so be it.

Now, though it is a fairly hopeless task to regain the trust of an entire family, one which has perhaps never been wholly weaned from prejudice and other equally honourable and respectable qualities, I am not entirely without hope that, bit by bit, slowly but surely, the good relationship between one and all may be restored. In the first place I should be glad to see this good relationship - to put it no more strongly than that - restored at least between Father and me, and further, I set great store by seeing it restored between the two of us. A good relationship is infinitely preferable to a misunderstanding.

Now I must trouble you with certain abstract matters, hoping that you will listen to them patiently. I am a man of passions, capable of and given to doing more or less outrageous things for which I sometimes feel a little sorry. Every so often I say or do something too hastily, when it would have been better to have shown a little more patience. Other people also act rashly at times, I think.

This being the case, what can be done about it? Should I consider myself a dangerous person, unfit for anything? I think not. Rather, every means should be tried to put these very passions to good effect.

To mention just one by way of an example, I have a more or less irresistible passion for books and the constant need to improve my mind, to study if you like, just as I have a need to eat bread. You will understand that. When I lived in other surroundings, surroundings full of pictures and works of art, I conceived a violent, almost fanatical passion for those surroundings, as you know. And I do not regret that, and even now, *far from home, I often feel homesick for the land of pictures*

You may remember that I knew very well (and it may be that I know it still) what Rembrandt was or what Millet was or Jules Dupré or Delacroix or Millais or Matthijs Maris.

Well, today I am no longer in those surroundings, yet they say that what is known as the soul never dies but lives on for ever, continuing to seek for ever and again.

So instead of succumbing to my homesickness I told myself: your land, your fatherland, is all around. So instead of giving in to despair I chose active melancholy, in so far as I was capable of activity, in other words I chose the kind of melancholy that hopes, that strives and that seeks, in preference to the melancholy that despairs numbly and in distress. I accordingly made a more or less serious study of the books within my reach, such as the Bible and Michelet's La révolution Française, and then last winter Shakespeare and a little Victor Hugo and Dickens and Beecher Stowe and recently Æschylus and then various less classical writers, a few great minor masters. You know, don't you, that Fabritius and Bida are counted among the minor masters?

Now anyone who becomes absorbed in all this is sometimes considered outrageous, `shocking,' sinning more or less unwillingly against certain forms and customs and proprieties. It is a pity that people take that amiss.

You know, for example, that I have often neglected my appearance. I admit it, and I also admit that it is `shocking.' But look here, lack of money and poverty have something to do with it too, as well as a profound disillusionment, and besides, it is sometimes a good way of ensuring the solitude you need, of concentrating more or less on whatever study you are immersed in. One essential study is that of medicine. There is scarcely anybody who does not try to acquire some knowledge of it, who does not at least try to grasp what it is about (and you see, I still know absolutely nothing about it). And all these things absorb you, preoccupy you, set you dreaming, musing and thinking.

Now for the past five years or so, I don't know how long exactly, I have been more or less without permanent employment, wandering from pillar to post. You will say, ever since such and such a time you have been going downhill, you have been feeble, you have done nothing. Is that entirely true?

What is true is that I have at times earned my own crust of bread, and at other times a friend has given it to me out of the goodness of his heart. I have lived whatever way I could, for better or for worse, taking things just as they came. It is true that I have forfeited the trust of various people, it is true that my financial affairs are in a sorry state, it is true that the future looks rather bleak, it is true that I might have done better, it is true that I have wasted time when it comes to earning a living, it is true that my studies are in a fairly lamentable and appalling state, and that my needs are greater, infinitely greater than my resources. But does that mean going downhill and doing nothing?

You might say, but why didn't you go through with university, continue as they wanted you to? To that I can only reply that it was too expensive, and besides, the future then looked no better than it does now, along the path I am now taking.

And I must continue to follow the path I take now. If I do nothing, if I study nothing, if I cease searching, then, woe is me, I am lost. That is how I look at it - keep going, keep going come what may.

But what is your final goal, you may ask. That goal will become clearer, will emerge slowly but surely, much as the rough draught turns into a sketch, and the sketch into a painting through the serious work done on it, through the elaboration of the original vague idea and through the consolidation of the first fleeting and passing thought.

You should know that it is the same with evangelists as it is with artists. There is an old academic school, often odious and tyrannical, the `abomination of desolation', in short, men who dress, as it were, in a suit of steel armour, a cuirass, of prejudice and convention. When they are in charge, it is they who hand out the jobs and try, with much red tape, to keep them for their proteges and to exclude the man with an open mind.

Their God is like the God of Shakespeare's drunken Falstaff, “the inside of a church.” Indeed, by a strange coincidence, some evangelical (???) gentlemen have the same view of matters spiritual as that drunkard (which might surprise them somewhat were they capable of human emotion). But there is little fear that their blindness will ever turn into insight.

This is a bad state of affairs for anyone who differs from them and protests with heart and soul and all the indignation he can muster. For my part, I hold those academicians who are not like these academicians in high esteem, but the decent ones are thinner on the ground than you might think.

Now, one of the reasons why I have no regular job, and why I have not had a regular job for years, is quite simply that my ideas differ from those of the gentlemen who hand out the jobs to individuals who think as they do. It is not just a question of my appearance, which is what they have sanctimoniously reproached me with. It goes deeper, I do assure you.

I am telling you all this not to complain, not to make excuses for matters in which I may perhaps have been somewhat at fault, but simply to tell you the following: during your final visit last summer when we were walking together near that abandoned mineshaft which they call “La Sorcière,” you reminded me of another walk we once took at another time near the old canal and the mill at Rijswijk, and, you said, we used to agree about many things, but, you added, “You have changed since then, you are no longer the same.” Well, that is not entirely true. What has changed is that my life then was less difficult and my future seemingly less gloomy, but as far as my inner self, my way of looking at things and of thinking is concerned, that has not changed. But if there has indeed been a change, then it is that I think, believe and love more seriously now what I thought, believed and loved even then.

So you would be mistaken should you continue to think that I have become less keen on, say, Rembrandt, Millet, or Delacroix or whoever or whatever, for the reverse is the case, but there are many different things worth believing and loving, you see - there is something of Rembrandt in Shakespeare, something of Correggio or of Sarto in Michelet and something of Delacroix in Victor Hugo, and there is also something of Rembrandt in the Gospel or, if you prefer, something of the Gospel in Rembrandt, it comes to much the same thing, provided you understand it properly, do not try to distort it and bear in mind that the elements of the comparisons are not intended to detract in any way from the merits of the original individuals.

And in Bunyan there is something of M. Maris or of Millet, a reality that, in a manner of speaking, is more real than reality itself, something hitherto unknown that, if only you can read it, will tell you untold things. And in Beecher Stowe there is something of Ary Scheffer.

Now, if you can forgive someone for immersing himself in pictures, perhaps you will also grant that the love of books is as sacred as that of Rembrandt, indeed, I believe that the two complement each other.

I very much admire the portrait of a man by Fabritius that we stood looking at for a long time in the gallery in Haarlem one day when we took another walk together. Admittedly, I am as fond of Dickens's `Richard Cartone' [Sydney Carton] in his Paris & Londres in 1793 [A Tale of Two Cities], and I could point to other particularly gripping characters in other books with a more or less striking resemblance. And I think that Kent, a character in Shakespeare's “King Lear,” is as noble and distinguished a man as that figure by Th. de Keyser, though Kent and King Lear are reputed to have lived much earlier.

Let me stop there, but my God, how beautiful Shakespeare is, who else is as mysterious as he is; his language and method are like a brush trembling with excitement and ecstasy. But one must learn to read, just as one must learn to see and learn to live.

So please don't think that I am renouncing anything, I am reasonably faithful in my unfaithfulness and though I have changed, I am the same, and what preys on my mind is simply this one question: what am I good for, could I not be of service or use in some way, how can I become more knowledgeable and study some subject or other in depth? That is what keeps preying on my mind, you see, and then one feels imprisoned by poverty, barred from taking part in this or that project and all sorts of necessities are out of one's reach. As a result one cannot rid oneself of melancholy, one feels emptiness where there might have been friendship and sublime and genuine affection, and one feels dreadful disappointment gnawing at one's spiritual energy, fate seems to stand in the way of affection or one feels a wave of disgust welling up inside. And then one says “How long, my God!”

Well, that's how it is, can you tell what goes on within by looking at what happens without? There may be a great fire in our soul, but no one ever comes to warm himself by it, all that passers-by can see is a little smoke coming out of the chimney, and they walk on.

All right, then, what is to be done, should one tend that inward fire, turn to oneself for strength, wait patiently - yet with how much impatience! - wait, I say, for the moment when someone who wants to comes and sits down beside one's fire and perhaps stays on? Let him who believes in God await the moment that will sooner or later arrive.

Well, right now it seems that things are going very badly for me, have been doing so for some considerable time, and may continue to do so well into the future. But it is possible that everything will get better after it has all seemed to go wrong. I am not counting on it, it may never happen, but if there should be a change for the better I should regard that as a gain, I should rejoice, I should say, at last! So there *was something after all!*

But, you will say, what a dreadful person you are, with your impossible religious notions and idiotic scruples. If my ideas are impossible or idiotic then I would like nothing better than to be rid of them. But this is roughly the way I see things. In Le Philosophe sous les Toits by Souvestre you can read what a man of the people, a simple craftsman, pitiful if you will, thinks of his country: “Tu n'as peut-être jamais pensé à ce que c'est la patrie, reprit-il, en me posant une main sur l'épaule; c'est tout ce qui t'entoure, tout ce qui t'a élevé et nourri, tout ce que tu as aimé. Cette campagne que tu vois, ces maisons, ces arbres, ces jeunes filles qui passent là en riant, c'est la patrie! Les lois qui te protègent, le pain qui paye ton travail, les paroles que tu échanges, la joie et la tristesse qui te viennent des hommes et des choses parmi lesquels tu vis, c'est la patrie! La petite chambre où tu as autrefois vu ta mère, les souvenirs qu'elle t'a laissés, la terre où elle repose, c'est la patrie! Tu la vois, tu la respires partout! Figure toi, tes affections et tes besoins, tes souvenirs et ta reconnaissance, réunis tout ça sous un seul nom et ce nom sera la patrie.” [You may never have thought what your country really is, he continued, placing his hand on my shoulder; it is everything around you, everything that has raised and nourished you, everything that you have loved. This countryside that you see; these houses, these trees, these young girls laughing as they pass, that is your country! The laws that protect you, the bread that rewards your labour, the words you speak, the joy and sorrow that come from the people and things in whose midst you live, that is your country! The little room where you used in days gone by to see your mother, the memories she left you, the earth in which she rests, that is your country! You see it, you breathe it, everywhere! Imagine your rights and your duties, your affections and your needs, your memories and your gratitude, gather all that together under a single name, and that name will be your country.]

In the same way I think that everything that is really good and beautiful, the inner, moral, spiritual and sublime beauty in men and their works, comes from God, and everything that is bad and evil in the works of men and in men is not from God, and God does not approve of it.

But I cannot help thinking that the best way of knowing God is to love many things. Love this friend, this person, this thing, whatever you like, and you will be on the right road to understanding Him better, that is what I keep telling myself. But you must love with a sublime, genuine, profound sympathy, with devotion, with intelligence, and you must try all the time to understand Him more, better and yet more. That will lead to God, that will lead to an unshakeable faith.

To take an example: one man will love Rembrandt, genuinely, and that man will surely know that there is a God, he will really believe it. Another will make a thorough study of the French Revolution - he will not be an unbeliever, he will see that there is a supreme authority that manifests itself in great affairs. Yet another has recently attended a free course of lectures at the great university of sorrow and has heeded the things he saw with his eyes and heard with his ears, and has reflected upon them. He too will come to believe in the end and will perhaps have learned more than he can tell.

Try to grasp the essence of what the great artists, the serious masters, say in their masterpieces, and you will again find God in them. One man has written or said it in a book, another in a painting. Just read the Bible and the Gospel, that will start you thinking, thinking about many things, thinking about everything, well then, think about many things, think about everything, that will lift your thoughts above the humdrum despite yourself. We know how to read, so let us read!

Now then, you may well have bouts of being a little absent-minded, a little dreamy, indeed there are some who become too absent-minded, a little too dreamy. That may indeed have happened with me, but all in all that is my own fault, maybe there as a reason for it, perhaps I was lost in thought for one reason or another, anxious, worried, but one gets over that in the end. The dreamer sometimes falls into the doldrums, but is said to emerge from them again. And the absent-minded person also makes up for it with bouts of perspicacity. Sometimes he is a person whose right to exist has a justification that is not always immediately obvious to you, or more usually, you may absent-mindedly allow it to slip from your mind. Someone who has been wandering about for a long time, tossed to and fro on a stormy sea, will in the end reach his destination. Someone who has seemed to be good for nothing, unable to fill any job, any appointment, will find one in the end and, energetic and capable, will prove himself quite different from what he seemed at first.

I am writing somewhat at random, writing whatever flows from my pen. I should be very happy if you could see in me something more than a kind of fainéant [idler]. For there is a great difference between one idler and another idler. There is someone who is an idler out of laziness and lack of character, owing to the baseness of his nature. If you like, you may take me for one of those. Then there is the other kind of idler, the idler despite himself, who is inwardly consumed by a great longing for action who does nothing because his hands are tied, because he is, so to speak, imprisoned somewhere, because he lacks what he needs to be productive, because disastrous circumstances have brought him forcibly to this end. Such a one does not always know what he can do, but he nevertheless instinctively feels, I am good for something! My existence is not without reason! I know that I could be a quite a different person! How can I be of use, how can I be of service? There is something inside me, but what can it be? He is quite another idler. If you like you may take me for one of those.

A caged bird in spring knows perfectly well that there is some way in which he should be able to serve. He is well aware that there is something to be done, but he is unable to do it. What is it? He cannot quite remember, but then he gets a vague inkling and he says to himself, “The others are building their nests and hatching their young and bringing them up,” and then he bangs his head against the bars of the cage. But the cage does not give way and the bird is maddened by pain. “What a idler,” says another bird passing by - what an idler. Yet the prisoner lives and does not die. There are no outward signs of what is going on inside him; he is doing well, he is quite cheerful in the sunshine.

But then the season of the great migration arrives, an attack of melancholy. He has everything he needs, say the children who tend him in his cage - but he looks out, at the heavy thundery sky, and in his heart of hearts he rebels against his fate. I am caged, I am caged and you say I need nothing, you idiots! I have everything I need, indeed! Oh! please give me the freedom to be a bird like other birds!

A kind of idler of a person resembles that kind of idler of a bird. And people are often unable to do anything, imprisoned as they are in I don't know what kind of terrible, terrible, oh such terrible cage.

I do know that there is a release, the belated release. A justly or unjustly ruined reputation, poverty, disastrous circumstances, misfortune, they all turn you into a prisoner. You cannot always tell what keeps you confined, what immures you, what seems to bury you, and yet you can feel those elusive bars, railings, walls. Is all this illusion, imagination? I don't think so. And then one asks: My God! will it be for long, will it be for ever, will it be for eternity?

Do you know what makes the prison disappear? Every deep, genuine affection. Being friends, being brothers, loving, that is what opens the prison, with supreme power, by some magic force. Without these one stays dead. But whenever affection is revived, there life revives. Moreover, the prison is sometimes called prejudice, misunderstanding, fatal ignorance of one thing or another, suspicion, false modesty.

But to change the subject - if I have come down in the world, you have in a different way come up in it. And if I have forfeited sympathy, you have gained it. I am glad of that, I say that it in all sincerity, and it will always give me pleasure. If you lacked seriousness or consideration, I would be fearful that it might not last, but since I think that you are very serious and very considerate, I tend to believe it will!

But if you could see me as something other than a idler of the bad sort, I should be very happy.

For the rest, if I can ever do anything for you, be of some use to you, know that I am at your disposal. Now that I have accepted what you have given me, you are, should I be able to render you some service, in a position to ask me. It would make me happy, and I should take it a sign of trust. We have moved rather far apart and may in certain respects have perhaps different views, but some time, some day, one of us may be of service to the other.

For now I shake your hand, thanking you once again for having been so good to me. If, one of these days, you feel like writing, my address is, chez Ch. Decrucq, Rue du Pavillon 8, Cuesmes, near Mons, and know that it will do me good to hear from you.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Cuesmes, 20 August 1880

Dear Theo,
If I am not mistaken, you must still have “Les Travaux des Champs” by Millet. Would you be so kind as to lend them to me for a short time, and send them by mail?

I must tell you that I am busy sketching large drawings after Millet, and that I have already finished “The Four Hours of the Day “as well as “The Sower.” Well, perhaps if you saw them, you would not be altogether dissatisfied. Now if you send me “Les Travaux des Champs,” you might perhaps add some other prints by, or after, Millet, Breton, Feyen-Perrin, *etc*. Do not buy them for this purpose, but lend me what you have.

Send me what you can, and do not fear for me. If I can only continue to work, somehow or other it will se me right again. Your doing this will help me a great deal. If you should take a trip to Holland, I hope you will not pass by here without coming to see the sketches.

I write to you while I am busy drawing, and I am in a hurry to go back to it, so good night, and send me the prints as soon as possible, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent
C/o Charles Decrucq,
Rue du Pavillon 3, Cuesmes.

The Millets which I copied are, “The Four Hours of the Day,” the size is almost that of a page from the Cours de Dessin Bargue. You will understand well enough what I want without my telling you, but I'll tell you anyway, so you'll know what I really think. It is especially studies of the figure like “The Diggers” by Millet, or the lithograph after his “Le Vanneur” [The Winnower] and figures by Brion, Frère, or Feyen-Perrin, or Jules Breton. I think that you might perhaps find just what I want at the Alliance des Arts, where they sell lithographs of contemporary artists cheaply. One print which I should like to have immensely is the large etching by Daubigny after Ruysdael, “Le Buisson” [The Copse], which is sold at the chalcographic cabinet of the Louvre.

I have sketched a drawing representing miners, men and women, going to the shaft in the morning through the snow, by a path along a thorn hedge: passing shadows, dimly visible in the twilight. In the background the large mine buildings and the heaps of clinkers stand out vaguely against the sky. I am sending you a hasty sketch so you can see what it is like. But I feel the need to study the drawing of the figure from masters like Millet, Breton, Brion, or Boughton, or others. What do you think of the sketch - do you think the idea good?

Among Bingham's photographs of pictures by J. Breton, if I remember correctly, there is one representing gleaners: dark silhouettes against a red sky at sunset. Well, these are the things I want to study. It is because I think you would rather see me doing some good work than nothing that I write to you on this subject, and perhaps it might be a reason for restoring the *entente cordiale* and the sympathy between us, and make us of some use to one another.

I should like very much to do that drawing over again, better than it is now. In the one I have done already, such as it is, the figures could be 10 cm. high. The pendant represents the return of the miners, but it did not turn out so well; it is very difficult, being an effect of brown silhouettes, just touched by light, against a mottled sky at sunset.

Send me “Les Travaux des Champs” by return mail if you can and will. I wrote a note to Mr. Tersteeg to ask him if perhaps there was a chance of my having for a time the Exercices au Fusain, by Bargue - that is, the studies from the nude, which you know. I do not know whether he will send them or not, but in case he should not be willing to, could you put in a word for me? For those Exercices au Fusain would be of immense service to me. But perhaps he will do me the favour of sending at least a few sheets, if not the whole course.

Sketch of miners enclosed in letter

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Cuesmes, 7 September 1880

Dear Theo,
I received in good order the prints, etchings, etc., which you sent me some time ago, and I thank you very much. You did me a great service by sending them.

I can tell you that I have sketched the ten sheets of “Les Travaux des Champs” by Millet (almost the size of a page in Cours de Dessin Bargue), and that I have completely finished one. I should have done more, but first I wanted to make the Exercices au Fusain by Bargue, which Mr. Tersteeg has kindly lent me, and I have now finished the sixty sheets. In addition, I have made a drawing of “Evening Prayer,” after the etching which you sent me.

I wish I could show them to you and get your opinion of all this, as well as of some other drawings - for instance, a large sepia drawing after Th. Rousseau, “Four dans les Landes.” [Oven in the Landes - vast plain south of Bordeaux.] I had already done it twice in watercolour before I succeeded in finishing it. As I told you before, I should like very much to copy “Le Buisson” by Ruysdael too; you know those two landscapes are in the same style and sentiment.

I have been making rough sketches of these drawings without advancing very much, but lately it seems to be improving, and I am hopeful that it will improve even more. Especially because Mr. Tersteeg and also you have come to my aid with good models, for at present I think it is much better to copy some good things than to work without this foundation. Yet I could not keep from sketching in a rather large size the drawing of the miners going to the shaft which I sent you a hasty sketch of, though I changed the placement of the figures a little. I hope that after having copied the other two series by Bargue, I shall be able to draw miners, male and female, more or less well, if by chance I can have a model with some character; and as to that, there are plenty of them.

The lithograph after Bosboom's “Interior of a Cowshed” is very beautiful. You understood my intentions perfectly when you added “La Malaria” by Hébert to the collection.

If you still have the book with the etchings after Michel, please lend me that sometime, too, but there is no hurry. For the moment I have enough to keep me busy, but I should like to see those landscapes again, for now I look at things with different eyes than I did before I began to draw.

I hope that you will not be too dissatisfied with the drawings after Millet when you see them; those little wood engraving are admirable.

As I already have twenty prints after Millet, you can understand that if you could send me some more, I would make them readily, for I try to study that master seriously. I know that the large etching of “The Diggers” is rare, but be on the lookout for it, and tell me what it will cost. Someday or other I shall earn a few pennies with some drawings of miners; I should like to have that print and “Le Buisson” as soon as I am able to buy it, even if it is rather expensive. The other day I bought for 2.50 francs two volumes of the Musée Universel, in which I found a large number of interesting woodcuts, including three of Millet's.

I cannot tell you the pleasure Mr. Tersteeg gave me by letting me have the Exercices au Fusain and the Cours de Dessin Bargue for a while. I worked almost a whole fortnight on the former, from early morning until night, and daily I seem to feel that it invigorates my pencil. With no less eagerness - in fact, more - I am now copying “Les Travaux des Champs.” I am now working on “The Sheep Shearers.”

Once more my heartfelt thanks for having sent them; everything you can find by that artist will be of the greatest use to me. I have already drawn “The Sower” five times, twice in small size, three times in large, and I will take it up again, I am so entirely absorbed in that figure.

Whenever you write to me (which would be a very welcome distraction), could you tell me something about the etchings by A. Legros? If I remember correctly, I saw a dozen of them in England, and they were very beautiful. This is all for today. Thanking you again, and with a handshake,

Vincent

Accept my congratulations on the occasion of September 10.

C/o Charles Decrucq,

3 Rue du Pavillon,

Cuesmes, near Mons

These are the Millets I have:

The Sower
Angelus
Reapers Binding the Sheaves
Woodcutter and his Wife in the Wood
Fields in Winter
Young Farmer
Les travaux des Champs, 10 sheets

The Four Hours of the Day, 4 sheets

Do you still have an old woodcutter alone in the wood in your collection of wood engravings?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Cuesmes, 24 September 1880

Dear Theo,

Your letter has done me good and I thank you for having written to me in the way you have.

The roll with a new selection of etchings and various prints has just arrived. First and foremost the masterly etching, “Le Buisson” by Daubigny and Ruysdael. Well! I propose to make two drawings, in sepia or something else, one after that etching, the other after “Le Four dans les Landes” by Th. Rousseau. Indeed, I have already done a sepia of the latter, but if you compare it with Daubigny's etching you will see that it contrasts feebly, although considered on its own the sepia may betray some tone and sentiment. I shall have to return to it and tackle it again.

I am still working on Bargue's *Cours de Dessin*, and intend to finish it before I go on to anything else, for both my hand and my mind are growing daily more supple and strong as a result, and I cannot thank Mr. Tersteeg enough for having been so kind as to lend it to me. The models are outstanding. Meanwhile I am reading one book on anatomy and another on perspective, which Mr. Tersteeg also sent me. These studies are demanding and sometimes the books are extremely tedious, but I think all the same that it's doing me good to study them.

So you see that I am working away hard, though for the moment it is not yielding particularly gratifying results. But I have every hope that these thorns will bear white blossoms in due course and that these apparently fruitless struggles are nothing but labour pains. First the pain, then the joy.

You mention Lessore. I think I remember some very elegant watercolour landscapes by him in a blonde tone, worked with an apparent ease and a light touch, yet with accuracy and distinction, and a somewhat decorative effect (that is not meant badly, but on the contrary, in a favourable sense). So I know a little about his work and you mention someone not entirely unknown to me.

I admire the portrait of Victor Hugo. It is done very conscientiously with the evident intention of portraying the truth without straining after effect. That is precisely what makes it so effective.

Last winter I pored over some of Hugo's works, Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné and an excellent book on Shakespeare. I first started studying this writer long ago. He is just as splendid as Rembrandt. Shakespeare is to Charles

Dickens or Victor Hugo what Ruysdael is to Daubigny, and Rembrandt to Millet.

What you say in your letter about Barbizon is perfectly true and I can tell you one or two things that will make it clear how much I share your view. I haven't been to Barbizon, but though I haven't been there, I did go to Courrières last winter. I went on a walking tour in the Pas-de-Calais, not the English Channel but the department, or province. I had gone on this trip in the hope of perhaps finding some sort of work there, if possible - I would have accepted anything - but in fact I set out a bit reluctantly, though I can't exactly say why. But I had told myself, You must see Courrières. I had just 10 francs in my pocket and because I had started out by taking the train, that was soon gone, and I was on the road for a week, it was a rather gruelling trip. Anyway, I saw Courrières and the outside of M. Jules Breton's studio. The outside of the studio was a bit of a disappointment, seeing that it is in a brand-new studio, recently built of brick, of a Methodist regularity, with an inhospitable, stone-cold and forbidding aspect, just like C. M.'s Jovinda, which, between ourselves, I am none too keen on either, for the same reason. If I could have seen the inside, I am quite certain that I should have given no further thought to the outside, but there you are, I could not see the inside because I dared not introduce myself and go in. Elsewhere in Courrières I looked for traces of Jules Breton or any other artist. All I was able to find was a portrait of him at a photographer's and a copy of Titian's Entombment in a corner of the old church which looked very beautiful to me in the darkness and masterly in tone. Was it by him? I don't know because I was unable to make out any signature.

But of any living artist, no trace, just a cafe called Cafe des Beaux Arts, also of new, inhospitable, stone-cold, repulsive brick - the café was decorated with a kind of fresco or mural depicting episodes from the life of that illustrious knight, Don Quixote.

To tell the truth, those frescoes seemed to me rather poor consolation, and fairly mediocre at the time. I don't know who did them.

But anyway I did seen the country around Courrières then, the haystacks, the brown farmland or the marled earth, almost coffee-coloured (with whitish spots where the marl shows through), which seems somewhat unusual to people like us who are used to a blackish soil. And the French sky looked to me much finer and brighter than the smoky, foggy sky of the Borinage. What's more, there were farms and barns that, God be praised, still retained their mossy thatched roofs. I also saw the flocks of crows made famous by the pictures of Daubigny and Millet. Not to mention, as I ought to have done in the first place, the characteristic and picturesque figures of all manner of workmen, diggers, woodcutters, a farmhand driving his wagon and a silhouette of a woman in a white cap. Even in Courrières there was still a coal mine or pit, I saw the day shift come up at nightfall: but there were no women workers in men's clothes as in the Borinage, just the miners looking tired and careworn, black with coal dust, dressed in ragged miners' clothes, one of them in an old army cape.

Although this trip nearly killed me and I came back spent with fatigue, with crippled feet and in more or less depressed state of mind, I do not regret it, because I saw some interesting things and the terrible ordeals of suffering are what teach you to look at things through different eyes.

I earned a few crusts here and there en route in exchange for a picture or a drawing or two I had in my bag. But when my ten francs ran out I tried to bivouac in the open air the last 3 nights, once in an abandoned carriage which was completely white with hoarfrost the next morning, not the best accommodation, once in a pile of faggots; and once, and that was a slight improvement, in a haystack, that had been opened up, where I succeeded in making myself a slightly more comfortable little hideaway, though the drizzle did not exactly add to my enjoyment.

Well, and yet it was in these depths of misery that I felt my energy revive and I said to myself, I shall get over it somehow, I shall set to work again with my pencil, which I had cast aside in my deep dejection, and I shall draw again, and from that moment I have had the feeling that everything has changed for me, and now I am in my stride and my pencil has become slightly more willing and seems to be getting more so by the day. My over-long and over-intense misery had discouraged me so much that I was unable to do anything.

I saw something else during the trip - the weaver's villages.

The miners and the weavers still form a race somehow apart from other workers and artisans and I have much fellow-feeling for them and I should consider myself fortunate if I could draw them one day, for then these as yet unknown, or virtually unknown, types would be brought out into the light of day.

The man from the depths, from the abyss, *de profundis*, that is the miner. The other, with the faraway look, almost daydreaming, almost a sleepwalker, that is the weaver. I have been living among them now for nearly 2 years and have learned a little of their special character, in particular that of the miners. And increasingly I find something touching and even pathetic in these poor, humble workers, the lowest of the low in a manner of speaking, and the most despised, who, owing to a possibly widely held but quite baseless and inaccurate presumption, are usually considered a race of knaves and scoundrels. Knaves, drunkards and scoundrels may be found here, of course, just as elsewhere, but the real type is nothing at all like that.

You refer vaguely in your letter to my coming sooner or later to Paris or its environs, if it were possible and if I wanted to. It is of course my eager and fervent wish to go either to Paris or to Barbizon, or somewhere else, but how can I, when I do not earn a cent and when, though I work hard, it will be some time before I reach the point at which I can give any thought to something like going to Paris. For honestly, to be able to work properly I need at least a hundred francs a month. You can certainly live on less, but then you really are hard up, much too hard up in fact!

“Poverty stops the best minds in their tracks” the old Palissy saying goes, which has some truth in it and is entirely true if you understand its real meaning and import. For the moment I do not see how it could be feasible, and the best thing is for me to stay here and work as hard as I can, and, after all, it is cheaper to live here.

At the same time I must tell you that I cannot remain very much longer in the little room where I live now. It is very small room indeed, and then there are the two beds as well, the children's and my own. And now that I am working on Bargue's fairly large sheets I cannot tell you how difficult it is. I don't want to upset these people's domestic arrangements. They have already told me that I couldn't have the other room in the house under any circumstances, not even if I paid more, for the woman needs it for her washing, which in a miner's house has to be done almost every day. In short, I should like to rent a small workman's cottage. It costs about 9 francs a month.

I cannot tell you (though fresh problems arise and will continue to arise every day), I cannot tell you how happy I am that I have taken up drawing again. I had been thinking about it for a long time, but always considered it impossible and beyond my abilities. But now, though I continue to be conscious of my failings and of my depressing dependance on a great many things, now I have recovered my peace of mind and my energy increases by the day.

As far as coming to Paris is concerned, it would be of particular advantage to me if we could manage to establish contact with some good and able artist, but to be quite blunt about it, it might only be a repetition on a large scale of my trip to Courrières, where I hoped to come across a living example of the species Artist and found none. For me the object is to learn to draw well, to gain control of my pencil, my charcoal or my brush. Once I have achieved that I shall be able to do good work almost anywhere and the Borinage is as picturesque as old Venice, as Arabia, as Brittany, Normandy, Picardy or Brie.

Should my work be no good, it will be my own fault. But in Barbizon, you most certainly have a better chance than elsewhere of meeting a good artist who would be as an angel sent by God, should such a happy meeting take place. I say this in all seriousness and without exaggeration. So if, sometime or other, you should see the means and the opportunity, please think of me. Meanwhile I'll stay here quietly in some small workman's cottage and work as hard as I can.

You mentioned Méryon again. What you say about him is quite true. I know his etchings slightly. If you want to see something curious, then place one of his meticulous and powerful sketches next to a print by Viollet-le-Duc or anyone else engaged in architecture. If you do, then you will see Méryon in his true light, thanks to the other etching which will serve, whether you like it or not, as a foil or contrast. Right, so what do you see? This. Even when he draws bricks, granite, iron bars, or the railing of a bridge, Méryon puts into his etchings something of the human soul, moved by I do not know what inner sorrow. I have seen Victor Hugo's drawings of Gothic buildings. Well, though they lacked Méryon's powerful and masterly technique, they had something of the same sentiment. What sort of sentiment is that? It is akin to what Albrecht Dürer expressed in his “Melancholia,” and James Tissot and M. Maris (different though these two may be) in our own day. A discerning critic once rightly said of James Tissot, “He is a troubled soul.” However this may be, there is something of the human soul in his work and that is why he is great, immense, infinite. But place Viollet-le-Duc alongside and he is stone, while the other, that is, Méryon is Spirit.

Méryon is said to have had so much love that, just like Dickens's Sydney Carton, he loved even the stones of certain places. But in Millet, in Jules Breton, in Jozef Israëls, the precious pearl, the human soul, is even more in evidence and better expressed in a noble, worthier, and if you will allow me, more evangelical tone.

But to return to Méryon, in my view he also has a distant kinship with Jongkind and perhaps with Seymour Haden, since at times these two artists have been extremely good.

Just wait, and perhaps you'll see that I too am a workman. Though I cannot predict what I shall be able to do, I hope to make a few sketches with perhaps something human in them, but first I must do the Bargue drawings and other more or less difficult things. Narrow is the way and straight the gate and there are only a few who find it.

Thanking you for your kindness, especially for “Le Buisson,” I shake your hand,

Vincent

I have now taken your whole collection, but you will get it back later and in addition I've got some very fine things for your collection of wood engravings, which I hope you will continue, in the two volumes of the Musee Universel, which I am keeping for you.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Brussels, 15 October 1880

Dear Theo,

As you can see, I am writing you from Brussels. I thought it better to change my domicile for the present. And that for more than one reason.

In the first place, it was urgently necessary because the little room where I lived - which you saw last year - was so narrow and the light so bad that it was very inconvenient to draw there. It is true that if I could have had another room in that house, I would have stayed; but the people of the house wanted that room for their cooking and washing, and I could not have had it even if I had paid more. It is true that in spite of everything I drew Les Exercices au fusain and Les modèles d'apres la bosse de Bargue [Plaster-cast Models by Bargue] there - either in the little room or outside in the garden; but now that I am as far as the portraits after Holbein in the third part of the Cours de Dessin, it has become impossible.

That is why I moved, and in order to remedy things somewhat radically, this is the plan which I have begun to carry out. I went to see Mr. Schmidt here in Brussels and told him about the affair, that is, I asked him if he could help me make an arrangement with some artist so that I could continue my study in a good studio. For I feel that it is absolutely necessary to have good things to look at and also to see artists at work. Then I am more aware of what I lack, and at the same time I learn how to do better.

It had already been a long time since I have seen enough pictures or drawings etc., and the very sight of some good things here in Brussels has given me new inspiration and has strengthened my desire to make good things myself.

If Mr. Schmidt would have the kindness to talk seriously about it to someone or other, I do not doubt that the thing could be satisfactorily arranged. He received me cordially, but still, if you yourself would put in a word or two in my behalf to recommend the thing to him, it would have more effect on him than I could make myself. It would be quite natural if he perhaps looked at me with some suspicion, because formerly I was with Goupil & Co., left, and have now returned to the art field.

So if you write him by return mail, you would render me a great service, and it would prevent my losing time.

I immediately took up my work here, namely the third part of Bargue, and I have a much better room here in a little hotel on the Bd. Du Midi than the small cabinet I used to have.

Father wrote me that for the present I may count on receiving 60 fr. a month through his intermediary. There are several young men who are beginning to study drawing and are in the same position of not being rich either. The thing that gives one strength in such circumstances is not to be always alone, but to be in contact and relation with others in the same position. So you see, this is my great desire - that through Mr. Schmidt I may have some chance to make the acquaintance of some of the young artists here. Will you do what I ask you to that effect, that is, write a little note to Mr. Schmidt?

I have made another pen drawing after “The Woodcutter” by Millet (the woodcut that you sent me). I think pen drawing is a good preparation, in case one should later want to learn etching. The pen is also very useful in accentuating pencil drawings, but one does not succeed in it at once. As to the drawing after “Le Buisson” by Ruysdael, I will work with the pen on it especially, and prepare myself by using it on other drawings. Among others, I have made one of the head of Dante which looks somewhat like an etching. But it is not as easy as it seems.

In our interview Mr. Schmidt spoke about my entering L'École des Beaux Arts here, but I told him frankly that I thought in my particular case it would be much better to work with some artist - especially since I have already finished two series of the Bargues and am on the third, which I could perhaps complete with the charcoal drawings by Allongé. However, I have not quite dismissed the idea of L'École des Beaux Arts; I might go there in the evening while I'm here if it is free or not too expensive.

But for the moment my aim must be to learn to make some drawings that are presentable and saleable as soon as possible, so that I can begin to earn something directly through my work. Because that is the necessity which is forced upon me. If you write me, please address your letters care of Mr. Schmidt, for I do not know whether or not I shall stay at this hotel any longer. I think you will approve of what I say, for to progress, it is necessary to continue with vigour.

Once having mastered my pencil, or watercolouring, or etching, I can go back to the country of the mines or weavers and work from life better than I can now; but first I must learn more of the technique.

Well, I shall finish this letter, hoping you will approve of what I have said.

I think that lodgings and perhaps food somewhat better than that of the Borinage will also help to set me right again. For I have undergone some misery in the Belgian “Black Country,” and my health has not been very good lately.

But if I can only succeed someday in learning to draw well what I want to express, I shall forget all that and remember the good side of things, which also exists if one looks for it. But still I must try to regain some strength, for I need all my energy.

With a handshake,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Brussels, 1 November 1880

72 Boulevard du Midi

Dear Theo,
In answer to your letter I will tell you a few things.
First, I went to see Mr. Roelofs the day after receiving your letter. He told me that in his opinion from now on I must draw principally from nature, that is, from either plaster cast or model, but not without the guidance of someone who knows it well. He - and others too - have advised me so earnestly to go and work at the academy, either here or in Antwerp or wherever I can, that I felt obliged to try to get admitted to the said academy, though I don't think it so very pleasant.

Here in Brussels the teaching is free of charge (in Amsterdam, for instance, I hear it costs 100 guilders a year) and one can work in a well-heated and well-lighted room, which is good, especially in winter.

I get on very well with the Bargues, I am making progress.

Besides that, lately I have been busy drawing something that took a lot of work, but still I am glad I have done it: I drew a rather large-sized skeleton with pen and ink on five sheets of Ingres paper.

1 page: the head, bones and muscle.
1 page: the torso, bones.
1 page: the hand, front view, bones and muscle.
1 page: the hand, back view, bones and muscle.
1 page: the pelvis and legs, bones.

I got the idea of making these from a textbook by John: Sketches of the anatomy for artist's use. There are some reproductions in it which seem to me very good and clear, of the hand, the foot, *etc. etc.* And what I am going to do now is finish drawing the muscles, that is, of the torso and the legs, which with the others will form the whole of the human body. Then follows the back and side view of the body. So you see, I am going ahead with a will: these things are not so easy - they take time and a great deal of patience besides.

In order to be admitted to the academy of drawing one must have the Mayor's permission and be registered. I am waiting for the answer to my request. I know quite well that no matter how economically or poorly one may live, life here in

Brussels must be more expensive; but I cannot get on without some instruction, and I think if only I work hard, which I do, possibly Uncle Vincent or Uncle Cor will do something - if not to help me, at least to help Father.

From the veterinarian school I intend to get pictures of the anatomy, for instance, of a horse, a cow, or sheep, and draw them the way I did the anatomy of the human body.

There are laws of proportion, of light and shadow, of perspective, which one must know in order to be able to draw well; without that knowledge, it always remains a fruitless struggle, and one never creates anything. Therefore I think I was right in acting as I did, and this winter I will try to lay in some capital of anatomy; I cannot put it off any longer - in the end it would prove more expensive, for it would be loss of time.

I believe this will also be your point of view.

It is a hard and difficult struggle to learn to draw well.

If I might find some permanent work here, so much the better; but I dare not count on it, for I still have many things to learn.

Have also been to see Mr. Van Rappard, who now lives at Rue Traversière 6a, and had a talk with him. He is a fine-looking man; of his work I saw only a few pen-and-ink drawings of landscapes. But judging from the way he lives he must be quite wealthy, and I do not know whether he is the person with whom someone like me could live and work, for financial reasons. But I certainly shall go and see him again some time. He impressed me as one who takes things seriously.

In Cuesmes, boy, I should have fallen ill with misery, if I had stayed a month longer. You must not imagine that I live richly here, for my chief food is dry bread or some potatoes or chestnuts which people sell here on the street corners, but by having a somewhat better room and by occasionally taking a somewhat better meal in a restaurant whenever I can afford it, I shall get on very well. But for almost two years I have had a hard time in the Borinage - it was no pleasure trip, I assure you. The expenses here will be somewhat more than 60 fr., which cannot be helped. Drawing materials, studies to copy - for instance, for anatomy - all cost money, and yet they are strictly necessary: only in this way shall I obtain a fair return, otherwise I could never succeed.

The other day I read with great pleasure an extract from the work of Lavater and Gall, Physiognomy and Phrenology, namely, how character is expressed in the features and in the shape of the skull. I have drawn “The Diggers” by Millet, from a Braun photograph which I found at Schmidt's and which he lent me, together with that of “The Angelus.” I sent both these drawings to Father so he might see I am working.

Write again soon, address 72 *Bd. Du Midi*. I am here in a small hotel for 50 fr. a month, including my bread and a cup of coffee morning, afternoon and evening. That is not very cheap, but it is expensive everywhere. Those Holbeins in The Models from the Masters are splendid. Now that I am drawing them, I feel it even more strongly than before. But I assure you, they are not easy.

When I went to see Mr. Schmidt, I hadn't the slightest idea that he was involved in a money question which concerned the Van Gogh family, for which reason he, Mr. Schmidt, was going to be sued; I only learned it from your letter. So that was rather bad luck, though I must say Mr. Schmidt received me rather cordially. But since I do know it now and things are the way they are, it will perhaps be wise not to go there often, though I do not see the necessity of avoiding him intentionally.

I should have written sooner, but was too busy with my skeleton. I believe the longer you think it over, the more you will see the urgent necessity of more artistic surroundings for me - how can one learn to draw if nobody shows one how? With all the best intentions in the world, one cannot succeed without coming into contact with artists who are more advanced. Good intentions alone are not sufficient without some opportunity for development.

As to your thinking I should not want to be among the mediocre artists, what shall I say? it quite depends on what you call mediocre. I shall do what I can, but I do not at all despise *mediocre* in its simple sense. And one certainly does not rise above the mark by despising what is mediocre. In my opinion one must at least begin by having some respect for the mediocre, and know that it already means something, and is only reached with great difficulty.

Adieu, for the present, I shake hands with you in thought. Write soon if possible,

Vincent

1881

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Brussels, January 1881

My dear Theo,

You will quite forgive me when you know that I wrote my last letter in a moment of spleen. My drawings went all wrong, and not knowing what to do, I began to write. I certainly ought to have waited for a better moment, and this will show you that I myself undoubtedly belong to that class of people of which I spoke in my last letter, namely, that class of people who do not always reflect on what they say or do. This being so, let us drop it.

I can tell you one thing; during these last days there has been a change for the better. I have finished at least a dozen drawings, or rather sketches in pencil and in pen and ink, which seem to me to be somewhat better. They vaguely resemble certain drawings by Lançon, or certain English wood engravings, but as yet they are more clumsy and awkward. They represent a porter, a miner, a snow shoveller, a walk in the snow, old women, a type of old man ("Ferragus" from Balzac's L'histoire des treize), *etc.* I am sending you two small ones, "En Route" and "Devant les Tisons" [In front of the wood fire]. I see perfectly well that they are not good, but they are beginning to look like something.

I have a model almost every day, an old porter, or some working man, or some boy, who poses for me. Next Sunday perhaps one or two soldiers will sit for me. And because now I am no longer in a bad humour, I have quite a different and better opinion of you, and of the world in general. Also I have again drawn a landscape - a heath - a thing I had not done for a long time.

I love landscape very much, but I love ten times more those studies from life, sometimes of startling realism, which have been drawn so masterfully by Gavarni, Henri Monnier, Daumier, De Lemud, Henri Pille, Th. Schuler, Ed. Morin, G. Doré (e.g. in his "London"), A. Lançon, De Groux, Félicien Rops, etc., *etc.* Now without in the least pretending to compare myself to those artists, still, by continuing to draw those types of working people, etc., I hope to arrive at the point of being able to illustrate papers and books. Especially when I am able to take more models, also female models, I shall make more progress - I feel it, and know it. And I shall also probably learn to make portraits. But the condition is to work hard, "Not a day without a line," as Gavarni said.

So it is understood that for the present I shall stay here, till you perhaps find something better for me. Only write me now and then. I am for the moment busy drawing for the third time all the Exercices au Fusain by Bargue.

You told me of a change in the staff of the house Goupil & Co., and also of another change in your own position. I congratulate you, and as to those gentlemen Goupil & Co., I am inclined to believe that they are to be congratulated on having got rid of some of the staff. I have always thought that those gentlemen themselves were animated by a superior and nobler spirit than that of those who have now left. Perhaps the position the latter have occupied so long in the firm, the influence and domination, which Messrs. Goupil & Co. put up with, were repugnant to some of the other employees, whom the company would perhaps have done better to retain, but who were so driven to extremes that they resigned.

As you vaguely spoke to me some time ago about coming to Paris, I must tell you that I wish no better than to go someday soon, provided I were sure of finding some work there which would give me a salary of at least 100 fr. a month. I must also tell you that as I have begun to draw, I do not intend to drop it, so I will try chiefly to get on in that line. Not only does drawing figures and scenes from life demand a knowledge of the technique of drawing, but it also demands profound studies of literature, physiognomy, etc., which are difficult to acquire.

Enough for today; write me when you have a moment to spare, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

72 Bd. du Midi

Someday I hope to go to see Mr. Horta.

Sketches enclosed with letter:

“Devant les Tisons” and “En Route”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Brussels, January 1881

Mon très cher,

As I have not heard from you for so long - meaning, not for several months - nor even had the slightest answer to my last letter, perhaps it will not be out of place to ask you for some sign of life.

I must say it seems rather strange and rather unaccountable that you have not written me since the one letter I received on my arrival here. Not to write is good, but to write seasonably is not bad either; in some cases it is even much better.

In thinking of you, I unconsciously said to myself, Why doesn't he write? If he is afraid of compromising himself in the eyes of Messrs. Goupil & Co. by keeping in touch with me - is his position with those gentlemen so shaky and unstable that he is obliged to be so careful? Or is it that he is afraid I will ask him for money? But if this was the reason for your silence, you might at least have waited until I tried to squeeze something out of you, as the saying goes.

However, I will not prolong this letter unnecessarily by enumerating a lot of things which occasionally pass through my head when I think of the reasons you may have had for not writing.

I have been drawing all winter until now, and I have also read a great deal, for indirectly that is very necessary to me. On the whole I can say I have made progress, but I ought to be able to get along more quickly. The principal motive for writing you now is to ask you if you know of any reason why I should not go to see Mr. Tersteeg and Mauve. I think it would be to my advantage to go to The Hague for a time. But if I knew for certain that Mr. Tersteeg would rather I did not go there, it might make me change my mind. What do you think about it?

I have seen little of Van Rappard, because it seemed to me that he did not like to be disturbed. As long as I am not more advanced, I must avoid young artists, who do not always reflect on what they do or say. And yet I long very much to find one who, being more advanced than I, could help me progress.

Well, tell me if you see any insurmountable obstacle to my going to The Hague for a while, and if perhaps you know any other course, in case I am prevented from going there.

I shake hands, awaiting a somewhat quicker reply,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to His Parents

Brussels, 16 February 1881

Dear Father and Mother,
I received your letter, which made me very happy, as I was already looking forward to it, especially because of Father's illness. I was glad to hear that there is some improvement.

I am getting on pretty well with my work, though it is still far from perfect, and must become much better still.

In the studio of that painter I found a very good reproduction of a skeleton. As those things are rather difficult to get, I asked him if he would lend it to me for a few days to copy. At first he raised some objection, probably because he thought I could not do it or that it would take me too long, but I insisted on having it, and he consented. That happened last Sunday afternoon, and as soon as I came home I began it; it was finished Monday night, and to his surprise I brought it back to him on Tuesday morning. He thought my drawing good, and indeed, it is not so bad after all. I shall profit more from his instruction if only he has time to spare. On some points, especially perspective, he is very well informed, and I at least can learn a great deal from him.

Now I must tell you another thing that I have done. As I told you, about a month ago I bought a pair of trousers and a coat, secondhand. It turned out so well that I bought another coat and pair of trousers from the same man. It's true that the first suit would have been quite sufficient, but it is much better to have two suits because they last longer when one can alternate them. Enclosed is a sample of the material. And I also had to replenish my underwear with three pairs of drawers, and paid 2.75 fr. apiece for them; besides, I bought a pair of shoes for 4 fr. The things I bought were really not superfluous. But altogether they have made a big hole in this month's money, and I shall have to stint myself in consequence, especially as I paid 5 fr. to that painter in advance for the lessons.

Do not worry about these expenses, however, and do not accuse me of extravagance, for really the contrary is rather my fault of character, and if I could spend more, I should get on quicker and make more progress. If you can send me something extra this month without depriving yourselves, I hope you will. But if you cannot, there is no immediate hurry. I told my landlord that I should be rather hard up this month, and he agreed that I could pay at my convenience because he now knows me well enough not to demand my paying in advance, at least not for a full month.

I bought that suit for a reason other than wearing it myself as long as possible: when I can wear it no longer, it will serve me in another way. For you should know that eventually I must have a small collection of workmen's clothes in which to dress the models for my drawings. For instance, a Brabant blue smock, the grey linen suit that the miners wear and their leather hat, then a straw hat and wooden shoes, a fisherman's outfit of yellow oilskin and a sou'wester. And certainly also that suit of black or brown corduroy which is very picturesque and characteristic - and then a red flannel shirt or undervest. And also a few women's dresses, for instance, that of De Kempen [region in Brabant] and from the neighbourhood of Antwerp, along with the Brabant bonnet and, for instance, that of Blankenberg, or Scheveningen or Katwijk.

I certainly do not intend to buy all this at once, but to collect it gradually piece by piece, when I have a chance. And as those clothes can be bought secondhand, they are not at all difficult to get. I shall only be able to manage this well when I have some kind of studio of my own.

Drawing the model with the necessary costumes is the only true way to succeed. Only if I study drawing thus seriously and thoroughly, always trying to portray truly what I see, shall I arrive; and then, notwithstanding the inevitable expenses, I shall make a living by it. For a good draughtsman can certainly find work nowadays: such persons are in great demand, and there are positions that are very well paid. So the thing is to try and become as skilled as possible. In Paris many a draughtsman earns from 10 to 15 francs a day, and in London and elsewhere the same and even more; but one does not reach this at once, and I am not so far advanced as yet. But I may become so if I have some good luck and can renew relations with persons like Mr. Tersteeg and Theo and others, especially with good painters and draughtsmen. But I must work and study very hard, that is the condition.

You will not be surprised when I tell you that I am eager to hear what Theo's proposition might be, or to hear something from Mr. Tersteeg. For one way or the other, before the month of March I must know what I can expect and how and where I shall be able to work during the spring and summer.

And if I should gradually succeed in earning something, that would not be unpleasant at all, though the principal thing is that I make progress and that my drawing becomes stronger - then everything will come right sooner or later. Models are expensive, at least relatively expensive, and if I had money enough to have them often, I should be able to work much better. But then a studio becomes indispensable. And people like Mr. Tersteeg, Theo, and others know that quite well. Well, I must wait until they write me what they think, and meanwhile do what I can.

I made another drawing of miners in the snow which is somewhat better than last winter's - there is more character and effect in it. I am also collecting wood engravings again, like those albums that Theo and Willemien once had. For if I can more or less complete the collection, they will be of use to me, as it is quite possible that I shall work from wood engravings sometime.

I must tell you that those clothes I bought are well cut and look better on me than any others that I can remember. I tell you this because you might think they were something unusual or showy; this material is often worn in studios especially.

And now I finish, with greetings to all, and my best wishes for A.'s birthday, and believe me,

Your loving Vincent

The painter who gives me lessons now is making a very good picture of a Blankenberg fisherman.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Brussels, 2 April 1881

Dear Theo,

In reply to your two good letters, and as a result of Father's visit, for which I had been longing for some time, I have a few things to tell you.

In the first place this. I hear from father that without my knowing it you have been sending me money for a long time, in this way effectively helping me to get on. Accept my heartfelt thanks, I firmly believe that you will not regret it. In this way I am learning a handicraft, and though it certainly will not make me rich, I will at any rate earn my 100 fr. a month, which is the least one needs to live on, as soon as I become a better draughtsman and get some regular work.

What you told us about the painter Heyerdahl has greatly interested Van Rappard, as well as me. [Norwegian painter, temporarily in Paris at Bonnat's studio]

As the former undoubtedly will write you about it himself, I speak about this question only in so far as it concerns me personally, more or less.

I find much truth in your remarks about the Dutch artists, that it is very doubtful if one could get from them any clear counsel on the difficulties of perspective, etc., with which I am struggling. At least I quite agree with you that someone like Heyerdahl would be far preferable (as he seems to be such a versatile man) to many others who do not possess the ability to explain their method and to provide the necessary guidance and teaching. You speak of Heyerdahl as one who takes great pains to seek “proportions for drawing”; that is just what I need. Many a good painter has not the slightest, or hardly any, idea of what proportions for drawing are, or beautiful lines, or characteristic composition, and thought and poetry. Yet these are important questions which Feyen-Perrin, and Ulysse Butin, and Alphonse Legros - not to mention Breton and Millet and Israëls - take extremely seriously, and never lose sight of.

Many a Dutch painter would understand nothing, absolutely nothing, of the beautiful work of Boughton, Millais, Pinwell, du Maurier, Herkomer, and Walker, to name only a few artists who are real masters as draftsmen, not to mention their talent in other directions.

I say many of them look with contempt on such work, as many do on the work of De Groux, even among the painters here in Belgium who ought to know better. This week I saw some things by De Groux which I did not know, namely, a picture, “Departure of the Conscript,” and a full-length drawing, “The Drunkard” - two compositions which resemble Boughton so much that I was struck by the resemblance, as of two brothers who had never met and who were yet of one mind.

So you see, I quite agree with your opinion on Heyerdahl, and I shall be very happy if later on you could put me in touch with that man; further, I will not insist on carrying out my plan of going to Holland, at least not if I have the prospect of going to Paris later and can more or less count on it.

But in the meantime what must I do? What do you think would be best? I can continue to work with Rappard for a few weeks, but then he will probably leave here. My bedroom is too small, and the light is not good, and the people would object to my partly shutting out the light from the window; I am not even allowed to put my etchings or my drawings up on the wall. So when Rappard leaves in May, I shall have to move; I should like to work awhile in the country - at Heyst, Calmphout, Etten, Scheveningen, Katwijk, anyplace, even nearer here, as Schaerbeek, Haeren, Groenendael. But preferably a place where there is a chance of coming into contact with other painters, and if possible of living and working together, because it is cheaper and better.

Wherever it may be, living expenses are always at least 100 fr. a month; if one has less, it means want, either physical or of the necessary material and tools. This winter I have spent, let us say, 100 fr. a month, though in reality it has scarcely been as much. And I spent a great deal of that on drawing materials and also got myself some clothes. I bought two workmen's suits of rough black velvet, of that material known as veloutine. It looks well, and one can wear it everywhere besides, the suits will be of use to me later, because I shall want a great many workmen's clothes - as I do already - for my models, which of course I need like everybody else. Gradually I must make such a collection, of all kinds of garments, secondhand if necessary, men's as well as women's; but of course I need not do it all at once, though I have started, and am going on with it.

What you say is true, financial questions have either advanced or handicapped many people in the world. It is so, and Bernard Palissy's saying remains true, “Poverty prevents the good spirits from arriving.” But when I think it over, I cannot help wondering, Isn't it right that in a family like ours - in which two Messrs. Van Gogh are very rich, and both in the art field, Uncle Cor and our uncle of Prinsenhage, and in which you and I of the younger generation have chosen the same line, though in different spheres - isn't it right, I wonder, that, this being so, I should be able to count in some way on 100 fr. a month during the time which must necessarily elapse before I can get regular work as a draughtsman ? Now three years ago I quarreled with C. M. about quite a different question, but is that any reason for C. M. to remain my enemy forever? I would much rather think that he had never been my enemy and consider it a misunderstanding, for which I gladly take all the blame, rather than argue about how much was really my fault, for I have no time for such things. Uncle Cor so often helps other draughtsmen - would it be so unnatural now if someday, when I needed it, he showed me his good will? However, I do not say this to get financial help from him. He could help me in quite another way than by giving money: for instance, if it were possible, he might bring me into contact with persons from whom I could learn many things, or help me get regular work from some magazine.

This is the way I expressed myself to Father. I noticed that people talked about the strange and unaccountable fact that I was so hard up, although I belonged to such and such a family. I replied that I thought it was only temporary, and would come right after a time. Still, I thought it better to talk it over with Father and you, and I wrote something about it to Mr. Tersteeg. But he seems to have misunderstood my intention, as he got the impression that I planned to live on the bounty of my uncles; this being his opinion, he wrote me a very discouraging letter, and said I had no right to do such a thing. I certainly do not pretend to have the right, but I want to prevent this affair from ever becoming the subject of gossip in the studios; therefore I think that it is necessary for good relations between myself and the family to be re-established, at any rate provisionally and outwardly, in expectation of their changing their minds about me. If they are unwilling, que soit, but then I should not be able to prevent gossip here and there. Were I immediately to write C. M. or go to see his Honour, it is to be feared he would not read my letter, or would receive me too uncordially. That's why I am talking it over with Pa and yourself, as you might possibly drop a word occasionally, so that he will not misunderstand my intentions. I was not hoping to get money from his Honour, as Mr. Tersteeg seemed to think, but only hoping that if he gained faith and confidence in my future after a talk with me, he might see me with new eyes. And if he did, it stands to reason that I most certainly would not scorn his help; and in that case he might smooth the way for me by means other than by giving me money, for instance, in the interval between now and my going to Paris.

I wrote back that I was not at all astonished at his misconstruing my letter in this way because you yourself had spoken one time of “living on my rents.” And as I now gather from the tone of your letter that you no longer see my difficult position in that miserable light and as I infer it from your strong assistance, so I hope that Mr. Tersteeg's opinion will also change eventually. The more so because he was the first to help me with those Bargues, for which I shall always be grateful to him.

You write me about a manikin. I am not in a special hurry for it, but it would be of great service to me in composing and finding the right positions, you understand that. But I would rather wait awhile and have a better one than take one now that is too defective.

But please look out for all possible prints or books on proportion, and gather as much information about them as you can. It is of the greatest value to me, for without it, one cannot make a composition of figures quickly. Furthermore, I want something about the anatomy of the horse, and sheep, and cow - not from the veterinary point of view, but rather in relation to drawing those animals. If I ask you for these things, it is because you may occasionally find such prints cheaply, as I have. For instance, if you ever have the opportunity to ask Bargue or Viollet-le-Duc about those papers on proportion, they would perhaps be the best source of information.

Of course, I should be delighted to live with you later, but we haven't come to that yet. If C. M. would help me to find some job for the time being, I certainly would not refuse it.

Even from relatively bad artists one can learn much indirectly, for instance, as Mauve learned much from Verschuur about the perspective of a stable and a wagon, and the anatomy of a horse, and yet how far Mauve is above Verschuur.

If you can recommend a picture by Madiol for the Salon, do so, for there is much that is beautiful in his work; the man is hard up and has a great many little children. He is now painting a forge; it is very good. Not long ago he painted a little old woman in which the drawing and especially the colouring are superb. But the quality of his work is uneven. His charcoal drawings are often excellent.

This letter is rather long, but I cannot make it shorter. I speak about the possibility that C. M. and others should change their opinion of me at least outwardly but I would much rather it were truly so. For example, somebody like Roelofs doesn't know what to make of such a false position - either there must be something wrong with me, or with the others; but what he is sure of is: anyhow there is something wrong somewhere. So he is overprudent and will have nothing to do with me just at the moment when I most need advice or help.

Such experiences are not pleasant. The main question is, Am I making progress by working on with patient energy? I think I am. “Where there is a will, there is a way.” And should I be to blame later if I took my revenge? An artist does not draw for the sake of revenge, but for the love of drawing; it urges you on more than any other motive. So perhaps some things that are now amiss will come right after all.

This winter I collected many wood engravings. Your Millets have increased in number, and you will see that I did not keep your capital of wood engravings, etc., without their bringing interest. I now have twenty-four wood engravings, by and after Millet, counting “Les Travaux des Champs.”

But the main thing for me is to draw, and everything must contribute to that end. The cheapest way would perhaps be for me to spend this summer at Etten - I can find subjects enough there. If you think this right, you may write to Father about it. I am willing to give in about dress or anything else to suit them, and perhaps would meet C. M. there some day this summer. There are no real objections to it, as far as I know. Either inside or outside the family, they will always judge me or talk about me from different points of view, and you will always hear the most divergent opinions about me. And I blame no one for it, because relatively few people know why an artist acts as he does. But in general, he who searches all kinds of places to find picturesque spots or figures - holes and corners which another passes by - is accused of many bad intentions and villainies which have never entered his head. A peasant who sees me draw an old tree trunk, and sees me sitting there for an hour, thinks that I have gone mad and, of course, laughs at me. A young lady who turns up her nose at a labourer in his patched, filthy dirty clothes, of course cannot understand why anyone visits the Borinage or Heyst and goes down the shaft of a coal mine; she also comes to the conclusion that I am mad.

Naturally, I do not care at all what they think if only you and Mr. Tersteeg, and C. M. and Father, and others with whom I come into contact, know better, and instead of making remarks about it, say, Your work demands it, and we understand why it is so.

So I repeat, under the circumstances there is after all no urgent reason why I should not go, for instance, to Etten or to The Hague, if that were preferable, even though it may be criticized by some fops and silly girls. As Father said when he was here, “Just write to Theo, and arrange with him what is best, and what will be the cheapest way.” I hope you will let me know your opinion soon.

Heyst and Calmphout are very picturesque. In Etten I could also find subjects enough, even here if necessary, though then I would move to Schaerbeek.

Scheveningen or Katwijk would perhaps be possible if C. M. changed his opinion of me, and then I could profit directly or indirectly by the Dutch artists. As to the expenses, I suppose they would amount to at least 100 fr. a month; to do with less is impossible: “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.”

So I wait for your reply about these things, and in the meantime I am working with Rappard.

Rappard has painted some good studies, among others a few after the models at the academy, which are well done. A little more fire and passion would not hurt him, a little more self-confidence and more courage. Somebody once said to me, “Nous devons faire des efforts de perdus, de désespérés.” [We must make the same efforts as lost, desperate beings.] He does not do that as yet. His pen-and-ink drawings of landscape are very witty and charming, but in these, also, a little more passion, please.

And now I take my leave, with a handshake, and am always

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Brussels, 12 April 1881

Dear Theo,

As I heard from Father that there is a chance of your being in Etten next Sunday, and that it would be well for me to be there also, I start thither today.

So I hope to meet you soon, and am looking forward to it very much, particularly because I have sketched two drawings at Rappard's, “The Lamp Bearers” and “The Bearers of the Burden,” and should like to consult you about how to go on with them. I must somehow have the necessary models to finish them, and then I trust the result will be good, that is, I shall have a few compositions to show to Smeeton Tilly, or to the editors of L'Illustration or the like.

So I leave today and am letting you know, so that you will not look for me in Brussels. I should like to make a few sketches of the heaths at Etten, which is why I am starting a few days earlier.

So I hope to meet you soon, and now shake hands with you in thought.

Yours truly, Vincent

I am sending you three krabbelingen [scrawls] which are clumsy as yet, but from which you will see, I hope, that I am gradually improving. You should take into account that it is only a short time since I started drawing, although I made little sketches when I was a boy. And that during this winter I thought it most important to make rigidly accurate anatomical studies, not my own compositions.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 30 April 1881

Dear Theo,
My best wishes for your birthday. I often think of your visit; I am glad that we saw each other again, and hope you will come back this summer. I have been here a few days now and it is splendid outdoors, but the weather does not as yet permit drawing in the open air every day. Meanwhile, I have started on the Millets. The *Semeur* is finished and I have sketched the Quatre heures de la journée. And now I still have to do *les Travaux des champs.*

As you know there was an exhibition of watercolours in Brussels - it was rather interesting. Among the Dutch there were 4 or 5 Mauves, “Woodcutters”; J. Maris, “Dunes,” like a picture by Ruysdael or Van de Velde; then J. H. Weissenbruch, 5 superb large drawings; Roelofs, also 5 large ones; then Gabriël, and Van de Sande Bakhuyzen, and Valkenburg, and Van Trigt, and P. Stortenbeker, and Vogel, *etc.*

Then there was a Mesdag that kept one from looking at any other drawing, at least it did for me. The beach at twilight, stormy weather, a sky with grey clouds, and the ruddy glow of the setting sun. In the foreground a fisherman on horseback - a tall, strange, dark silhouette standing out against the white foaming waves. This figure is speaking with people aboard a fishing smack that is riding on the waves in the middle distance. On deck some people are busy with a lantern, and they are talking to the man on horseback, apparently about the anchor which he must come and take ashore. It is a large, important drawing, done broadly and so vigorous that, as I told you, nothing else can really be compared to it.

There were two drawings by Ter Meulen which struck me, too, “Sheep in the Dunes” and “Sheep in the Snow”; he is progressing well. If I remember correctly, I saw that man at Bakhuyzen's studio, drudging and plodding along, and yet he has arrived now, at least these two drawings were excellent. Then there were drawings by Meunier: “Varlet dans une Grange” [Peasant Boy in a Barn], refined in colour and tone, and also in conception, reminding one of Millet, for instance, in its simplicity and faithfulness to nature; and also “A Stoker ” and “A Factory Hand.” There were several drawings by Rochussen, too, and many others; but of the Belgians, only Meunier appealed to me.

Rappard is going to Holland in three weeks, and this summer he will probably work in the country, then perhaps go to Paris next winter; but right now it looks as though he's not going to stay there. I think he got a cold shower there at one time, but that's no reason why he shouldn't be more fortunate next time. It certainly is true that he's made great progress since then.

I am very glad things have been arranged so that I shall be able to work here quietly for a while. I hope to make as many studies as I can, for that is the seed which must later produce the drawings.

Write to me now and then and, if possible, keep me informed of the things that strike you; and if you should hear of a vacancy for a draughtsman, think of me.

And now it is mail time. I will let you know what I am doing, and I hope you will occasionally advise me on what subjects to choose for drawing; sometimes it will be of use to me, sometimes, perhaps not - but tell me what you think. I will do the same for you, and then on both sides we must try to sift the chaff from the grain. Adieu, a handshake in thought,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, May 1881

Dear Theo,

I enclose a little note because the others are writing to you and I thought you would like to hear what I am actually doing.

Every day that it does not rain, I go out in the fields, generally to the heath. I make my studies on a rather large scale, like the few you saw at the time of your visit; so I have done, among other things, a cottage on the heath, and also that barn with a thatched roof on the road to Roozendaal, which locally they call the Protestant barn.

You will perhaps remember what I mean.

Then the mill right opposite it, in the meadow, and the elm trees in the churchyard.

And another of woodcutters, busy on a wide patch of ground where a large pine tree has been cut down. I also try to draw the implements, such as a wagon, plough, harrow, wheelbarrow, etc., *etc.*

The one with the woodcutters turned out best of all, and I think you would like it.

I have had a letter from Rappard; perhaps he will come here some time this summer.

A handshake in thought, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Uncle Cor

Etten, the year 1881

Etten
Dear Uncle,

As Theo is going to see you, and as I have a request to make of you, I am taking advantage of the opportunity to ask you the following:

Whether you would allow me to come to see your pictures - I have not seen any pictures for such a long time, and I am longing to so much that I have decided to let bygones be bygones in order to ask this of you.

Theo has taken along two small studies of mine - the colour of both is colder than I think right. I have two others the same size which are warmer. If you happen to have any old grooved frames which you have no immediate use for, it would please me very much to exchange one of these studies for a small frame.

Yours truly, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, June 1881

Dear Theo,
It is time that you heard from me again.
You must know that Rappard has been here for about twelve days, and now he has gone. Of course, he sends his best regards. We have taken many long walks together - have been, for instance, several times to the heath, near Seppe, to the so-called Passievaart, a big swamp. There Rappard painted a large study (1 meter by 50cm.) in which there was much that was good. Beside that, he did about ten small sepias, also in the Liesbosch.

While he was painting, I made a drawing in pen and ink of another spot in the swamp, where all the water lilies grow (near the road to Roozendaal). We also went to Prinsenhage together, but Uncle was ill in bed again. I think Rappard makes progress in his work. From what he told me, he has got a nicely furnished studio at home. Now this week he is going to Loosdrecht, where he intends to stay a month. He too works *regularly* and hard.

I bought Cassagne's Traité d'Aquarelle and am studying it; even if I should not make any watercolours, I shall probably find many thing in it, for instance, about sepia and ink. For until now I have drawn exclusively in pencil accented and worked up by the pen, sometimes a reed pen, which has a broader stroke. What I have been doing lately demanded that way of working, because the subjects required much *drawing* - drawing in perspective, too, for instance, a few workshops in the village here, a forge, a carpenter's shop and the workshop of a maker of wooden shoes.

Willemien has left now, and I am sorry; she poses very well - I made a drawing of her and of another girl who stayed here. I put a sewing machine into that drawing. Nowadays there are no more spinning wheels, and it is a great pity for painters and draughtsmen; but something has come in its place that is no less picturesque, and that is the sewing machine.

What about your coming here this summer, is there any chance of its really happening? I hope so.

Rappard seems to have a boat of his own there at Loosdrecht; that must be fine.

From Loosdrecht he intends to go to Gelderland.

He would very much like to meet you, and I promised him that if you came and I knew it beforehand, I should let him know, because he would then try to arrange to meet you.

I do not know whether he intends to go back to Paris; he did not speak of it at all. Nor do I know if this is a sign that he does not think about it, or that, on the contrary, il couve son projet [he hatches his plans]. When I think that he is only twenty-three years old, and more things of that sort, I should not be surprised if the latter were the case.

I hope you will write me if you can spare a moment. If you could by any chance send me the Salon's catalogue, I should be greatly obliged to you.

Rappard told me he was going to buy all Cassagne's books. He has trouble with his perspective, and I know of no better remedy for this ailment; at least, if I am quite cured of it, I shall have those books to thank for it - that is to say, I put into practice the theory they contain. However, practice is a thing one cannot buy along with books; if that were so, there would be a larger sale of them, I suppose.

And now adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, July 1881

Dear Theo,

In your last letter you wrote that there is a good chance of your coming to Holland pretty soon. I am very glad because I am looking forward to seeing you. Now I know that you are coming, I think it even more unnecessary to send you a few things; perhaps I might have if you were not coming, so that you might see my drawings do not get any worse, though they are far from what they ought to be. Well, you will see for yourself what is in them when you come.

In my last letter I wrote about the Salon's catalogue; I did so to remind you of it, in case you might be able to get one. Of course, if need be I can do very well without it - it is not a necessity of life.

But there is another thing which is a necessity, and when you come, and if it is not too difficult for you to carry, bring some with you then. I mean, *white Ingres paper*. I bought some of it from Brussels and worked on it with pleasure, and it is very well suited to pen drawing, especially for a reed pen. Now I have been without it for quite a time, and here I can only get smooth paper without any grain (unless I take Whatman or Harding, but that is too expensive for sketches - the Ingres paper costs 10 centimes a sheet, I think). Well, try your best to put as large a package of it as you can in your bag, and you will give me more pleasure than with anything else.

I have made another drawing in the Liesbosch, and now it has become quite hot - too hot to sit on the heath by day - so I work at home now, and am copying the drawings by Holbein from the Bargues. Remembering what you told me once, I have tried to draw a few portraits after photographs, and I think this is good practice.

As I asked you before, write whenever you can and receive a handshake in thought,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, early August 1881

Dear Theo,
It was very pleasant to have you here again, and to have long talks together about everything. I always regret that we cannot be together much more. Not that I think talking in itself so valuable, but I mean that I wish we knew each other much better and more intimately than we do now. That thought occurred to me especially when coming back from Roozendaal after seeing you off at the station; also with regard to some things we said that last moment at the station.

I am glad to see in the letter I got today that you hope to come back before very long. Of course I feel quite better now. The day after you left I stayed in bed, however, and had a long talk with Dr. Van Gent, a clever and practical man; not because I thought this insignificant malaise important, but rather because in general, either well or unwell, I like to talk with a doctor now and then, in order to know that everything is all right. If one occasionally hears a sound and true word about health, by and by one gets much clearer ideas about it; and if one knows what to do and what to avoid, one is not shaken like a reed by every wind and does not believe all the nonsense so often heard about health and ill health.

For the rest, I am drawing the Exercices au Fusain on the Ingres paper you brought with you; it is difficult enough. It is much more inspiring to draw from nature than to copy such a page from the Bargues, but still I set myself the task of drawing them once more, and now for the last time. It would not be right if I paid too much attention to details and overlooked the great things when drawing from nature. And that was too much the case in my last drawings, I thought. Therefore I want to study Bargue's method again (he gives only broad lines and forms, and simple delicate outlines). And for the moment I have stopped drawing outdoors. When I go back to it shortly, I shall have a better view of things than before.

In do not know if you ever read English books; if you do, I can strongly recommend that you read Shirley by Currer Bell, author of another book called Jane Eyre. It is as beautiful as pictures by Millet or Boughton or Herkomer. I found it at Prinsenhage and finished it in three days, though it is quite a voluminous book.

I wish all people had what I am gradually beginning to acquire: the power to read a book in a short time without difficulty, and to keep a strong impression of it. In reading books, as in looking at paintings, one must admire what is beautiful with assurance - without doubt, without hesitation.

I am busy rearranging all my books; I have read too much not to work on systematically to get at least an idea of modern literature. Sometimes I am so sorry that I do not know more about history, especially modern history. Well, being sorry and giving up doesn't help us on; the only thing to do is to push forward.

I was very glad to detect now and then in your talk some very good philosophy. Who knows what a great thinker you may become in time. If you think Illusions Perdues by Balzac too long (two volumes), then try Le Père Goriot, only one volume; once you have tried Balzac, you will prefer him to many others. Remember Balzac's nickname, “vétérinaire des maladies incurables.” [Veterinary of incurable diseases.]

By the time I have finished the Bargues, it will be autumn; that is a delightful time for drawing. I wish that Rappard would come back here then.

I think I shall find a good model here in Piet Kaufman, the gardener, but I think it will be better to let him pose with a spade or plough or something like that - not here at home, but either in the yard or in his own home or in the field. But what a tough job it is to make people understand how to pose. Folks are desperately obstinate about it, and it is hard to make them yield on this point: they only want to pose in their Sunday best, with impossible folds in which neither knees, elbows, shoulder blades nor any other part of the body have left their characteristic dents or bumps. Indeed, that is one of the petites misères de la vie d'un dessinateur [small miseries of a draughtsman's life].

Well, adieu, write when you can and receive a handshake in thought from

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, Aug/Sep 1881

Dear Theo,
I have just come back from a trip to The Hague. I am home alone tonight, as Father and Mother are still at Prinsenhage. So it is a good opportunity to tell you about everything.

I left here Tuesday, and now it is Friday night.

At The Hague I went to see Mr. Tersteeg, Mauve and De Bock. Mr. Tersteeg was very kind, and said he thought I had made progress. As I had again copied the whole series of Exercices au Fusain, 1 - 60, I brought them with me, and it was especially in reference to them that he made the remark; he at least attaches some value to my making them, also to my occasionally copying a figure by Millet, Boughton or others, which most people do not approve of at all.

So then I got some satisfaction from that work, too.

I spent an afternoon and part of an evening with Mauve, and saw many beautiful things in his studio. My own drawings seemed to interest Mauve more. He gave me a great many hints which I was glad to get, and I have arranged to come back to see him in a relatively short time when I have some new studies. He showed me a whole lot of his studies and explained them to me - not sketches for drawings or pictures, but real studies, things that seemed of little importance. He thinks I should start painting now.

I enjoyed meeting De Bock; I was at his studio. He is painting a large picture of the dunes which has much that is fine in it. But in my opinion the fellow must practice drawing figures in order to produce even finer things. It seems to me he has a real artist's temperament and that we have not heard the last of him. He raves about Millet and Corot, but didn't these two work hard on figures - yes or no? Corot's figures aren't so well known as his landscapes, but it cannot be denied that he has done them. Besides, Corot drew and modelled every tree trunk with the same devotion and love as if it were a figure. And a tree by Corot is something quite different from one by De Bock. One of the best things I saw of De Bock's was a copy of a Corot. It's unlikely that it would be taken for an original, but it was very seriously done - more seriously than many a false Corot less noticeably different from the real thing.

Then I went to see Mesdag's Panorama with him; it is a work that deserves all respect. It reminded me of a remark, I think by Burger (or Thoré) about The

Anatomy Lesson by Rembrandt: le seul défaut de ce tableau est de ne pas avoir de défaut. [This picture's only fault is that it has no fault.] The three drawings by Mesdag at the exhibition had perhaps more faults, but aroused immediate sympathy, at least it was so with me.

Speaking of the exhibition, there was a splendid drawing by Israëls, “Sewing Class at Katwijk”; Mauve, “A Plough” - splendid - “Sheep in the Dunes,” and then a single figure - a labourer resting in the field at twilight. Artz had three drawings there if I remember correctly: a scene in an almshouse, old men and women eating porridge - very important, very well and seriously done; also two studies of heads, full of character - a man and woman from Scheveningen. Among Weissenbruch's was a drawing of water lilies, so simple, so full of style, of understanding and love, that many drawings by others were lost beside it. But this exhibition shows clearly that there are many clever landscape painters among the younger artists.

Including Duchâtel [Du Chattel] and Neuhuys. Albert Neuhuys had a large figure drawing which was splendid, a girl and two children.

Clara Montalba's work was new to me. Hers is a peculiar talent - in some respects it reminds me of Rochussen.

At Mr. Tersteeg's I also saw many fine things by Valkenburg, Neuhuys, etc., *etc.* J. Maris had beautiful things at the exhibition, for instance, two little girls in white at a piano and a mill in the snow. I met Willem Maris at De Bock's. What a beautiful sketch the latter has by him, a road in winter with a little figure under an umbrella.

By chance Bosboom saw my studies and gave me some hints about them. I only wish I had more opportunity to receive such hints. Bosboom is one of those people who has the ability to impart knowledge to others and make things clear to them. There were three or four good drawings of his at the exhibition.

I stayed in The Hague until Thursday morning, then I went to Dordrecht because from the train I had seen a spot I wanted to draw - a row of windmills. Though it was raining, I managed to finish it, and so at least I have a souvenir from my little trip.

At Stam's I found Ingres paper twice as thick as the ordinary kind, one can work better on it. But alas, it's white. Would there be any chance of your sending some of that same kind, but the colour of unbleached muslin or linen? Like a few of the sheets that were in that lot you bought me before, and like those on which the Exercices au Fusain are printed. Before beginning to draw on the white paper, one must first wash the whole page with a flat tone.

So I have been to The Hague; perhaps it was the beginning of a renewed and closer acquaintance with Mauve and others. I hope so. A handshake in thought;

my warm thanks for your faithful help in this matter - because of the expenses perhaps I never would have gone, or at least postponed it.

Yours, Vincent

De Bock was very pleased with the drawings by Millet which he bought from you.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, September 1881

Dear Theo,

Though it is only a short time since I wrote to you, I have something more to tell you now.

For there has been a change in my drawings, both in the way I set about them and in the results.

Also, as a consequence of some of the things Mauve told me, I have started working with live models again. Luckily I have been able to get several people to sit here for me, including Piet Kaufman, the labourer.

Careful study and the constant and repeated copying of Bargue's Exercises au Fusain have given me a better insight into figure-drawing. I have learned to measure and to see and to look for the broad outlines, so that, thank God, what seemed utterly impossible to me before is slowly becoming possible now. I have drawn a man with a spade, that is un bècheur [a digger], five times over in a variety of poses, a sower twice, a girl with a broom twice. Then a woman in a white cap peeling potatoes and a shepherd leaning on his crook and finally an old, sick peasant sitting on a chair by the hearth with his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees.

And it won't be left at that, of course. Once a few sheep have crossed the bridge, the whole flock follows. Now I must draw diggers, sowers, men and women at the plough, ceaslessly. Scrutinize and draw everything that is a part of country life. Just as many others have done and are doing. I no longer stand helpless before nature like I used to.

I brought along some conté-crayon in wood (just like pencils) from The Hague, and I work with them a great deal now.

I have also started to introduce the brush and the stump. With a little sepia and India ink, and now and then with a little colour.

What is quite certain is that the drawings I have been doing lately bear little resemblance to anything I have done before.

The size of the figures is about the same as that of an *Exercices au Fusain.*

As for landscape, I don't see why it need suffer in any way as a result. On the contrary, it will gain. Enclosed are a few small sketches to give you an idea.

Of course I have to pay the people who pose. Not much, but because it happens every day it is one more expense until I manage to sell some drawings.

But since a figure is hardly ever a complete failure, I am sure that the outlay on the model will be fully recovered relatively soon.

For nowadays anyone who has learned to tackle a figure and hang on to it until it is safely down on paper, can earn quite a bit. I need hardly tell you that I am only sending you these sketches to give you some idea of the pose. I dashed them off today in no time at all and can see that there is much wrong with the proportions, more so anyway than in the actual drawings. I've had a nice letter from Rappard, who seems to be hard at work. He sent me some very good landscape sketches. I wish he would come back here for a few days.

This is a field or rather a stubble, where they are plowing and sowing. Have made a fairly large sketch of it with a gathering thunderstorm.

The other two sketches are poses of diggers. I hope to do several more of them.

The other sower has a basket.

I am tremendously anxious to get a woman to pose with a seed basket, so as to find a little figure like the one I showed you last spring and which you can see in the foreground of the first little sketch.

Well, as Mauve says, the factory is in full swing.

If you like and are able to, please remember the Ingres paper, the colour of unbleached linen, the stronger kind if possible. In any case, write as soon as you can, and accept a handshake in my thoughts,

Ever yours, Vincent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, c. 12 October 1881

Dear Theo,

As the whole family is writing to you again, I too enclose a little note. I certainly hope you are well, and will be able to find a half-hour to write me again.

Now I will tell you what I have been doing since I wrote you last.

In the first place, two large drawings (crayon and a little sepia), pollard willows - somewhat like the sketch below [Drawings lost].

Then another one, vertical, of the road to Leur [Drawing lost]. I also had a model again a few times, a digger and a basket weaver. And then last week I received from Uncle in Prinsenhage a paintbox which is still very good, certainly good enough to begin on (it is Paillard's paint). I am very glad to have it.

I at once started to make a kind of watercolour, like the sketch below [Painting lost].

[The second sketch in the above picture was drawn here.]

I am very happy to get models. I am also trying to get a horse and a donkey.

That thick Ingres paper I mentioned is especially good for painting in watercolour, and it is much cheaper than any other. Still, I am not in a hurry for it because I brought a supply from The Hague, but alas, it's plain white.

Well, you see I am hard at work.

Uncle goes to The Hague tomorrow and will perhaps talk over with Mauve the question of my going up to see him again.

And now adieu. I have walked very far today and am very tired, but I would not let the letter go without enclosing a word.

I hope things are well with you, a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Etten, 12 October 1881

Dear Rappard,

Just now I received Gavarni, L'homme et l'oeuvre; thanks for returning it. In my opinion Gavarni is a very great artist, and certainly also very interesting as a man. Undoubtedly he now and then did things that were not right, as for instance his behaviour toward Thackeray and Dickens, but such things are in the nature of all men.

Besides, he seems to have regretted it, for later on he sent drawings to people whom he had not treated kindly enough at first. And Thackeray himself behaved in a similar way toward Balzac, and went even further, I think; but this does not alter the fact that at bottom they were kindred spirits, even if this was not always clear to themselves.

When I received the book this morning, I thought, “Now Rappard will certainly not come himself, otherwise he would have kept it until he arrived.” I hardly think it necessary to assure you again that we should all be very happy to have you with us once more, and that we sincerely hope that, even if you do not stay long, you will not stay away altogether.

I am eager to hear something about your plans for the winter. In case you go to Antwerp, Brussels or Paris, be sure to look us up on your way there, and if you remain in Holland, I shall not give up hope; in winter too it is beautiful here, and surely we should be able to do something, if not outside, then we could work with a model indoors, for instance in the house of some peasant or other.

Recently I have been drawing from the model a good deal, for I have found a number of models who are willing enough. And I have all kinds of studies of diggers, sowers, etc., men and women. At present I am working a good deal with charcoal and black crayon, and I have also tried sepia and watercolour. Well, I do not venture to say that you will see progress in my drawings, but most certainly you will see a change.

Before long I hope to be able to pay another visit to Mauve to discuss with him the question of whether I should start painting or not. Once started, I shall carry it through. But I want to talk it over with some people before starting. More and more I am glad that I have specially set my mind on drawing figures. For most certainly it indirectly influences landscape drawing, because one learns to concentrate.

I should have liked to send you a few sketches, if I'd had time, but I am busy with all kinds of things; later on, however, you will get some. In case you do not stay in Holland, please be sure to let me know your address, for in any case I shall have quite a few things to write about during the winter. Do you mind very much if I keep Karl Robert's Le fusain a little while longer, because, you know, I need it so much, as I am working with charcoal now; but when I go to The Hague I shall try to get it myself. I should be very much surprised if I did not stay quietly in Etten this winter - at least that is my intention; in no case shall I go abroad. For I have made rather good progress since I came back to Holland, not only in drawing but also in other things. Well, I am going to toil on here for a bit longer; I have been abroad for so many years, in England as well as in France and Belgium, that it is high time for me to stay here again for a while. Do you know what is so superb these days? - the road to the railway station and to De Leur with those old pollard willows; you have a sepia of it yourself [F 995, JH 056]. I can't tell you how beautiful those trees are just now. I made about 7 large studies of some trunks.

I know for sure that, if you could come one of these days while the leaves are falling, even if it were for only a week, you would make something beautiful of it. If you care to come, we shall all be delighted.

Kind regards from my parents and a handshake in thought from me, and believe me

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 12-15 October 1881

My dear Theo,
I was very pleased to get your letter just now, and as I intended to write to you anyhow in the next day or so, I am replying right away.
I'm so glad you've sent the Ingres paper. I've still got some left, but not the right colour.

I was happy to hear what Mr. Tersteeg said about my drawings, and certainly no less glad that you saw progress yourself in the sketches I sent you. If it is indeed so, I mean to work to such an effect that neither you nor Mr. T. will have any reason to take back your more favourable opinions. I shall do my very best not to let you down.

The artist always comes up against resistance from nature in the beginning, but if he really takes her seriously he will not be put off by that opposition, on the contrary, it is all the more incentive to win her over - at heart, nature and the honest draughtsman are as one. (Nature is most certainly “intangible,” yet one must come to grips with her and do so with a firm hand.) And having wrestled and struggled with nature for some time now, I find her more yielding and submissive, not that I have got there yet, no one is further from thinking that than I am, but things are beginning to come more easily.

The struggle with nature is sometimes a bit like what Shakespeare calls “the taming of the shrew” (which means wearing down the opposition, bon gré et mal gré [willy-nilly]). In many fields, but especially in drawing, I think that “serrer de près vaut mieux que lâcher” [persistence is better than surrender].

I have come to feel more and more that figure drawing is an especially good thing to do, and that indirectly it also has a good effect on landscape drawing. If one draws a pollard willow as if it were a living being, which after all is what it really is, then the surroundings follow almost by themselves, provided only that one has focused all one's attention on that particular tree and not rested until there was some life in it.

Enclosed are a few small sketches. I'm doing quite a bit of work on the Leurs road these days. Working with watercolour and sepia now and then too, but that isn't coming off too well yet.

Mauve has gone to Drenthe. We've agreed that I'll go and see him there as soon as he writes, but perhaps he'll come and spend a day at Prinsenhage first.

I went to see the Fabritius in Rotterdam on my last trip, and I'm glad you had a chance to see that Mesdag drawing among other things. If the drawing by Mrs. Mesdag you mention is of yellow roses on a mossy ground, then I saw it at the exhibition and it is indeed very beautiful and artistic.

What you say about De Bock is, I think, true in every respect. I take the same view of him, but could not have put it as well as you did in your letter. If he could and wanted to concentrate, he would certainly be a better artist than he is. I told him straight out, “De Bock, if you and I were to apply ourselves to figure drawing for a year, then we would both end up quite different from what we are now, but if we do not apply ourselves and simply carry on without learning anything new, then we won't even stay as we are but will lose ground. If we don't draw figures, or trees as if they were figures, then we have no backbone, or rather one that's too weak. Could Millet and Corot, of whom we both think so much, draw figures, or couldn't they? I think those Masters tackled just about anything.” And he agreed with me about this, in part at least.

In fact, I think he's been working very hard on the Panorama, and even though he refuses to admit it, that too will have a generally favourable effect on him.

He told me a very funny thing about the Panorama, which made me feel very warmly toward him. You know the painter Destreé? He went up to De Bock with a very superior air, and said to him, with great disdain, of course, yet in an unctuous and insufferably patronizing way, “De Bock, they asked me to paint that Panorama, too, but seeing it was lacking in any artistic worth I felt I simply had to refuse.”

To which De Bock retorted: “Mr. Destreé, which is easier, painting a Panorama, or refusing to paint one? Which is more artistic, doing it or not doing it?” I'm not sure if those were his precise words, but that was certainly the gist of it, and I thought it straight and to the point.

And I respect it as much as I respect your way of dealing with the older and wiser members of your society, whom you have left to their own old age and wisdom while you yourself have got on with things in your younger and more energetic way. That is true philosophy and makes us act as De Bock and you do when the need arises; it can be said of such philosophy that it is practical as well, in the same way as Mauve says, “Painting is drawing as well.”

I've filled up my paper, so I shall end and go out for a walk. My warmest thanks for all your efforts on my behalf, a handshake in my thoughts, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

[Enclosed with this letter were sketches Road with Pollard Willows, and Man putting Potatoes in a Sack.]

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Etten, 15 October 1881

Amice Rappard,
In my opinion your letter must be answered on the spot. In the first place I want you to know that it interests me very much - more than any other letter I have received from you - I learned more from it than you yourself meant to write down.

I learned from it that my friend Rappard has taken a great step forward, or will do so shortly. Why? Oh, it doesn't matter right now, but I have my reasons for believing that you have reached a point of revolution and reform. Ça ira! Within a short time there will be fire and enthusiasm in you. Ça ira! But for the moment not another word about it in this letter.

But if by chance you should be surprised at what I have told you, I hope to be able to tell you more soon in person. For in any case I expect to see you soon, whether you come by way of Breda or Rozendaal.

In the first place, on my parents' behalf I invite you to come and stay with us one of these days, for a longer or shorter time. So it is not necessary for you to ask if it is convenient, you will only have to write: I shall come on this or that day by this or that train.

If it is impossible for you to come and stay a few days, then I count on your skipping a train, either at the station at Breda or at Rozendaal, and on your letting me know by letter or postcard the hour and place of your arrival. Then I shall be on the spot according to your information. And then I shall bring along a number of drawings, the large one, “Worn out,” and several others that you do not know at all. I need not tell you that I hope that on the same occasion you on your part will show me some of your watercolours, as I am anxious to see them.

Look, we really must arrange to meet somehow one of these days. There is only one thing which might prevent me from coming to the station on the day of your passing through, but it is most unlikely that it should happen just on that very day. It is like this: Mauve is going to Prinsenhage for a day, and after that he will come and spend a day here. We hope it will happen soon, but we don't yet know which day it will be. And when Mauve is here, I go where Mauve goes. Suppose you were staying here when Mauve came, would you think that so unpleasant? I don't think you would; I don't know whether you know Mauve personally, but I think meeting him or meeting him again would be a good thing indeed. Mauve gave me courage when I needed it not long ago. He is a man of genius.

Now you are thinking seriously of going to Brussels until Christmas to paint from the nude.

Well, in your case I can well understand it, and especially in your present mood I shall see you go with an easy mind. Ce que doir arriver arrivera - what must happen will happen.

Whether you go to Brussels or not, some new flame will be kindled in you. Ça ira, and your going to Brussels or not will make little difference, but the caterpillar will become a butterfly; in this I am speaking like a fellow adventurer.

I feel sure you need not think that a few days' stay at Etten would mean a neglect of duty; on the contrary, you may take it for granted that it will be devoting yourself to duty, for neither you nor I should be idle here.

You can do some figure drawing here too if you want to. I am not sure whether I told you that my uncle at Prinsenhage saw the little sketches in your letter and thought them very good, and noticed with pleasure that you are making progress in figure drawing as well as in landscape.

I am of the opinion, Rappard, that in the beginning you should work from *the clothed* model. Most certainly one must have a sound knowledge of the nude, but in reality we have to do with figures with clothes on. Unless you intend to go the way of Baudry, Lefebyre, Henner, and so many others who specialize in the nude. Of course in that case you should study the nude almost exclusively; in that case the more you confine yourself to it and concentrate on it, the better. But in point of fact, I do not think you will take this road. You have too much liking for other things. You think a poor woman gathering potatoes in a field, a digger, a sower, a little lady in the street or at home, too beautiful not to feel the impulse to attack them in quite a different manner than you have done up to now. You have too much feeling for colour, too keen a perception of tone, you are too much of a landscapist to follow in Baudry's footsteps. The more so because I believe that you, Rappard, will ultimately decide to settle down in Holland too. You are too much of a *Dutchman* to become a Baudry. But I certainly think it excellent that you paint such beautiful studies from the nude as the two big ones I know - the reclining pose and the brown seated figure - and I wish I had done them myself. I am telling you my thoughts unreservedly, and you on your part must always tell me yours unreservedly too. Your remark about the figure of the Sower - that he is not a man who is sowing, but one who is posing as a sower - is very true [F857, JH 032].

However, I look upon my present studies purely as studies after the model, they have no pretension to being anything else.

Only after a year or a couple of years shall I have gained the ability to do a sower who is sowing; there I agree with you.

You tell me, Rappard, that you have done hardly anything for a fortnight. Surely I know these “fortnights”; I had them myself last summer. I did not work at drawing directly - but indirectly I did; what I did was go through one of those periods of metamorphosis.

I saw Mesdag's “Panorama.” I was there with the painter De Bock, who collaborated on it, and he told me of an incident that happened after the Panorama was finished and that I thought quite funny.

Perhaps you know the painter Destrée. Between you and me and the lamppost: the incarnation of mealy-mouthed arrogance. Well, one day this gentleman came up to De Bock and said to him, very haughtily, very blandly, very condescendingly, “De Bock, I was invited to paint that Panorama too, but because it was so inartistic, I refused.”

To which De Bock answered, “Mr. Destrée, what is easier, to paint a Panorama or to refuse to paint a Panorama? What is more artistic, to do a thing or not to do it?” I thought this answer very much to the point

I have good news from my brother Theo - he sends his kind regards. Do not neglect to keep up your acquaintance with him by writing him once in a while. He is a clever, energetic fellow, and I am very sorry he isn't a painter, although it is a good thing for the painters that there are such persons as he. This you will find out if you keep up your acquaintance with him.

And now I shall say, “See you soon.” Shall I? And believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

I am looking for a poem, I think by Tom Hood, “The Song of the Shirt”; do you happen to know it, or do you see your way to hunting it up for me? If you know it, I should like to ask you to write it out for me.

After I had closed this letter I opened it again to tell you that, although I quite understand your having made your plans, yet I want you to consider whether you will positively carry them out after all.

Speaking my mind unreservedly, I say to you, Rappard, stay here. But of course there may be reasons of which I am ignorant but which are weighty enough to make you decide on that plan.

Therefore, speaking only from an artistic point of view, I tell you that in my opinion you as a Dutchman will feel most at home in the Dutch intellectual climate, and will get more satisfaction from working after the character of this country (whether it be figure or landscape) than by concentrating on and specializing in the nude.

Although I like Baudry and others, such as Lefebvre and Henner, too - I greatly prefer Jules Breton, Feyen-Perrin, Millet, Ulysse Butin, Mauve, Artz, Israëls, etc., *etc.*

And I am speaking in this way because I am positive that fundamentally this is your opinion too. And though you have seen a lot, it is certain that I at least have not seen less than you of different kinds of art. Particularly seeing that I, though loosely speaking only a beginner in the art of drawing, am a pretty good judge of art in general, you should not take my opinion too lightly the few times I give it. And as I see it, both you and I cannot do better than work after nature in Holland (figure and landscape). Then we are ourselves, then we feel at home, then we are in our element. The more we know of what is happening abroad, the better, but we must never forget that we have our roots in the Dutch soil.

If I am not mistaken, you have made good progress with your work for Mr. Lantsheer; at least I am pleased to hear that he spoke that way about your picture at Arti. He has a clear eye for art, and there are not many who have so much knowledge and good taste.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Etten, 2 November 1881

Dear Rappard,

Thanks for your quick reply - so you soon succeeded in finding rooms, and are now living near the academy.

With reference to a certain question, which I descried at the bottom of your postcard, I want to tell you that, far from thinking it "stupid" of you to go to the aforesaid sanctuary, I think it very wise, even so wise that - yes, that I am *almost* tempted to say, a little bit too wise and righteous.

In my opinion if you had not gone, if your expedition had not taken place, it would have been all the better, but since you have undertaken it, I wish you success from the bottom of my heart, and notwithstanding everything, I have no doubt about the good results.

You - and others too - even if you really and truly attend the lessons at the academy, you will of course never be in my eyes an "academician" in the despicable sense of the word. Of course I do not take you for one of those arrogant fellows whom one might call the Pharisees of art, and the prototype of whom is, I think, "good old" Stallaert. And yet even this man may have something good in him, and if I knew him better, I might think differently of his Honour. But it will be difficult to hammer it into my head that his Honour does not have something damned bad in him too, which eclipses his possible good qualities. Nothing pleases me more than discovering good qualities even in such fellows. It always hurts me, it always makes me nervous, when I meet a man of whose principles I am obliged to say, "But this is really too bad, this doesn't hold water," and I go on having this choking feeling until someday I discover something good in him.

Never think it gives me pleasure to notice something wrong; it grieves me and gives me so much pain that at times I cannot keep it to myself. Ca m'agace [it exasperates me].

I do not like catching myself at "having a beam in mine eye," and yet - yet I have happened to catch myself at it, but then I didn't let it go at that, and I tried to remedy it.

And exactly because I know from my own experience how terrible such a "beam in one's eye" is, I sympathize with others suffering from the same complaint.

Please, please do not take me for a fanatic or a partisan. Certainly I have the courage to take sides, like any other man; at times one is compelled to do so in life, one is *compelled* to speak one's mind and to give one's opinion candidly, and stick to it.

But seeing that I do my utmost to look at the undeniably good side of things in the first place, and only afterward, most unwillingly, look at the bad side too, I make bold to believe that, even if I have not quite succeeded in it, I shall eventually arrive at what I may call in general a mild and broad and unprejudiced judgment. And therefore it is to me a petite misère de la vie humaine to meet a man who thinks he is always right, and who demands to be taken for someone who is always right; and this is because I am so convinced of my own fallibility and, at the same time, of the fallibility of all the children of men.

Now as to you, I believe that you too are striving after a mild and broad and unprejudiced judgment of things, in life but more especially in art. And therefore nothing is further from my mind than looking upon you as a Pharisee, either in the moral or in the artistic sense.

But for all that, such people as you and I, who decidedly have honest intentions, are not perfect after all, and often make very bad mistakes, and besides, are influenced by their environment and by circumstances. And we should be deceiving ourselves if we thought we stood so firm in our shoes that we had no need to take heed lest we fall.

You and I “think we stand,” but malheur a nous if we should become foolhardy and careless because we feel sure - and rightly so - that we possess some more or less good qualities. Attaching too much importance to the good that is in us, even if it is really and truly there, may lead us to Phariseeism.

When you are making vigorous studies after the nude like the ones you showed me, whether at the academy or somewhere else, when I am drawing potato diggers in a field - then we are doing good things by which we shall make progress. But, as I see it, for all that we must be especially distrustful of ourselves and be on our guard against ourselves as soon as we perceive that we are on the right road. When we must say: *Let me be very careful, for I am just the kind of man to spoil things for myself when they seem good* - unless I am careful. How must we be careful???...this I cannot define, but I am most decidedly of the opinion that in the case I mentioned, being careful is necessary, for from my own bitter experience, through my own sufferings and shame, I have become conscious of what I underlined just now. The fact that my being conscious of my own fallibility will keep me from making many mistakes will certainly not prevent my making a great many mistakes after all. But after we fall, we stand up again...!

So I think it a very good thing that you are painting from the nude at the academy, just because I am confident that you will not consider yourself righteous like the Pharisees on account of it, nor think those whose views differ from yours insignificant. Your work, far more than your words and expressions, has given me this conviction, and it has grown stronger and stronger.

Today, I drew another digger. And also since your visit, a boy cutting grass with a sickle [F851, JH 061].

And a man and a woman sitting by the fire besides [F897, JH 063; F 1216, JH 064].

We all enjoyed your visit very much; I am so glad to have seen your watercolours, you have made progress indeed.

Yet I should like to see you draw or paint ordinary people with their clothes on. I shouldn't be surprised if you made a success of it; I often think of that clerk whose portrait you drew during the sermon of the Very Reverend and Learned Dr. Kam. But since then I have not seen any more drawings by you like that one, which I regret - have you been reclaimed, by any chance, and are you listening more to the sermon nowadays instead of paying attention to the speaker and his audience? In some cases the speaker can carry us with him to such an extent that we forget everything around us, but this often happens in church, and I should wish it were always like that in church.

Well, I hope that you will write soon, and that you will have a good time and good luck in Brussels. And don't forget to drop in on your return journey, if it is possible; let's agree on that as a matter of principle.

Kind regards from my parents and a handshake in thought from me. And believe me

Ever yours,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 3 November 1881

Dear Theo,
There is something on my mind that I want to tell you about. You may perhaps know something of it already and it will not be news to you. I wanted to let you know that I fell so much in love with Kee Vos this summer that I can find no other words for it than, “It is just as if Kee Vos were the closest person to me and I the closest person to Kee Vos,” and - those words I spoke to her. But when I told her this, she replied that her past and her future remained as one to her so that she could never return my feelings.

Then I was in a tremendous dilemma about what to do. Should I resign myself to that “never, no, never,” or consider the matter not yet settled and done with, keep in good heart and not give up?

I chose the latter. And to this day I do not regret this approach, although I am still up against that `never, no, never'. Since then, of course, I have had to put up with quite a few “petites misères de la vie humaine,” [life's little troubles] which, had they been written about in a book, might well have served to amuse some people, but which if one experiences them oneself must be deemed anything but pleasant.

However, to this day I am glad that I left the resignation - or the “how not to do it” method - to those who have a mind for it and for myself kept in good heart. You will understand that in case like this it is surprisingly difficult to tell what one can, may and must do. Yet `we pick up the scent as we wander about, not as we sit idly by.'

One of the reasons why I have not written to you about all this before is that my position was so uncertain and unsettled that I was unable to explain it to you. Now, however, we have reached the point where I have spoken about it, not only to her but to Father and Mother, to Uncle and Aunt Stricker and to our Uncle and Aunt at Prinsenhage.

The only one to say to me, and that very informally and privately, that there really might be a chance for me if I worked hard and made progress, was someone from whom I least expected it: Uncle Cent. He was pleased with the way in which I reacted to Kee's never no, never, that is not making heavy weather of it but taking it in quite good humour, and said for instance, 'Don't give grist to the never, no, never mills which Kee has set up, I wish her all the best, but I rather hope those mills will go bankrupt.'

Similarly, I didn't take it amiss when Uncle Stricker said that there was the danger that I 'might be severing friendly relationships and old ties'. Whereupon I said that in my view the real issue, far from severing old ties, was to see if the old ones could not be renewed where they were in need of repair.

Anyway, that is what I hope to go on doing, and cast out despondency and gloom, meanwhile working hard - and ever since I met her, I have been getting on much better with my work.

I told you that the position has now become more clear cut. 1st. - Kee says never, no, never and then - I have the feeling that I'm going to have an immense amount of difficulty with the older people, who consider the matter settled and done with now and will try to force me to drop it.

For the time being, however, I think they'll go about it very gently, keeping me dangling and fobbing me off with fair words until Uncle and Aunt Stricker's big celebration (in December) is over [their silver wedding]. I fear they will be taking measures to get rid of me.

Forgive me for expressing myself somewhat harshly in order to make the position clear to you. I admit that the colours are somewhat glaring and the lines somewhat starkly drawn, but that will give you a clearer insight into the affair than if I were to beat about the bush. So do not suspect me of lacking in respect for the older people.

However, I do believe that they are positively *against* it and I wanted to make that clear to you. They will try to make sure that Kee and I neither see or speak or write to each other, because they know very well that if we saw, spoke or wrote to each other, there would be a chance of Kee changing her mind. Kee herself thinks she will never change her mind, the older people are trying to convince me that she cannot change it, and yet they fear such a change.

The older people will change their minds about this affair, not when Kee changes her attitude but when I have become somebody who earns at least 1000 guilders a year. Once again, forgive me the hard contours with which I am outlining matters. If I receive a little sympathy from the older ones, I believe that some of the younger ones will be able to understand my position.

You may, Theo - you may hear it said of me that I want to force things, and expressions like that. Yet everyone knows how senseless force is in love. No, nothing is further from my thoughts.

But it is neither unfair nor unreasonable to wish that Kee and I, instead of not being allowed any contact with each other, might see, speak or write to each other so that we could come to know each other better, and even be able to tell whether or not we are suited to one another. A year of keeping in touch with each other would be salutary for her and for me, and yet the older people have really dug in their heels on this point. Were I rich, they would soon change their tune.

But now you will realize that I hope to leave no stone unturned that might bring me closer to her, and that is my intention:

To go on loving her
Until in the end she loves me too.

Plus elle disparait plus elle apparait. [The more she disappears the more she appears.]

Theo, are you by any chance in love as well? I hope you are, for believe me, even its `petites misères' have their value. One is sometimes in despair, there are moments when one is in hell, so to speak, yet there is also something different and better about it.

There are three stages.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 7 November 1881

Old boy,
This letter is for you alone, you will keep it to yourself, won't you?
I should not be surprised, Theo, if my last letter made a somewhat strange impression on you. But I hope the impression has been such as to give you some idea of the whole situation. I tried to indicate the proportions and planes with long, straight charcoal strokes; when the necessary auxiliary lines have been traced, then we brush off the charcoal with a handkerchief or a wing and begin to draw the more intimate details.

So this letter will be written in a more intimate, less harsh and angular tone than the former.

In the first place I must ask you if it astonishes you at all that there is a love serious and passionate enough not to be chilled even by many “never, no, nevers”?

I suppose far from astonishing you, this will seem very natural and reasonable.

For love is something so positive, so strong, so real that it is as impossible for one who loves to take back that feeling as it is to take his own life. If you reply to this by saying, “But there are people who put an end to their own life,” I simply answer, “I really do not think I am a man with such inclinations.”

Life has become very dear to me, and I am very glad that I love. My life and my love are one. “But you are faced with a `never, no, never,' ” is your reply.

My answer to that is, “Old boy, for the present I look upon that `never, no, never' as a block of ice which I press to my heart to thaw.”

To determine which will win, the coldness of that block of ice or the warmth of my heart, that is the delicate question about which I can give no information as yet, and I wish that other people would not talk about it if they can say nothing better than, “The ice will not thaw,” “Foolishness” and more such nice insinuations. If I had an iceberg from Greenland or Nova Zembla before me, I do not know how many meters high, thick and wide, then it would be a difficult case, to clasp that colossus and press it to my heart to thaw it.

But as I have never yet seen an ice colossus of such dimensions loom up across my course, I repeat, seeing that she with her “never, no, never” and all is not many meters high and thick and wide, and if I have measured correctly, might easily be clasped, I cannot see the “foolishness” of my behaviour. As for me, I press the block of ice “never, no, never” to my heart; I have no other choice, and if I try to make it thaw and disappear - who can object to that??? What physical science has taught them that ice cannot be thawed is a puzzle to me.

It is very sad that there are so many people who object to it, but I do not intend to get melancholy over it and lose my courage. Far from it.

Let those be melancholy who will. I have had enough of it, and will only be glad as a lark in spring! I will sing no other song but aimer encore! Theo, do you like that “never, no, never”? Indeed, I think you don't. But there seem to be people who like it and, perhaps unconsciously - “of course with the best intentions and for my own good” - they occupy themselves with trying to wrench the ice from my breast; unconsciously they throw more cold water on my ardent love than they are aware.

But I do not think many pails of cold water will be able to cool my love soon, old boy…

Do you think it considerate of the family to insinuate that I must be prepared to hear in a short time that she has accepted another, richer suitor; that she has become quite handsome and will no doubt be asked in marriage; that she will take a positive dislike to me if I go further than “brother and sister” (that was the utmost limit); that it would be such a pity if “meanwhile (!!!) I let a better chance go by (!!!) …”

Does a man who has not learned to say, “She, and no other,” know what love is? … When they said those things to me, then I felt with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind: “She, and no other.”

Perhaps some will say, “You show weakness, passion, stupidity, ignorance of the world, when you say, `She, and no other.' Add another string to your bow, do not commit yourself definitely.” Far from it! Let this my weakness be my strength. I will be dependant on “her, and no other”; even if I could, I should not want to be independent of *her*.

But she has loved another and her thoughts are always in the past; and her conscience seems to bother her even at the thought of a possible new love. But there is a saying, and you know it, “Il faut avoir aimé, puis désaimé, puis aimer encore” [one must have loved, then unloved, then love again].

“Aimez encore: ma chère, ma trois fois chère, ma bien aimée - “ [love again: my dear, my three times dear, my beloved -].

I saw that she was always thinking of the past and buried herself in it with devotion. Then I thought, Though I respect that feeling and though that deep grief of hers touches and moves me, yet I think there is some fatalism in it.

So it must not weaken my heart, but I must be resolute and firm, like a steel blade. I will try to raise “something new” which will not take the place of the old, but has a right to a place of its own.

And then I began - at first crudely, awkwardly, but still firmly - and I ended with the words, Kee, I love you as myself… Then she said, “Never, no, never.”

What is the opposite of “never, no, never”? Aimer encore! I cannot say who will win. God knows, I only know this one thing, “I had better stick to my faith.” When it happened this summer, though I was not unprepared for it, it was at first as terrible a blow as a death sentence, and for a moment it absolutely crushed me to the ground.

Then in that inexpressible anguish of soul, a thought rose in me like a clear light in the night: Whosoever can resign himself, let him do so; but he who has faith, let him believe! Then I arose, not resigning but believing, and had no other thought than “she, and no other.”

You will say, On what will you live if you win her? Or perhaps, You will not win her. But no, you will not talk like that. He who loves, lives; he who lives, works; he who works has bread.

So I remain calm and confident through all this, and it influences my work, which attracts me more than ever just because I feel I shall succeed. Not that I shall become anything extra-ordinary, but “ordinary”; and by *ordinary* I mean that my work will be sound and reasonable, and will have a right to exist, and will serve some purpose.

I think that nothing awakens us to the reality of life so much as true love. And whoever is truly conscious of the reality of life, is he on the wrong road? I think not. But to what shall I compare that peculiar feeling, that peculiar discovery of love? For indeed when a man falls seriously in love, it is the discovery of a new hemisphere.

And therefore I wish that you were in love too, but then a woman must come into your life; however, as with other things, who *seeks* will find, though the finding itself is due simply to luck, not to any merit of our own.

And then it is a great surprise when you have found someone, and - and - and - if you then find yourself faced, not with a “yes, and amen,” but with a “never, no, never,” it is not pleasant at first, but terrible. But as Uncle Jan rightly says, The devil is never so black as he is painted; so is it also with a “never, no, never.”

Now when you have received and read this letter, you must surely write me soon if you haven't already done so, for since I've told you everything, I long very much for a letter from you. I do not think you will take what I have told you in bad part, but rather that you have pretty much the same thoughts about the question of the necessity of a “she, and no other” in general.

However it may be, write to me soon, and believe me,
Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 9-10 November 1881

Old boy,

I cannot make out from the letter Father and Mother received today what you think of my last two letters. But since you did not mention their receipt or enclose a letter for me, I suppose I shall soon get one from you. And in this case I think it much better if you write after reading my two - or including this one, my three - letters which, though written singly, complement each other, than if you had immediately answered the first one only. How cold and harsh my first letter must have sounded, and I suppose you must have thought me very obstinate and obdurate then. But was I wrong in this, and you will reproach me for not laying before you my most intimate and tender feelings - since you, oh man of business, would have received them during your daily fever of affairs, when not exactly in the mood to appreciate love stories? So I thought, No, first we must awaken him, and only then sow the seeds of soft words in him. We must first prepare the soil for that man who "hammers away at business." Therefore, the first letter was as cold as a ploughshare. But as to the second, was I wrong in asserting that it would be more serious and more intimate? And now that we are speaking more intimately, we shall continue to.

But "in the meantime," just another little bit of the ploughshare. Here it comes… Though you have gone pretty far in the world without a "she, and no other," though you stand firmly in your shoes without a she, and no other, though you know how to bring off business deals without a she, and no other, though you are a man of will power, energy and character without a she, and no other, though you have knowledge of men and experience without a she, and no other, though you have high spirits, buoyancy and courage without a she, and no other, though you dare to take sides and hate halting between two opinions without…

Yet you will get further in the world, stand more firmly in your shoes, be a man of more will power, energy and character, obtain more knowledge of men and experience, have higher spirits, more buoyancy and courage, take sides more decidedly, be more averse to halting between two opinions, to wavering, oscillating, etc., than you have until now as soon as you have somebody, to whom "she, and no other" *then* applies. In short, you will be more yourself with an honestly meant and deeply felt "she, and no other" than *without* the same.

This little bit of the ploughshare is still going on - don't get cross at it.

Your letter to Father was rather melancholy and, to tell you the truth, I did not understand it and did not know what to make of it. Is there anything serious, yes or no? And some expressions astonished me, first, because it was you who used them and, second, because you wrote them to Father and Mother.

For you, more than anyone else, keep all your “grandes et petites misères de la vie humaine” to yourself; and *if* you did speak about them, it would be to those whom you knew to be strong in the things in which you might feel more or less weak. I believe that if you felt yourself weak in anything, you would only confess that weakness to someone whom you knew would be able to cure you of it. Besides, only this summer you told me yourself that you thought it better not to speak about the difficulties in life, but to keep them to yourself in order not to lose your buoyancy, as you put it. I thought this a very impressive resolve, though, indeed, I was far from sympathizing with it; I know only too well that my need for sympathy has often induced me to seek it from people who, instead of strengthening, unnerved me.

Father and Mother are very good at heart, but have little understanding of our inner feelings, and as little comprehension of your real circumstances as of mine. They love us with all their hearts - you especially - and we both, I as well as you, love them very much indeed; but alas, in many cases they cannot give us practical advice, and there are times when, with the best of intentions, they do not understand us. It is not their fault, but the difference in age and the difference in opinion and the difference in circumstances… But that our home is and will remain our resting place come what may, and that we must appreciate it and on our side respect that home, there I quite agree with you - though perhaps you did not expect such a candid declaration from me.

However, there is a resting place better, more necessary, more indispensable than our home with our parents, however good, however necessary, however indispensable it may be - and that is our own hearth and home, with our respective “she, and no other.”

There you are, oh man of business, closing profitable deals, your biggest deal - your own home with your own “she, and no other.”

In my opinion this is the point you would do well to bear in mind, the stimulant which more than any other ”tonic” will keep alive your courage, strength, energy and love of life, and renew them more and more every day. Some expressions in your letter of today induce me to say now, Suppose there might be some special reason why you should be more than ever on the qui vive, and act more energetically and intelligently, suppose they try to undermine your position, or there is some other trouble or moment of danger. Do not forget you are twenty-six, and in “la saison du renouveau” [the season of renewal]. Close the biggest deal of your life! Renew yourself radically by being principally on the *qui vive* in that you look at girls more seriously and attentively, and be very careful to find out if *your* “she, and no other” is not among them.

This is the end of the ploughshare.

You remember perhaps that this summer we spoke about women, both with a kind of desolation. That we felt, or thought we felt, “La femme est la désolation du juste.”

And - and - I felt, perhaps you did too, rather like Monsieur le Juste above - I am not able to decide whether this saying is true or untrue, because since this summer I have begun to doubt, if I ever knew distinctly, “qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une femme, et qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un juste?”

And I have resolved to examine these two problems, the result being that I often say to myself, Tu ne sais pas encore ce que c'est qu'une femme. Tu ne sais pas encore ce qu'est qu'une juste, si non toutefois que tu n'en es pas encore un” [You don't yet know what a woman is. You don't yet know what a just man is, except that you aren't one yet for sure].

All of which is quite different from my opinion of this summer. Not I, but Father Michelet says to all young men like you and me:

Il faut qu'une femme souffle sur toi pour que tu sois homme. Elle a soufflé sur moi, mon cher!

Faut-il de même et par rencontre qu'un homme souffle sur une femme pour qu'elle soit femme?

Je le pense très certainement.

[A woman must breathe on you for you to be a man. She has breathed on me, dear chap!

On the other hand, must a man breathe on a woman for her to be a woman?

I most certainly think so.]

So, man of business, there is a love story for you! Do you think it very dull and very sentimental? When I had firmly resolved not to leave her, even if it should arouse her displeasure at first, not to turn away from her, when I clung only to that “she, and no other” and “aimer encore” then I felt a certain calm and firmness come over me.

Then my melancholy left me, then all things became new for me, then also my energy increased.

I know there are persons who think I ought to resign myself, and that it is against the rules not to consider myself beaten; but if they say of my proposal this summer, “If you sing before breakfast, you will cry before night,” then you know the verse,

He lost his feather in a fight
But knew they'd grow again all right,
Far finer than before.

However, now it is one of the little miseries of human life for me that I cannot go to see her once in a while or write to her, and that some people, who might have a good influence in undermining that “never, no, never,” on the contrary, feed that “never, no, never.” I wish that she found no sympathy anywhere for her “never, no, never” and that everyone would join in efforts to bankrupt the “never, no, never.” That they would quite reduce it to a warning monument for other “never, no, never” - saying ladies and for the encouragement of those who say, “Aimer encore.” But we have not come that far.

I should like it very much if you could persuade Father and Mother to be less pessimistic and to have more good courage and humanity, for they are awfully pessimistic, and call what I did this summer “premature and indelicate” (till I requested them quite firmly and definitely not to use such expressions any more).

A word from you perhaps influences them more than anything I can say, and it would be so much better, for them as well as for me, to let me go my way quietly.

They want me to stop all correspondence, for instance, with Uncle and Aunt; of course I cannot promise such a thing, and even if I did stop writing awhile, I would certainly start again with new vigour later.

She refuses to read my letters but - but - but the frost and the winter cold are *too* bitter to last very long.

I think it much more natural and sensible that when I spoke to her for the first time about these things, she at once uttered that “never, no, never” so energetically. That very thing convinces me that there was some fatal disease, and I hope I have touched the core of the fatal disease of burying herself too much in the past; now a crisis of indignation follows, but the surgeon laughs up his sleeve and says, “Touché!” This is just between ourselves, however, Theo - she must not know that I laughed up my sleeve over the result of the knife's thrust. Toward her I am of course more or less repentant: “Did I hurt you? Oh, how brusque and rough I was! How could I be so?” That is my attitude toward her. A very repentant and humble letter to Uncle; but still I told him, “she, and no other.” You will not betray me, brother? To act as if nothing had happened between us is all nonsense and humbug. None of that. Boy, I am so glad with my “never, no, never,” I should like to shout with glee; but I must not show it, and must attack her again in some other way. But how to approach her, how to come near her? I must do it someday quite unexpectedly and take her unawares. For if

I do not stick with it, then the fatal evil of burying herself in the past will come back with sevenfold strength, and yet “aimer encore” is such a good thing, and worth all the efforts of one's soul.

Now, I have been complaining a little about Father and Mother, but except that they do not understand the least bit of it and do not understand anything of the “aimer encore” and could only call it “untimely and indelicate” until I put a stop to that - after all, they are very good to me and kinder than ever. But I would rather they could understand more of my thoughts and opinions on many things. Theirs is a system of resignation in many matters to which I cannot resign myself. Now I think a letter from you, speaking lightly about that “never, no, never,” would perhaps be very effective. One word from Mother this summer would have given me the opportunity of saying many things to *her* which could not be said in public. But Mother very decidedly refused to say that word; on the contrary, she cut off every opportunity for me.

And she came to me with a face full of pity and with many comforting words, and I am sure she had prayed a beautiful prayer for me, that I might receive strength for resignation.

But until now that prayer has found no hearing; on the contrary, I have received strength for action.

You understand that a man who wants to act cannot quite approve of the fact that his mother prays for his resignation. And that he also thinks her words of comfort a little out of place as long as he does not despair, but, on the contrary, says from the bottom of his heart, “Je n'accepte point le joug du déspoir” [I won't accept the yoke of despair]. I wish she had not prayed for me, but had given me the chance of having an intimate conversation with *her*. And instead of agreeing with that “never, no, never,” she might have taken my part with a little more sympathy when Kee spoke to her in confidence and poured out her heart to her. I tell you these things to convince you that an energetic word from you to Father and Mother would be of great help to me. For it is true, is it not, brother, that we are not only brothers, but friends and congenial spirits?

Since I really love, there is more reality in my drawings, and I sit writing to you now in the little room with quite a collection around me of men, women and children from the “Heike,” *etc.* Mauve is ill, but Father and Mother have invited him to come here to recover as soon as he can undertake the journey.

Adieu. Write soon, a handshake in thought, believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 10-11 November 1881

Dear brother,
I have received your letter, but think it is only an answer to my No. 1.
In No. 2 and No. 3 you will have found a `talking-to' as my thanks for your advice. `Take care not to build too many castles in the air before you are sure the work is not in vain.'

And since you have had that talking-to already, I shall not repeat it. Bien te fasse [much good it may do you], old boy!

It's lucky at any rate that you haven't been guilty of `in the meantime' thinking, isn't that so?

No, neither you nor I are guilty of that sort of thinking. To the best of our belief, yours and mine, someone who lacks courage, or uses a won't-commit-myself approach, or doesn't dare stake his life with a smile, would be better off not even trying to win a real woman's heart. From the very beginning of this love I have felt that unless I threw myself into it sans arrière pensée [unreservedly], committing myself totally and with all my heart, utterly and for ever, I had absolutely no chance, and that even if I do throw myself into it in this way the chance is very slight. But what do I care if my chance is great or small?

I mean, should I, can I, take that into account when I am in love? No, no reckoning up, one loves because one loves.

Being in love - quelle chose [what a business]!

Imagine what a real woman would think if she found that someone was courting her with reservations; wouldn't she say something worse than `never, no, never!'? Oh, Theo, don't let's talk about it, if you and I are in love then we are in love, voilà tout [that's all there is to it]. And we keep a clear head and do not becloud our mind, nor curb our feelings, nor douse the fire and the light, but simply say, `Thank God, I am in love.'

Again, imagine what a real woman would think of a lover who came to her confident of success. I wouldn't give tuppence for his chances with someone like Kee Vos, and not for a hundred thousand guilders would I swap his chances for that `no, never, ever'.

I sent you a few drawings because I thought you might find something of the look of Heike [a town near Etten in Noord-Brabant, also called St. Willebrord] about them. Now tell me, please, why don't they sell and how can I make them saleable? For I should like to earn some money now and then for the fare to go and look into that `never, no, never.'

But be sure not to mention this plan of mine to the Most Reverend and Very Learned Mr. J. P. S. [Johannus Paulus Stricker, Uncle Stricker, the father of Kee]. For when I do arrive entirely unannounced, he might perhaps have no alternative but to turn a blind eye for the sake of peace.

Someone like the Most Reverend and Very Learned Mr. J. P. S. becomes quite a different person from what he was before once one falls in love with his daughter, at least as far as the one involved in the `present case' is concerned. He becomes quite gigantic and assumes unheard of proportions! But that does not alter the fact that, as one who loves his daughter, one is more afraid of *not going to him* than of *going to him*, even though one knows that he is capable of doing terrible things in the circumstances.

Anyway, right now I can't help feeling `I have a draughtsman's fist,' and I am very glad that I have such an implement, even though it is still unwieldy. The Ingres paper is really excellent.

And so you are popularly known as a lucky dog. For all the petites misères de la vie humaine.

And you are not sure whether you really are one or not? But why should you doubt it?

Now look, what I should like to know is this: what sort of petites misères do you have? I know some of them in part or in full, others I don't.

Do you also have petites misères to do with a lady from time to time? Of course you do, but I should like to hear what they are! Surely none of the never, no, never sort? Or perhaps, on the contrary, too many heavy-handed yeas and amens?

Well, your petites misères with the ladies interest me exceedingly. Especially because I think of your petites misères what I think of my own, namely, that in many cases we do not quite know how to take them, when, in fact, they contain hidden treasure provided we know how to find and take possession of it. The petites or grandes misères are riddles. Finding the solution is well worth the trouble.

A lucky dog who complains - without reason! And they call me `the melancholy one', and I ask you to congratulate me on my `never, no, never'! And I get very cross when people tell me that it is dangerous to put out to sea, observing that one might drown in it. I don't get cross because I think they are wrong to say that, but because they seem to forget `that there is safety in the very heart of danger'.

So, you lucky dog: what is wrong with your luck? You were able to tell me with much piquancy what falling in love is like by your comparison with a strawberry. It was nicely put indeed, but to be in love in the teeth of a triple `no, never, ever' as well as of a Most Reverend and Very Learned Mr. J. P. S. who makes inquiries about the means of existence in the `present case', as His Reverence calls it, or rather, does not even make inquiries about them because he (being into the bargain a Philistine when it comes to art) thinks that they are nonexistent - to be in love like that, I say, is not quite like picking strawberries in the spring.

And that `never, no, never' is not balmy as spring air but bitter, bitter, bitter as the biting frost of winter. `This is no flattery,' Shakespeare would say [As You Like It]. However Samson said something else: `Out of the strong came forth sweetness'. And the question is very much whether Samson was not much wiser than I am. Proudly he seized hold of a lion and overpowered him, but could we do the same? `You *must* be able to,' Samson would have said, and rightly so.

Enough, the strawberry season has not yet arrived, I can indeed see the strawberry plants but they are frozen. Will spring arrive and thaw them out, and will they come into bloom, and then - then - who will pick them?

Still, that `never, no, never' has taught me things I did not know: 1. It has brought home to me the enormity of my ignorance, and 2. Women have a world of their own, and much more. Also that there are such things as means of existence.

I should think it more considerate of people if they said (as the Constitution says: `Tout homme est considéré innocent jusqu'à sa culpabilité soit prouvée [every man is considered innocent until proven guilty]) that it should be assumed that others have the means of existence until the contrary is proved. It could be said: this man exists - I see him, he speaks to me, a proof of his actual existence is even that he is not uninvolved in a certain case, *e.g.* `the present case'. His existence being clear and obvious to me (since I am aware that the person in question is not a mere ghost, but is made of real live flesh and bones) I shall take it as axiomatic that he owes that existence to means he obtains in some way or other and for which he works. So I shall not suspect him of existing without any means of existence. However that is not the way people reason, least of all a certain person in question in Amsterdam. They have to see the means in order to believe in the existence of the person in question, but the existence of the person in question does not prove to them that he has means. Well, this being so, we are obliged to hold up a draughtsman's fist, though not to attack or even to threaten them with it. Then we must use that draughtsman's fist as best we can.

But the `no never ever' riddle is still by no means solved in this way. Trying the direct opposite of certain pieces of advice can often prove practical and do one good. That is why it is in many cases so useful to ask for advice. But some pieces of advice can be used in their natural state and do not need to be turned inside out or upside-down. This latter kind is very rare and desirable, however, for it still has some special characteristics. The former kind thrives everywhere in profusion. The latter sort is expensive. The former costs nothing and is sometimes delivered unsolicited to one's home by the sackful. `In the meantime!!!'

Yours truly, Vincent

I close this letter with some advice of my own.

If ever you fall in love, do so without reservation, or rather, if you should fall in love simply give no thought to any reservation.

Moreover, when you do fall in love, you will not `feel certain' of success beforehand. You will be `un âme en peine' [a lost soul] and yet you will smile.

Whoever feels so `sure of his ground' that he rashly imagines `she is mine', even before he has waged the soul's battle of love, even before, I say, he has become suspended between life and death on the high seas, in the midst of storm and tempest - there is one who knows little of what a woman's heart is, and that will be bought home to him by a real woman in a very special way. When I was younger, one half of me once fancied that I was in love, and with the other half I really was. The result was many years of humiliation. Let me not have been humiliated in vain.

I speak as one `*Who has been down'*, from bitter experience, from learning the hard way.

Lucky dog! What's the matter? What aileth thee? Perhaps, after all, you have not been such a lucky dog so far, but I think you are well on the way to becoming one. That much I gather from the tone of your letters.

It was just as if there is a small lump in your throat, in your voice. What kind of small lump is it? Could you not tell me for once, now that I have told you so much?

Theo, every girl's father has something called a key to the front door. A very terrible weapon, which can open and shut the aforesaid door as Peter and Paul open and close the gates of Heaven. Well, does that implement also fit the heart of the respective daughters in question? Can that be opened or shut with a key to the front door? I think not, God and love alone can open or close a woman's heart. Will hers open? Brother, will she ever let me in? Dieu le sait [God knows]. I cannot tell such things in advance.

Father and Mother have promised not to oppose this if only I leave them out of the matter, as it were.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Etten, 12 November 1881

Etten 12 November 1881
Dear Rappard,
Not having received any letter from you up to today, I thought, “Probably Rappard did not like my last letter at all, there seems to have been something in it that made him peevish.” Qu'y faire? Suppose this were so, do you really think it nice of you? Speaking for myself, I cannot always quite make out whether my reasonings are right or wrong, proper or improper. But this much I know, that however roughly or harshly I may express myself toward you, I have such a warm sympathy for you that on quietly reading or rereading my letter you will see and feel, The person who speaks that way to me is not my enemy. And knowing this, is it quite impossible for you to hear with me and even swallow some expressions that are a little rough or harsh, which perhaps later on will prove to be less rough and harsh than you thought in the beginning?

Rappard, why do you think I speak and write to you as I do? Is it because I want to lay snares for you, because I am a sort of tempter who wants to make you fall into a pit, or is it possible that I had a sound reason for thinking, “Rappard is taking a chance on very slippery ice!” Oh, I well know that there are people who not only stay on their feet on the most slippery ice, but can even perform tours de force on it - but even if you were standing as firmly on your feet as all that (and I'm not saying you aren't), yet I would rather see you marching on a footpath or a paved road.

Please, don't get angry - read on - to the very end - if you get angry - don't tear up this letter without reading it - first count to ten. One... two... three... and so on....

That's tranquillizing... for you know, now there follows something dreadful indeed. What I want to say is this.

Rappard, I believe that, though you are working at the academy, you are trying more and more to become a true realist and that even at the academy you will stick to reality - however, without being conscious of it yourself. Without knowing it, this academy is a mistress who prevents a more serious, a warmer, a more fruitful love from awakening in you. Let this mistress go, and fall desperately in love with your real sweetheart: Dame Nature or Reality.

I fell in love the same way too - desperately, I tell you - with a certain Dame

Nature or Reality, and I have felt so happy ever since, though she is still resisting me cruelly, and does not want me yet, and often raps me over the knuckles when I dare prematurely to consider her mine. Consequently I cannot say that I have won her by a long shot, but what I *can* say is that I am wooing her, and that I am trying to find the key to her heart, notwithstanding the painful raps on the knuckles.

But never think that there is only one woman called Dame Nature or Reality; no, it is only the family name of many sisters with different Christian names. So we need not be rivals.

Is this clear to you, my friend? Of course it is meant in a purely artistic sense, you know.

Now, in my opinion there are two kinds of mistresses. There is the kind whom you may love and be loved by, all the time being aware that on one side or on both it is nothing permanent, and that you do not surrender yourself completely, unconditionally and without reservation.

Such mistresses enervate one, they flatter and spoil one, and then - then - they scorch the wings of quite a number of men.

The mistresses of the second kind are of an entirely different variety. Collets montés - female Pharisees - female Jesuits!!! These are women of marble - sphynxlike - frozen vipers - who would like to fetter men completely, once and for all, however, without on their part surrendering themselves unconditionally and without reservation. They are bloodsuckers, these mistresses, they freeze men and petrify them.

But I told you, old fellow, this is only meant in a purely artistic sense - and so I compare the first kind of mistress, those who scorch, to that school in art which lapses into vulgarity; and I compare the other kind of mistress (the collets montés) those who freeze and petrify, to the academic reality, or ... or ... if you want me to coat the pill, to the unacademic reality - more sugar won't stick to the pill, and I am afraid you can look through the thin layer. The pill is bitter, but very healthy ... it is quinine....

Have you understood this, old fellow?

Now there are - thank God - others besides these two kinds of women: they form that family of Dames Nature and Reality, but it takes a severe mental struggle to win one of them.

They demand nothing more nor less than the entire surrender of the heart, the Soul and the mind, in a certain respect all the love we have in us, and then - then - they surrender themselves too. These Dames Nature, though righteous as doves, are at the same time cautious as serpents and they know quite well how to distinguish those who are sincere from those who are false.

She renews, she refreshes, she gives life, this Dame Nature, this Dame Reality!

Rappard, there are people, and perhaps you and I belong among them, who - only when they are really in love - realize that before that time they have had mistresses of either variety, consciously or unconsciously, or who at any rate are not unacquainted with both species.

So, according to me, you have a mistress who freezes you, who petrifies you, who sucks your blood.

Therefore I tell you, my friend, you must tear yourself from the arms of this woman of marble (or is it plaster of Paris??? how horrible!), or you will freeze to death.

Meanwhile remember, if I be a tempter digging a deep pit for you to fall into, that pit may be a "well wherein truth dwells."

And that's that. Nevermore sound the praises of any unacademic mistress to me (speaking artistically)! In my opinion she is a shrew. Old fellow, I think she will cheat you if you let her capture you. Let her go to the devil. Drive her away on the double, but listen, this is meant purely in the artistic sense, old fellow.

Oh well! if there is anything over and above this, that is another matter - even so, I shan't take back my words, though I should like to take my own words in a nonfigurative sense. Do you understand, old fellow? - and - and - say! - you will now write to me without loss of time, hein?

A handshake, and believe me

Ever yours, Vincent

Recently I made a drawing. Lunch hour: a labourer resting and drinking his coffee and cutting a slice of bread. On the ground a spade, with which he returned from the field.

[The following part of the postscript is written mostly in French.]

Yet she is somewhat cold, my friend, the woman whom you say you love, and who is your ideal for the time being. She certainly is what I had imagined: - marble, plaster of Paris, how can I tell? A somnambulist at best. Alive? - no!

So you say:

Where does she come from?...from Heaven.

Where does she dwell?...everywhere in the world.

Her intentions?...beauty and sublimity.

But, good heavens, at least you are sincere, and without knowing it you agree with me to the extent of admitting that you have chosen a mistress among those to whom I have assigned the name of collets montés, etc, *etc.*

Truly this is quite right, you have described her very correctly. But how Pharisaical she is, this beautiful lady, and how much you are in love with her -

what a pity.

Lady, who are you? I am *Beauty and Sublimity*. Just tell me, beautiful and sublime lady, she who *feels* so, is she really so? I readily admit that in certain crises in life - in great pain, in the exaltation of joy - one may feel one is beautiful as well as sublime; I hope I belong to those who can appreciate such feelings. Notwithstanding all that, the fact is, my lady, that you leave me cold and without emotion - what is the cause of this? I feel sure that I do not have too thick a skin; I hope that quite a few females, some not even pretty nor exactly sublime, have charmed me. But you, my lady, you do not charm me in the least. One should not claim to possess beauty and sublimity!

My lady, I do not love you at all, and besides, I do not believe that you know how to love, or it might be in some academic heaven; this may be true - but somewhere on the heath, or by the fireside, intimately? - no, a thousand times no! Don't tell me that story, my Lady Beauty and Sublimity, you know nothing of that.

You see, my lady, I am only a man with human passions, and as long as I am rambling on the heath “here below,” I have no time to meddle with some celestial and mystical love, for I feel a love of a more earthly and frank character.

I certainly want beauty and sublimity, I admit it, but above all I want something else - to begin with: goodness, kindness, tenderness - do you have much of that, my Pharisaical lady? I am inclined to doubt it. And then, my lady, please tell me, do you really have a body and a soul? - I am inclined to doubt that too, by heaven, and I mean the body as well as the soul.

Listen, beautiful lady, wherever you pretend to come from, you who tell me that your fundamental intentions are “beauty and sublimity” (which, however, can only be *results* and never *intentions),* whatever place you come from, you certainly did not issue from the body of the living God, neither did you from the body of a woman. Get you gone, sphinx, begone at this very instant, I tell you - you are nothing but a humbug ... You do not exist at all. (Le tiaple n'eczisde boind, as Nucingen would say.) But if you really exist, if in point of fact you come from somewhere, are you quite sure that your progenitor was not Satan himself, the father of lies; are you less viper and less serpent than he, my beautiful, my sublime lady?

To say that your mistress, “the Beautiful and Sublime One, who says that she comes from heaven and dwells everywhere on earth,” is a more than suspect person would mean expressing the thing not strongly enough.

Ask her if she is good and useful, if she loves and craves for love. Then she will be troubled in her mind, and if she answers Yes, it is a lie.

She - that is to say the *other one*, not the one with the intentions aforenamed - where does she come from?

Far be it from me to deny her divinity, her immortality; most certainly I believe in these, and in the first place too, but on the other hand she is also quite earthly, and also certainly a *woman*born of a woman.

She? Where she dwells? I well know where, and it is not far from any of us.

She? Her intentions? What do I know of them, how can I express myself?

I want to be silent - and yet, because I *must* speak - well then - as it seems to me: to love and to be lovable - to live - to give life, to renew it, to restore it, to preserve it - and to work, giving a spark for a spark, and above all to be good, to be useful, to be helpful in something, for instance lighting a fire, giving a slice of bread and butter to a child, a glass of water to a sufferer.

Oh! but all this is very beautiful, very sublime. Yes, but she did not know the names for it, and moreover she believed it was quite simple, she did not do it expressly, it *was not her intention* to make so much noise: she thought nobody took any notice of it.

Those “reasonings” of hers, you see, are not so very brilliant, not so very exquisite - but her feelings are always right.

“To know what's her duty she does not go to her head she goes to her heart.”

But this one is not a *mistress* at all. Puisqu'une dame est une dame, as Michelet says.

Meanwhile, Rappard, I thought that competition affair rather funny.

In the first place number 11 is the fools' number, and further, to be “the last one” is also a good sign, so I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart - I think it all a good omen for you. It is promising.

Well, I have many objections to various dogmas of yours too, but seeing that under the present circumstances the said mistress is my particular *bête noire*, I shall leave your dogmas alone. If only you could send the Lady Beauty and Sublimity packing, and fall in love with the *other one*, I think this would put quite different dogmas into your head *and* into your heart. And certain phenomena give me the impression that, however much you may be attached to my Lady Beauty and Sublimity, you will not be able to stand her company much longer. If only she does not petrify, and freeze, and immobilize you in this way, but I do not consider this very probable: you have too much good sense for that. Be careful - see to it that you keep warm (by way of a little precaution against her freezing influence) - take many walks (especially when you feel a certain petrifaction beginning); a warned man counts as two, so here is your warning.

Do not take this in bad part - if the phrase were not so academic, I should say: it is for your own good.

Enfin, keep going strong, I have yet another *bête noire* to pursue, but at the moment I won't tell you which it is. However, listen, I am going to tell you all the same. This other *bête noire* is “resignation under disappointments.” Another Pharisaical invention of an incredible Jesuitism. But it is theological, very theological. My dear fellow, never be resigned, and never get disappointed, this is the best advice I can give you; it is worth even more than the other advice namely to send that cold mistress of yours to the devil - the more so as the two advices are really one.

A handshake. Always believe me

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 12 November 1881

Dear Theo,
One sentence in your letter of November 6 requires a separate answer.
You say, “In the present case I should not lose courage if I were you, but I would let the thing rest with regard to people whom it does not concern. I think this attitude will astonish those who now interfere, and it will disarm them.” It would have been new to me if I had not already tried these tactics more than once before and found them one of the best weapons. Now, however, I can only say, Yes, I knew as much, but now, after that, what more do you know? For you must not forget that there are cases where it is not always sufficient to be on the defensive, especially when the strategy of the enemy is based on the somewhat rash supposition that at the most I certainly cannot go any further than wait in a defensive attitude.

Theo, if you were in love with the same sort of love as mine - and, boy, why should you ever have another kind of love? - then you would discover something quite new in yourself. Such as you and I, who generally associate with men and who attend to business of some kind - you, in a large way and I, in a small - well, we are used to doing most of our work with our brains - with a certain diplomacy, with a certain sharp calculation. But now fall in love, and look, you will perceive to your astonishment that there is still another force that urges us on to action - and that is the heart.

We are sometimes rather inclined to ridicule it, but the truth cannot be denied; especially when in love, one says, I do not go to my head to ask my duty in this case, I go to my heart.

Now, I cannot believe that you would expect me to consider either my parents or her parents as persons “who have nothing to do with it,” *etc.* On the contrary, I cannot suppose that it would be superfluous to talk it over with them now and then. Especially when, as is now really the case, their attitude is neither positive nor negative; that is to say, they do nothing openly, for or against. I do not understand how they can bear this, it is like being neither cold nor warm, and that is always a miserable thing.

Oh, how much precious time is perhaps lost in this way? If you would rather be counted among the persons “whom it does not concern and with whom I should let the thing rest,” then I would still talk to you about it now and then, even against your will - in exactly the same way as I do now with Father and Mother and Uncle and Aunt Stricker. When I spoke of it to Father this summer, he interrupted me with an anecdote about somebody who had eaten too much and another who had eaten too little. It was quite inappropriate, and it was a story with no beginning or end, so that I thought, What's wrong with Father?

It was perhaps from nervousness, as he had not expected it, yet it was under his very eyes, so to speak, that she and I had walked together and spoken together for days and weeks. Now, in this mood, are those eyes clear seeing? I think not. If I were hesitant, doubtful, halting between two opinions, I might agree with Father's and Mother's attitude. But now it is quite different. This, my love, has made me resolute, and I feel energy - new, healthy energy in me. Just the way everybody else who really loves feels. So what I want to say, brother, is no more nor less than that I firmly believe that any man is unconscious of some peculiar great hidden force, deeply hidden in him, until sooner or later he is awakened by meeting someone of whom one says, “She, and no other.”

If a man has more ambition and thirst for money than love, in my opinion there is something wrong with him. If a man only has love and does not know how to earn money, there is something wrong with him, also. Within us ambition and greed are partners in their hostility to love. The germs of the two forces are inside all of us from the beginning; they develop later on in life, generally in unequal proportions; one is love, the other, ambition and greed!

But at our age we, you and I, can do something to keep the things within us orderly.

My opinion is that when it develops, when it comes to its full development, love produces better characters than the opposite passion: Ambition & Co.

But just because love is so strong, generally in our youth (I mean at 17, 18, or 20 years) we are not strong enough to keep it going straight! The passions are the little ship's sails, you know. And he who gives way entirely to his feelings in his twentieth year catches too much wind and his boat takes in too much water and - and he sinks - or comes to the surface again after all.

On the contrary, he who hoists the Ambition & Co. sail and no other on his mast, sails through life on a straight course without accidents, without wavering until - until at last, at last, circumstances arise which make him think, I haven't enough sail. Then he says, I would give everything I possess for another square of sail, and I have not got it. He is in despair.

But now he remembers that he possesses another power which he can use; he thinks of the sail which he has despised until now, which he had put away with the ballast. And it is this sail that saves him. Love's sail must save him; without hoisting it, he cannot arrive.

The first case - that of the man whose little boat capsized when he was twenty years old, and sank, did it not? …no, recently it came to the surface again - is really that of your brother Vincent, who writes to you as “one who has been down, yet came up again.”

What kind of love was it that I felt when I was twenty? It is difficult to define - my physical passions were very weak then, perhaps because of a few years of great poverty and hard work. But my intellectual passions were strong, meaning that without asking anything in return, without wanting any pity, I wanted only to give, but not to receive. Foolish, wrong, exaggerated, proud, rash - for in love one must not only give, but also take; and, reversing it, one must not only take but also give. Whoever deviates either to the right or to the left falls, there is no help for it. So I fell, but it was a wonder that I got up again. What helped me recover my balance more than anything else was reading practical books on physical and moral diseases. I got a deeper insight into my own heart and also into that of others. Gradually I began to love my fellow men again, myself included, and more and more my heart and soul - which for a time had been withered, blighted and stricken through all kinds of great misery - revived. And the more I turned to reality, and mingled with people, the more I felt new life reviving in me, until at last I met *her*.

It is written, Love thy neighbour as thyself. One can deviate to the right or to the left, but both are bad. I think all in exchange for all is the real true thing - that is *it*. And now the two extremes; first, to ask everything without giving, second, to ask nothing but give everything. Two equally fatal, bad things, both damned bad.

Of course there are people who advocate one or the other of these extremes: the first produces those members of society which we call rascals, thieves, and usurers, etc., etc.; the second produces Jesuits and Pharisees, male and female - also rascals, you know!

If you tell me, “Take care that you do not get too fond of that `never, no, never,' and you mean by that, take care that you do not give all without taking anything, then you are quite right. My answer is, I made that mistake once: I gave up a girl and she married another, and I went away, far from her, but kept her in my thoughts. Fatal.

But now, grown wiser by experience, I say, I must try if, far from resigning myself, I cannot by strong, patient energy achieve the result which will give me more satisfaction. I will use all my powers to thaw that “never, no, never.”

Theo, in order to prove to you that I can reason quite calmly, though I am in love, I say to you:

If she and I were sentimental and soft-hearted, then we could have married already and great misery would have come of it - poverty, hunger, cold, illness, etc., but, oh, it would still be better for us to be together than not to be together.

If violent passion ruled me and she yielded to it, that passion would cool down - my lendemain de fête [morning after the party] would be desolation and hers, a broken heart.

If she were a coquette and played with a man's heart, and the man did not see through her game, that man would be a fool, but a sublime fool - if a fool can be sublime.

If I wanted her for other motives - money, for instance, or sensuality - and if I thought, She cannot escape me for this or that reason, I would be the damnedest of all Jesuits and Pharisees (may I tell you “meanwhile” that it is not so between us two).

If we played at brother and sister, we would be acting like children, and it would be quite out of place.

If she never returned my love, I should probably stay a bachelor always.

If I saw that she loved another man, I should go far, far away. If I saw that she took a man she did not love for his money, I should plead guilty to shortsightedness on my part, and I would say, I have mistaken a picture by Brochart for one by Jules Goupil, a fashion print for a figure by Boughton, Millais or Tissot.

Am I as shortsighted as that???

But my eye is like yours, well trained and steady.

But if she and I rise to a new life with renewed energy, then the future is no longer dark.

If she with her lady's hand and I with my draughtsman's fist are willing to work, the daily bread will not be wanting for us, nor for her boy.

If I had had other motives when I proposed to her, she would have despised me, and now she does not despise me.

But my third page is almost full and I still have something to ask. Boy, I must see her face again and speak to her once more; if I do not do it soon, something will happen at the silver wedding which would perhaps do me great harm. Don't ask me to go into it. If you were in love too, you would understand; because you are not in love, I should not be able to make it clear to you.

Theo, I want money for the trip to Amsterdam; if I have but just enough, I will go. Father and Mother have promised not to oppose this if only I leave them out of the matter, as it were.

Brother, if you send it to me, I will make lots of drawings for you of the Heike, and whatever you want. And they would not get worse if the “never, no, never” began to thaw. For aimer encore is also the best recipe for dessiner encore.

Could you help me with the money, boy? If it is only 20 fr., Father will perhaps give me another 10 (leaving him out of it, “pretending not to know”) et alors je décampe plus vite que ça. As-tu compris, mon cher! [and then I'll rush off at a tremendous speed. You understand, old chap!] Crois-moi toujours,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 18 November 1881

Dear brother,
If I did not give vent to my feelings every so often, then, I think, the boiler would burst.
I must tell you something that, were I to keep it bottled up inside me, might distress me, but which, if I just come straight out with it, may turn out to be not so bad.

As you know, Father and Mother on the one hand and I on the other do not see eye to eye about what should or should not be done with regard to a certain “no, never, never.”

Well, after I'd been listening to the fairly strong expressions, `indelicate and inopportune' for some considerable time (just imagine that you were in love and they called your love `indelicate', wouldn't you, with a certain amount of pride, take exception and say, Enough!'), at my urgent request that these expressions not be no longer used, they stopped, but only to come up with a new order of the day. Now they say that `I would be severing family ties.'

Well, I have told them over and over again, seriously, patiently and with feeling, that this is not the case at all. This helped for a time, and then it started all over again. Now the complaint was that I kept 'writing letters'.

And when - rashly and wantonly in my view - they kept using that wretched expression `severing ties,' I did the following. For a few days I said not a word and took no notice at all of Father and Mother. A contrecour [reluctantly], but I wanted them to see what it would be like if ties really had been severed.

Of course they were amazed at my behavior, and when they said so, I replied, `You see, *that's what it would be like* if there were no tie of affection between us; but luckily there is one and it will not be broken so easily, but I beg you to appreciate how dreadful that phrase, “severing ties” really is, and not to use it any longer.' The result was, however, that Father grew very angry, ordered me out of the room, and, and cursed me, or at least that is exactly what it sounded like!

Now while I am very distressed and sorry about it all, *I simply cannot agree* that a father who curses his son and (remember last year) proposes to send him to a lunatic asylum (which naturally I resisted with all my might) and who calls his son's love `inappropriate and indelicate' (!!!), is in the right.

Whenever Father loses his *temper* he is used to having everyone, myself included, give in to him. However, I had made up my mind in God's name to let this fit of temper rage on for once.

In anger Father also said something about my having to move away somewhere else, but because it was said *in anger*, I do not attach much importance to it. I have my models and my studio here, elsewhere life would be more expensive, working more difficult and the models dearer. But if Father and Mother were coolly and calmly to tell me, `Go,' of course I should go.

There are things a man simply *cannot* let pass. If one hears people saying `you are mad' or `you are someone who severs family ties' or `you are indelicate', then anyone with a heart in his body will protest with all his might. To be sure, I have told Father and Mother a thing or two as well, namely that they were quite wrong about this love of mine, that they had hardened their hearts, and seemed absolutely incapable of a gentler and more humane way of thinking. In a word, that to me their way of thinking seemed narrow-minded, neither full nor generous enough; and also that to me `God' would ring nothing but hollow if one had to hide one's love and were not allowed to follow the dictates of one's heart.

Now I am quite ready to believe that there have been times when I have been unable to suppress my outrage upon hearing `indelicate' or `severing ties', but who would keep calm when that sort of thing never stops?

Quoi qu'il en soit [be that as it may]. In his anger, Father muttered nothing more nor less than a curse. But then, I had already heard something of the sort last year, and thank God, far from being properly damned, felt new life and new energy springing up within me. And I firmly believe that it will be the same this time, only more so, and more forcefully than last year.

Theo, I love her, her and no other, her forever. And, and, and, Theo, although the `no, never, ever' still “seems” to be in full sway, there is a feeling of something like redemption within me, and it is as if she and I had stopped being two and were united for all eternity.

Have my drawings arrived? I made another yesterday, a peasant boy in the morning lighting the fire in the hearth with a kettle hanging over it, and another, an old man laying kindling wood on the hearth. I am sorry to say there is still something harsh and severe in my drawings, and I think that *she*, that is, her influence, is needed to soften that.

Well, my dear fellow, it seems to me there is no reason to take 'the curse' so terribly hard. Perhaps I used too harsh a method to make Father and Mother feel something they did not want to hear, yet is not `a father's curse' a great deal stronger and harsher, going indeed a little too far? Enfin, je te serre la main, et crois-moi [Well, I shake your hand, and believe me],

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 18 November 1881

Friday evening.
Dear brother,

When I mailed my letter to you this morning, I had a feeling of relief.

For a moment I had been in doubt - shall I tell him or not? - but on thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that it really was necessary. I sit writing to you now in the little room that is my studio now that the other room is so very damp. When I look around, I see the walls all covered with studies relating to one subject, "*Brabant types*."

So this is a work I have started, and if I were suddenly taken out of these surroundings, I should have to start anew on something else, and this one would remain half finished! That must not be! I have been working here since May, I am beginning to know and understand my models, my work is progressing; but it has cost me a lot of effort to get on so far.

And now that I have got so far, Father would say, Because you write letters to Kee and therefore make trouble between us (*for this is the chief reason,* for whatever they may say of my being too unconventional, or the like, it is just talk), because difficulties arise, I am showing you the door.

Isn't it too bad, and wouldn't it be ridiculous to stop a work that has been started, and is beginning to succeed, for that reason? No, no, it is not the way!

Besides, the disagreement between Father and Mother and myself is not so terrible, is not of such a nature that we could not stay together. But Father and Mother are getting old, and they have prejudices and old-fashioned ideas which neither you nor I can share any more. When Father sees me with a French book by Michelet or Victor Hugo, he thinks of thieves and murderers, or of "immorality"; but it is too ridiculous, and of course I don't let myself be disturbed by such opinions. So often I have said to Father, Then just read it, even a few pages of such a book, and you will be impressed yourself; but Father obstinately refuses. Just now, when this love took root in my heart, I reread Michelet's book L'Amour et la Femme, and so many things became clear to me that would have otherwise been riddles. I told Father that under the circumstances I attached more value to Michelet's advice than to his own, if I had to choose which of the two I should follow.

But then they bring up the story of a great-uncle who was infected with French ideas and took to drink, and so they insinuate that I shall do the same.

Quelle misère!

Father and Mother are very good to me in that they do everything to feed me well, *etc*. Of course I appreciate it very much; but it cannot be denied that food and drink and sleep are not enough for a man, that he longs for something nobler and higher - aye, he positively cannot do without it.

That higher feeling which I cannot do without is love for Kee. Father and Mother argue in this way: *She says No, so you must resign yourself*. I do not see the necessity of this at all, on the contrary. And I would rather give up the work just begun and all the comforts of this home than resign myself to not writing her or her parents.

Well, I write to you about it because at least my work certainly concerns you, for you are the one who has already given so much money to help me succeed. Now I am getting on, it progresses, I begin to see some light; and now I tell you, Theo, this threatens me. I ask no better than to work on quietly, but Father seems to want to put me out of the house, at least he said so this morning.

A strong word from you can perhaps settle this matter. *You* will understand what I tell you: In order to work and to become an artist, one needs *love*. At least one who wants sentiment in his work must first feel it himself, and live with his heart.

But Father and Mother are harder than stone in the matter of “means of subsistence,” as they call it. If it were a question of marrying immediately, I should certainly agree with them; but *now* it is a question of thawing a “no, never never,” and *that* a means of subsistence cannot do. It is quite another thing, a matter of the heart, and therefore she and I must see each other, write to each other, and speak to each other; it is as clear as daylight, and simple and reasonable. And indeed, I tell you (though they think me a weak character, a man of butter) that nothing in the world will make me give up this love. No delaying from day to day, from week to week, no *silent* waiting. The lark cannot be silent as long as he has a voice. What is to be done now?

Wouldn't it be foolish, Theo, not to continue drawing those Brabant types now that I am getting on with them, simply because Father and Mother disapprove of my love?

No - it must not be.

For heaven's sake, let them give in for once; it would be too foolish for a young man to sacrifice his energy to the prejudices of an old man. And really, Father and Mother are prejudiced in this.

No, brother, listen: it would be too bad if for this reason I should have to leave my work here and spend money elsewhere, where things would be much more expensive, instead of eventually earning a little money for a trip to Amsterdam. No, no, no, there is something wrong, it cannot be right that they want to put me out of the house just at this moment. There is no excuse, and it would thwart me in my work. So I cannot allow it.

What would she think if she knew what happened this morning? She is so tender and kind that it pains her to say one unkind word, but if one so soft, so tender, so loving as she is roused - piquée au vif! - then woe to those who are the cause of this anger. May her anger not be roused against me, dear brother. I think she is beginning to understand that I am neither a thief nor a criminal, but, on the contrary, am inwardly more quiet and sensible than I appear outwardly. In the beginning she did not understand this - at first she really had an unfavourable impression of me - but now, I do not know why, while the sky becomes clouded and overcast with quarrels and curses, a light rises on her side.

Well, boy, as soon as you send me the money for the journey, you will receive at once three drawings - “Dinner Time,” “Lighting the Fire,” “Almshouse Man.” So send the money if you can, for the journey will not be entirely in vain. If I have only 20 or 30 francs, I can at least see her face once more.

And if you can, write a few words about that sentence of banishment, for I should like so much to go quietly on with my work here; that is what I should like best. I want her and her influence in order to reach a higher artistic level. Without her I am nothing, but with her there is a chance. To live, to work, and to love are really one. Well, adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

One word from you, “from Paris,” will weight the scale against prejudices.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 19 November 1881

Dear Brother,
I have just received your letter. Thanks for your sympathy, thanks for the money "for the ticket." Thanks for your opinion about my drawings, though it is more favourable than I deserve. Continue writing me about my work. Do not fear your remarks will hurt me; I will take such criticism as proofs of sympathy, worth a thousand times more than flattery. You tell me practical things, from you I must learn to become practical; so preach me many a sermon, for I do not refuse to be converted and I am greatly in need of conversion.

I do not think I ever received money more gratefully than those ten guilders from you, for the thought that, if I *had* to go, I should be unable to, was so unbearable to me; now I have at least one string to my bow. I should have gone long ago if I had only had the ten guilders. However, I must be sure of *her* being at home when I go. Now I am corresponding continually with our sister Willemien, who is on the lookout and will warn me, for *she* is going to Haarlem; I shall hear from W. when *she* goes back to Amsterdam.

Oh, Theo, there is so much depth in her character, but one does not see it at once. She, you and I, we all have an outer bark of lightheartedness, but inside is a trunk of firmer wood, and hers is of a fine grain! Well, we shall see how things go.

If you too should perhaps have a love story, tell me all about it, and trust my discretion. If I were not "one who has been down," but on the contrary one who has always stood firm, I should be worse than useless to you, but as I have been in that mysterious deep well of misery of the heart, there is a shadow of a chance that I may be able to give you some practical advice in some affair of the heart. I go to you for help with my drawings and practical affairs, who knows whether I for my part cannot be of some use to you in relation to some difficulties in love.

For myself I learn much from father Michelet. Be sure to read L'Amour et la Femme, and if you can get it, My Wife and I, and Our Neighbors by Beecher Stowe, or Jane Eyre and Shirley by Currer Bell. Those people can tell you more and better things than I can.

The men and women who may be considered to stand at the head of modem civilization - for instance Michelet and Beecher Stowe, Carlyle and George Eliot and so many others - they call to you:

“Oh, man, whoever you are, with a heart in your bosom, help us to found something real, eternal, true; limit yourself to one profession and love one woman only. Let your profession be a modern one and may you help your wife to attain a modern soul, deliver her from the terrible prejudices which shackle her. Have no doubt of God's help if you do what God wants you to do, and God wants us in these days to reform the world by reforming morals, by renewing the light and the fire of eternal love. By these means you will succeed and at the same time have a good influence on those around you, be the number large or small, according to your circumstances.”

In my opinion these are the words that Michelet says to us in general. We are full-grown men now and are standing like soldiers in the rank and file of our generation. We do not belong to the same one as Father and Mother and Uncle Stricker; we must be more faithful to the modern than to the old one - to look back toward the old one is fatal. If the older people do not understand us, it must not upset us, and we must go our own way against their will; later on they will say of their own accord, Yes, you were right after all.

Though perhaps you will now think me rather well informed in some things, in many others, you will find me very stupid and ignorant - alas, in this feverish and hurried modem life we become so one-sided. But should you or I doubt our right to propose to a girl, and should we be doubtful of our success in the end?

No doubt it is presumptuous to be sure of oneself, but one certainly may believe, My soul's anguish will not have been in vain, and I will fight my battle notwithstanding all my own weaknesses and faults; I will fight as well as I can.

Though I fall ninety-nine times, the hundredth time I shall stand. And what are they talking about means of subsistence for, as if I had none! What artist has not struggled and toiled, and what other way is there but struggling and toiling to gain a foothold. And since when has a draughtsman no chance of earning his living?

I began to draw a man busy digging potatoes in a field again. And I put in a little more of the surroundings. Some bushes in the background, and a streak of sky. I cannot tell you, boy, how beautiful that field is! When I have earned a little more money and am able to spend more on models, I tell you I shall make quite different things still.

But it is hard work for the models too, I can tell you. The more so because those I have are not professional models, and perhaps that much better for it. If you ever have a chance to get somebody interested in my work, I think you can now begin to speak about me with some assurance. But in order to do better work, I shall have to spend more on models. Now I spend 20, 25 or 30 cents a day, but I cannot do that every day, and it really is not enough; by spending a little more, I could make more rapid progress.

Well, this winter I shall not be able to work in the open air with a model, but I can work indoors, and that is beautiful too. Once more, thanks for the money, boy! It is very kind of you and very humane! A warm handshake in thought, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Etten, 21 November 1881

Dear Rappard,
To talk less abstractly this time, I am going to discuss some facts with you. You say that Ten Cate spoke to you about similar matters as I did. All right, but if this Mr. Ten Cate is the same person whom on a certain day I saw in your studio for a moment, I very much doubt whether he and l have exactly the same ideas fundamentally. Is he a man of small stature with black or at least dark hair, who on that occasion had a very pale complexion, or at any rate was very neatly dressed in a suit of black cloth? You should know that I am in the habit of observing very accurately the physical exteriors of people in order to get at their real mental make-up. However, I saw this Mr. Ten Cate only once, and that very fleetingly - at least if I saw him at all - and so I cannot make up my mind about him. All the same, it is possible that in some respects he spoke to you as I did, and I don't object to that - all the better, I say. Actually your answer to my letter is no more than half an answer, thanks all the same. I think you will tell me the other half some time, but not in the near future. The other half, still to come, will be longer than the one I received, *and much more satisfactory.*

Suppose at some time you leave the academy for good then I think that you will eventually have to struggle against a very peculiar difficulty, which is not quite unknown to you even now. A man who, like you, is working at the academy regularly cannot help feeling more or less out of his element when, instead of knowing, This or that is my task for today, he is forced to improvise, or rather *create*, his task every day anew. Especially in the long run this looking for and finding your work will not prove such an easy job by any means. At least it would not surprise me if, after having broken away from the academy for good, you did not occasionally feel that the ground was giving way under your feet. But I think you are not the kind of man to be thrown into a panic by such a natural phenomenon, and you will soon regain your balance.

However, when you have thrown yourself once and for all, headlong and without reservation into reality (for after you have thrown yourself into it, you will never go back), you will speak to others who are still clinging to the academy; exactly as Ten Cate does and exactly as I do. For from what you have told me Mr. Ten Cate I infer that his reasoning can be reduced to the following words: Rappard, give up your reservations, and throw yourself headlong into reality.

The Open Sea is your true element and even at the academy you do not belie your true character and nature; that is why the worthy gentlemen there will not recognize you in fact, and put you off with idle talk.

Mr. Ten Cate is not yet an able seaman, and I myself much less, and we cannot steer and manoeuver yet as we would like to; but if we do not get drowned or smashed on the rocks in the seething breakers, we shall become good sailors. There is no help for it, everyone has to go through a period of worrying and fumbling after he has risked himself on the open sea. At first we catch little or no fish, but we get acquainted with our course and learn to steer our little vessel, and this is indispensable to begin with. And after a while we shall catch a lot of fish, and big ones too, be sure of that!

But I think Mr. Ten Cate is casting his nets for another kind of fish than I am, because to my mind our temperaments diverge; for every fisherman has a right to his own specialty, but now and then a fish of one kind will swim into the net meant for another kind, and vice versa, and so it may happen that at times there is a similarity between his catch and mine.

Now from time to time you dislike sowers and seamstresses and diggers. Well, what of it? So do I. However, with me this “disliking from time to time” is far outweighed by a certain enthusiasm, but with you the two things seem to have equal weight.

Have you kept my epistles? If you have a little time to spare, and they have not perished in the flames, then I say: read them again, although it may seem pretentious to ask such a thing of you. But I did not write them without serious intentions, though I was not afraid to speak my mind freely and to give free rein to my imagination. Now you say that I am a fanatic at heart, and that most certainly I am preaching a doctrine.

Well, if you want to take it that way, so be it; when it comes to the point I don't object to it, I am not ashamed of my feelings, I do not blush to own that I am a man with principles and a creed. But where does my fanaticism seek to drive people, especially myself? To the open sea! And what is the doctrine I preach? My friends, let us give our souls to our cause, let us work with our heart, and truly love what we love.

Love what we love, how superfluous a warning this seems to be, and yet it is justified to an enormous extent! For how many there are who waste their best efforts on something that is not worth their best efforts, whereas they treat what they love in a stepmotherly way instead of yielding wholly to the irresistible urge of their hearts. And yet we venture to call this conduct “firmness of character,” and “strength of mind,” and we waste our energy on an unworthy creature, all the while neglecting our true sweetheart. And all this “with the most sacred intentions,” thinking “we are compelled to do it,” out of “moral conviction” and a “Sense of duty.” And so we have the “beam in our own eye,” confusing a pseudo-or would-be conscience with our true conscience. The person who at this moment is writing to his dear friend Rappard has been marching around on this earth with one, or even more than one, such object - but then of a monstrous size - in his eye for a long time.

Has this beam been got rid of? you ask. Well, what can the present writer answer to this? Of *one* thing he is sure, namely that one very big beam is got rid of, provisionally; but, for the very reason that he did not notice it when he was labouring under it, he does not deem it impossible that there are others of whose existence or nonexistence he is not fully aware. However, the person in question has learned to be on his guard against diseases of and beams in the eyes. The excessively big beam in question was of a more or less inartistic character. I won't tell you just now what kind of beam it was. For there are all kinds of eye beams, artistic, theological, moral eye beams (quite a multitude of them), practical eye beams and theoretical eye beams (sometimes the two are combined - *very ruinous indeed*!), and ... oh well, a lot more.

We must not let ourselves be thrown into too much of a panic if we are not without them, provided this “not being in a panic” does not lead us into carelessness or indifference in this respect, or even into stubbornness.

A few days ago I had a nice letter from my brother Theo, who also inquired after you; I had sent him some drawings, and he strongly advised me to go on with those Brabant types. What he says about art is always to the point and purpose, and he often gives hints that are practical and practicable.

Today I have again been attacking a certain “bête noire” of mine, to wit, the system of resignation; I believe this “bête noire” is of the race of the hydra - that is to say the more serpent's heads you cut off, the more spring up again. And yet there have been men who have succeeded in killing off such a “bête noir.”

It is always my favorite occupation, as soon as I can find a spare half-hour, to resume the fight against this old “bête noir.” But perhaps you do not know that in theology there exists a system of resignation with mortification as a side branch. And if this were a thing that existed only in the imagination and the writings or sermons of the theologians, I should not take notice of it; but alas, it is one of those insufferable burdens which certain theologians lay on the shoulders of men, without touching them themselves with their little finger.

And so - more's the pity - this resignation belongs to the domain of reality, and causes many great and petites misères de la vie humaine. But when they wanted to put this yoke upon my shoulders, I said, “Go to hell!” And this they thought very disrespectful. Well, so be it. Whatever may be the raison d'être of this resignation, it - the resignation, I mean - is only for those who *can* be resigned, and religious belief is for those who *can* believe. And what can I do if I am not cut out by nature for the former, i.e. resignation, but on the contrary for the latter, *i.e.* religious belief, with all its consequences?

Well, if you have a little time to spare, write me again, and in the meantime believe me, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Etten, 23 November 1881

Dear Rappard,
On rereading your letters, my dear fellow, I find such lively and funny sallies in them that I feel stimulated, particularly by the latter, to continue our correspondence.
Well, well! So after all I am a fanatic! All right, for your words have gone home, right through my skin! So be it - thanks for your revelation, yes, thank God, at first I dared not believe it, but you have made it clear to me - so I have a will, a conviction, I am going in a definite direction, and what is more, not being contented with this, I want others to go along with me! Thank God, so I am a fanatic! Well, from now on I won't be anything else. And now I should like to have my friend Rappard as a fellow traveller - it is not a matter of indifference to me to lose sight of him - do you think I am wrong in this?

Now I said in my hurry that I wanted to drive people “to the open sea” (see my previous letter). If I did nothing but this, I should be a sorry barbarian. But there is something else which renders the thing more reasonable. In the long run a man cannot stick it out in the open sea - he must have a little cottage on the shore with a bit of fire on the hearth - with a wife and children around that hearth.

Look, Rappard, whither I am trying to drive myself, and whither I am trying to drive others too, is to be fishermen on the sea that we call the Ocean of Reality, but on the other hand I want - for myself and for the fellow creatures whom I importune now and then - that “little cottage,” most decidedly I do! And in that cottage, all those things! So the open sea and that resting place, or that resting place and the open sea. And as regards the doctrine I preach, this doctrine of mine - “My friends, let us love what we love” - is based on an axiom. I thought it superfluous to mention this axiom, but for clarity's sake I will add it. That axiom is: “My friends, we love.” From this I deduce that first thesis.

My friends, let us love what we love, let us be ourselves, “do not let us think we know better than God.” This “do not let us think we know better than God” is not my expression, it belongs to Mauve. And this thesis I prove by negative demonstration, *i.e.* in the following way to begin with.

Suppose a man did not love what he loves, what a lot of misery he would cause himself and others, and how much turbulence he would create in God's world. In short, if all men were like the person who, as we suppose - at least if this is possible - for the moment, does not love what he loves, how the world (which, I think, our Lord put squarely on its feet, which is kept in that position by Him, and which will stay that way as long as you and I are alive - which will serve our time, you know!)...if, I say, all men were like this imaginary one, willfully turned inside out and upside down - (and how fortunate it is that he can only exist in our imagination as an abstraction, just like our proof by negative demonstration of an unmathematical thesis) - how much the world, correctly created by God, would gradually seem to become a radically wrong world. Methinks, by continuing to work with this abstraction in our imagination - and this only for a short, even a very short while - I mean, with the above actually nonexistent man, willfully turned inside out and upside down - we cannot help feeling it goes so much "against the grain" that we are entitled to think we have proved definitely the correctness and reasonableness of our thesis: "My friends, let us love what we love." (Besides, if I have not demonstrated clearly enough that the incorrectness of the said thesis would be an enormous *absurdity*, you, who are much further advanced in mathematics than I, would easily succeed - if you would give your mind to it - in finding more conclusive proofs for my thesis.)

We now come to some remarkable conclusions or "deductions" from our primary thesis, as for instance:

1. The man who damn well refuses to love what he loves dooms himself.
2. He must have quite a lot of o(a)bstinatie, to stick it out in the long run (The *o* and the *a* happen both to be appropriate, eh?) [This pun is untranslatable. The Dutch word *obstinatie* means "obstinacy," and the (incidentally incorrect) word *abstinatie* (correct: *abstinentie*) means "abstinence."]
3. If he changed, wouldn't his conversion be a great thing!

Yes, and whether I add it or not, I think you will understand that I am suggesting more or less, Rappard, by sticking so close to the academy you are clinging to a reservation as to a rope that has "strangled" many a one - I mean, who could not cut himself loose when he wanted to put to sea.

Are there still other "reservations" besides the academic ones? See the chapter "eye beams" in my previous letter. There are, if you will allow me to say so, as many kinds of reservations as there are kinds of eye beams.

How many? Legions, I tell you, legions!

This "being strangled" by a reservation is a much slower and more agonizing death than stoutly hanging oneself by means of a halter. Are there also moral reservations? Why shouldn't there be, just as there are moral "eye beams"? But you and I, have we laboured under them, are we labouring under them, shall we labour under them?

Goodness gracious - I am far from sure, and if I were speaking for myself instead of for the two of us, I should say, I have laboured, am labouring and shall labour under moral eye beams and moral reservations, but this has not altered, does not alter and will not alter the fact that I have cast, am casting and shall go on casting moral beams out of my eyes, and that I have chucked away, am chucking away and shall go on chucking away moral reservations.

Until in the end I shall stand with a clear eye and a free neck.

When?

If I persevere until the end - in the end.

But I feel sure you will see that by continuing our correspondence we get so much profit out of it that gradually this correspondence is getting more serious.

For though, as I said, I give my imagination a free rein, yet I swear that I write in dead earnest, and not the reverse. Nothing is further from my thoughts than writing you out of a lust for argument, but my intention is “to wake Rappard up,” and I doubt whether I shall drop off myself when “waking Rappard up.” God forbid that this should be the case - far be it from me!

Now I told you on a former occasion that in general, and more especially with artists, I pay as much attention to the man who does the work as to the work itself. If the man is not there, I am now and then forced to draw conclusions from the work only (we cannot know all artists personally), or if the work is not there, to form an opinion of the man by himself. Now I know something of the work of a certain Mr. Van Rappard, and secondly something of the gentleman himself.

His work is always saying to me, Better is to come; his person is saying the same thing to me.

Better and better.

Do you think this a very merciless judgment? And (to jump from one subject to another) as regards my special “bête noire,” today I had little opportunity to occupy myself with hunting it; but for all that I have not been able to refrain from attacking it a little.

And we shall have a bone to pick with it by and by. But it is beginning to be a little on its guard; the fact is that resignation is accustomed to resignation, and I thought it would give up the struggle. But lo! I am not yet in a mood for it. Oh well, later on I shall probably tell you something more about the said bête noire. Damned bête noire! And yet it amuses me.

Meanwhile believe me, with a handshake,
Ever yours,
Vincent

I am writing you pretty often now, as shortly I shall have a lot of other correspondence to attend to.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 23 November 1881

Dear brother,
I am very glad that you wrote to Father and Mother about a few things, as I asked you. I think it can only have a good influence - at least gradually. Of course you understand that I am not the man intentionally to grieve Father and Mother with anything. When I must do something contrary to their wishes and which often grieves them without cause, I feel very sorry about it myself.

But don't think that the recent regrettable scene was caused only by hot temper. Alas, previously when I declared that I would not continue with my study in Amsterdam, and later in the Borinage when I refused to do what the clergymen there wanted me to do, Father said something similar. So there is indeed a lasting, deep-rooted misunderstanding between Father and myself. And I believe that it never can be *quite* cleared up. But on both sides we can respect each other because we agree in so many things, though sometimes we have quite different - aye, even opposite - views.

So I do not consider Father an enemy, but a friend who would be even more my friend if he were less afraid that I might “infect” him with French “errors” (?). I think if Father understood my real intentions, I could often be of some use to him, even with his sermons, because I sometimes see a text in quite a different light. But Father thinks my opinion entirely wrong, considers it contraband, and systematically rejects it.

Now in regard to the “case in question,” as Uncle Stricker calls what happened between Kee and me, I must tell you that I have risked an attack on the above-mentioned Mr. S.: by means of a registered letter. I was afraid unregistered letters would be ignored, but he will be obliged to read this one, and in it I have tried to draw his attention to some points which I fear he overlooked or which he would take no notice of. It is a very “undiplomatic” letter, very bold, but I am sure it will at least make an impression on him. But perhaps at first it will cause him to use a certain expletive which he certainly would not use in a sermon.

There really are no more unbelieving and hard-hearted and worldly people than clergymen and especially clergymen's wives (a rule with exceptions). But even clergymen sometimes have a human heart under three layers of steel armour.

But I am in terrible suspense and am quite ready to go to Amsterdam, except that the journey is very expensive and I must not waste my powder; the trip to Amsterdam is my reserve if my letter has no effect.

Do you know that Uncle Stricker is really a very clever man, in fact, an artist? His books are very good and give proof of deep feeling. This summer I read a little book he had just published on the “minor prophets” and a few of the other less known books in the Bible. So I certainly hope that after some time has passed, there will be more sympathy between us than there has been hitherto.

The letter I received from him a few months ago was not unsympathetic or written in anger, but he wrote very positively, “Her *no* is quite decisive.” But when, notwithstanding this letter, I continued to write Kee, he thought the intervention of Prinsenhage would put a spoke in my wheel. This spoke did not prove strong enough. It was not the lever to lift me off my feet.

Apropos! you must write me soon. I have often thought over what I wrote you.

If you thought I meant to insinuate that if a man's passions were, for instance, ambition in business or financial affairs, he must clip their wings, tone them down, or quite overcome them, you were mistaken. On the contrary, but those passions must bear more and a better kind of fruit. They must not decrease, but be counter-balanced by love. *Greed* is a very ugly word, but that demon does not let anybody alone; I should be greatly astonished if it hadn't sometimes tempted you and me, even to the extent that for the moment we were inclined to say, “Money is the ruler, money can do everything, money is No. 1.”

Not that you or I really bow to that Mr. Mammon and serve him, but it is true that he worries you and me a great deal. Me, by poverty through many a year; you, through a high salary. These two both present the temptation to bow to the power of money. We may be more or less strong in those temptations, but I hope neither you nor I are destined to become entirely the prey of that money devil; but won't he get some hold on us? Now that money devil may not play you the trick of making you think it a crime to earn much money and making me think that there is some merit in my poverty. No indeed, there is no merit in being so slow to earn money as I am, and I shall have to remedy that; and you will give me many a useful hint, I hope.

But it certainly is my conviction that your attention, your best, your most concentrated, attention must be centered at this time on the development of a vital force which is still slumbering within you - Love. For indeed, of all powers it is the most powerful - it makes us dependent in appearance only; the truth is, there is no real independence, no real liberty, no steady self-reliance, except through Love. I say, our sense of duty is sharpened and our work becomes clear to us through Love; and in loving and fulfilling the duties of love we perform God's will. In the Bible it is not written in vain, “Love will cover a multitude of sins” , and again, “In Thee O God will be mercy, that Thou wilt be feared” . But I think you will derive more profit from rereading Michelet than from the Bible.

As for me, I could not do without Michelet for anything in the world. It is true the Bible is eternal and everlasting, but Michelet gives such very practical and clear hints, so directly applicable to this hurried and feverish modern life in which you and I find ourselves, that he helps us to progress rapidly; we cannot do without him. The Bible consists of different parts and there is growth from one to the next; for instance, there is a difference between Moses and Noah on the one hand, and Jesus and Paul on the other. Now take Michelet and Beecher Stowe: they don't tell you the Gospel is no longer of any value but they show how it may be applied in our time, in this our life, by you and me, for instance. Michelet even expresses completely and aloud things which the Gospel whispers only the germ of.

You must not be astonished when, even at the risk of your taking me for a fanatic, I tell you that in order to love, I think it absolutely necessary to believe in God. To believe in God (that does not mean that you should believe all the sermons of the clergymen and the arguments and Jesuitism of the “bégueules dévotes collet monté” [bigoted, genteel prudes], far from it); to me, to believe in God is to feel that there is a God, not dead or stuffed but alive, urging us toward aimer encore with irresistible force - that is my opinion.

I have sent Mauve a drawing of a man digging potatoes in the field; I wanted to show him some sign of life. I wish he would come soon. As soon as he has seen my studies, I will send you some again. If you do not like my writing you so often and so long, then say Stop; but perhaps there will soon be another reason for stopping, for instance when the time left for correspondence will all have to be devoted to *her*. These very long letters will not continue forever.

It is so curious that I am entirely in the dark about what is going on in Amsterdam: I mean, I don't *know* anything, but only *feel*. How can one feel things at a distance? Indeed, I can't explain it to you, but just fall in love yourself, and then perhaps you will also hear voices in the distance, and see little things which lead you to surmise bigger ones - as one guesses there is a fire from seeing the smoke. Fortunately the weather is warm and calm: that has a beneficial influence on people. If it were biting cold with a north wind, my “case in question” would be worse off.

Meanwhile Uncle and Aunt Stricker's silver wedding is approaching; Father and Mother intend to go there. I am very glad you have written them before that time, for I would rather not have them come out with their “conscientious objections” to “the untimeliness and indelicacy” of my love. Hoping to hear from you again, believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

You must be sure that I try very hard to change many things in myself - especially the sad state of my money affairs. And then I also think it would be good for me to associate more with other people.

Now the best and most effective way to better myself financially is to work hard. “Travaillez, prenez de la paine, c'est le fonds qui manque le moins.” But this alone is not sufficient, or rather, there are still other things for which I must work. Perhaps it is not bad that I have lived so long “underground,” as it were, that I have been “one who has been down.” But now I need not go back into the abyss, and I think it right to do away with all melancholy and to take a somewhat broader and more cheerful view of life - to walk on level ground, and to renew old relations as much as possible, and to enter into new ones.

It may be that I shall meet with rebuff here and there, but I want to carry it through and try and struggle to the surface. I have often wondered whether it would not be possible and good to go to The Hague for a time, always considering the sphere of action here and the Brabant types my real work. Notwithstanding everything, I must hold onto this; now that I have grown familiar with it, I can find subjects here for years and years. But keeping at those Brabant types need not prevent my seeking new relations elsewhere, and even living elsewhere for a time.

All artists and draughtsmen do.

Do you know what I should like? Kee's beginning to say better things than “no, never never”; then it would be possible to plan an artistic campaign. But as things are now, I have first to fight “Jesuitism,” and must spend much of my energy on it; and second, I cannot begin another campaign before the “case in question” has been settled.

Do you think Kee knows how terribly she unintentionally thwarts me? Well, she will have to make up for it afterward!!! That means I count on her joining in many artistic campaigns with me, you see.

But I am afraid I am busy selling the skins of many bears that I have not yet killed. However, there is one bearskin with which I want to speculate.

Recently Father said to me, “My conscience has never allowed me to influence two people to marry.” Well, personally my conscience tells me exactly the opposite. Luckily Michelet never had such scruples or else his books would never have been written. And out of gratitude to Michelet I promise that later on when I associate more with artists who so often “beat about the bush,” I shall do all I can to make it clear to them that they must marry. For the benefit of art dealers who are afraid that “keeping a family” costs more than not “keeping a family,” I add that a married artist with his wife spends less and is more productive than an unmarried one with a mistress.

Do you think father Millet had more expenses than so many Italians and Spaniards who “live in the desert where the sky is of brass and the soil of iron”? Is a wife more expensive than a mistress? You do pay the mistress anyhow, Messrs. Art Dealers, and those ladies laugh at you behind your backs. “Qui est-ce qui vous tire des carottes [who are cheating you…], messieurs Goupil et Cie? Les femmes comme il en faut” - or “les femmes comme il faut? On est sûr de périr à part, on ne se sauve qu'ensemble.” That is one of the things Michelet says so simply. Sometimes it seems that he must be mistaken, but later one sees that he was right after all.

The saying, “il faut les avoir aimé, puis désaimé, puis aimé encore,” can also be applied to Michelet's books.

Do you think this mild weather will be mild enough to thaw the “never, no, never” one of these days? Will they expel me on or shortly after the silver wedding party? God forbid.

Do you think that Trojan horse in the form of a registered letter has been taken inside the walls of Troy? And, if so, will the Greeks that were hidden in that horse - that is to say, the things that were written in the letter - storm the fortress?

I am in the greatest suspense on that point. Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 1-3 December 1881

Dear Theo,
As you see, I am writing you from The Hague.
I have been here since Sunday. You know Mauve had planned to come and stay in Etten for a few days. I was afraid that something would prevent it or that the visit would be too short, and I thought, I will try it in another and I hope better way.

I said to Mauve, Do you approve of my coming here for a month or so, and occasionally troubling you for some help and advice? After that I shall have overcome the first petites misères of painting, and then I shall go back to the Heike.

Well, Mauve at once sat me down before a still life with a pair of old wooden shoes and some other objects, so I could set to work. And I also go to him for drawing in the evening.

I am staying in a little inn near Mauve, where I pay 30 guilders a month for a room and breakfast. So if I may count on the 100 fr. from you, I can manage.

And Mauve gives me hope that perhaps I shall soon make something saleable. I can assure you that this simple sentence of Mauve's pleased me more than a cartload of Jesuistical compliments would have.

Perhaps Mauve will soon write you himself.

“Meanwhile” I have been to Amsterdam. Uncle Stricker was rather angry, though he gave vent to it in more polite words than “God damn you.” But nevertheless I am not sorry I paid that visit. What must be done now? For you know that I came back no less in love than I went, but not because she had encouraged me; on the contrary, she made me for a moment - or rather, for twenty-four hours - profoundly miserable, but when I thought it over I seemed to see some light after all. When I thought it over, I say, and somewhat more seriously than romanticism or sentimentality would allow. But it looks less and less like gathering strawberries in spring; well, the strawberries will no doubt come in due time.

I also went to see Mr. Tersteeg, and among the painters I met (the merry) Weissenbruch and Jules Bakhuizen, and De Bock.

In short, Theo, I think I shall daily become more realistic in everything. Thank God she is something very real, too.

Mauve and Jet send you their compliments, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

P.S. As soon as Mauve allows it, I will send you another drawing; but he says that I must keep all my *studies*, especially those of the figure. But within a relatively short time, Mauve says, I shall learn to make little watercolours.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 18 December 1881

Dear Theo,

Perhaps you have been expecting a word from me to hear what I am doing these days. And I for my part have been looking for a word from you.

I still go to Mauve's every day - in the daytime to paint, in the evening to draw.

I have now painted five studies and two watercolours and, of course, a few more sketches.

I cannot tell you how kind and friendly Mauve and Jet are to me these days. And Mauve has shown and told me things which of course I cannot do at once, but which I shall gradually put into practice. But I must work very hard, and when I return to Etten I shall have to make a few changes; among other things, I must try to rent a large room somewhere so that I can have sufficient distance - otherwise it is impossible to draw the figure, except for studying certain segments.

I am consulting Mauve about this question and I will soon write you about it again.

The painted studies are still life, the watercolours are made after the model, a Scheveningen girl .

[A sketch of a Scheveningen Girl drawn here.]

Perhaps Mauve will write you himself some time soon.

But, Theo, now it is almost a month since I came here, and you must understand I have had a great many expenses. It is true that Mauve has given me several things, paint, etc., but I had to buy a great deal myself, and I have also paid the model for a few days. And I needed a pair of shoes, and in short, I haven't watched every penny I've spent. So I have overdrawn the 200-franc limit, as all told this trip has cost me 90 guilders. And now I think that Father is rather hard up himself for the moment, and I do not know what to do. Personally, I should like to stay here longer, even renting a room here, for instance at Scheveningen for a few months (and perhaps even longer); but the way things are, perhaps it is better for me to go back to Etten. I think Scheveningen and its types and figures so splendid. But the models are very expensive - 1.50 or 2 guilders a day, some even more. But here one comes in contact with painters, *etc.*

When I wrote Father this week for money, he thought it so very excessive that I had spent 90 guilders. But you will understand, I think, that this is not unreasonable, for everything is so expensive. But I hate to have to account to Father for every cent I spend, the more so because it is told to everybody, not without enlargements and exaggerations.

So I must say, Theo, that just now I am rather hard up here. And I am writing to tell you so. I have no money to stay, I have no money to go back. I shall wait here for a few days at all events. And I will do as you wish.

Do you think it better for me to stay here a little longer? I should be very glad to, and I would not go back until I had made some progress.

If you want me to go back at once, I will, but I must find a good room somewhere, somewhat larger than the little studio at home; then I can get along alone for some time, and go back to The Hague after a while.

At all events, Theo, through Mauve I have got some insight into the mysteries of the palette and of watercolouring. And that will repay me for the 90 guilders the trip has cost. Mauve says that the sun is rising for me, but is still behind the clouds. Well, I have nothing to say against that.

Sometime I will tell you more about how kind and considerate Mauve has been to me.

So I shall wait a few more days for your answer. But if it does not come within three or four days, I shall ask Father for money to go back at once.

I have several things to tell, which will possibly interest you, about the manner of drawing after the model at Etten; but as I said before, I will write you about it again soon. Enclosed I send you little sketches after the two watercolours. I confidently hope that I shall be able to make something saleable in a relatively short time. Yes, *I even think that these two would be saleable in case of need*. Especially the one which Mauve has brushed a little. But I would rather keep them myself for a time in order to remember better some things about the way in which they were done.

What a splendid thing watercolour is to express atmosphere and distance, so that the figure is surrounded by air and can breathe in it, as it were. Now would you like me to make another set of watercolours for you here? I ask no better, but lodgings here, and the models and the paint and paper, etc., *etc.* - everything costs money, and I have nothing left. So at all events send me word by return mail, and if you wish me to stay, send me some money if possible.

I think I shall make better progress now that I have learned something practical about colour and the use of the brush.

And you can imagine that I hope Mauve will never have cause to regret his kindness. We will try to push ahead with some force. Well, adieu. At all events I count on your writing by return mail (address A. Mauve, Uilenboomen 198). Believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

These are the subjects of two painted studies: a terra cotta of a child's head with a fur cap; and a white cabbage with potatoes, etc., around it .

[Two enclosed sketches: Scheveningen Girl facing Left and Scheveningen Girl facing Right.]

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, c. 21 December 1881

Sometimes, I'm afraid, you cast a book aside because it is too realistic. Have pity on, and patience with, this letter, and in any case read it through, even though you may think it a bit much.

My dear Theo,

As I wrote to you from The Hague, I still have one or two things to discuss with you now that I am back here again. It is not without emotion that I think back on my short trip to The Hague. When I arrived at M[auve]'s, my heart was beating quite hard, because I was thinking to myself, is he going to try to fob me off with fair words too or am I going to find something different here?

And well, what I found was that in all sorts of practical and friendly ways he helped and encouraged me. Mind you, not by approving of what I did or said all the time, on the contrary. But if he says to me, “This or that is no good,” he immediately adds, “but just try it this way or that,” which is a different matter altogether from criticizing for the sake of criticizing. If somebody says, “You have this or that illness,” that's not a great deal of help, but if he says, “Do this or that and you will get better,” and his advice is reliable, then you see, he has told you the truth, and, and, it's a help as well.

Anyway, I came away from him with some painted studies and a few watercolours. They are not masterpieces, of course, yet I really believe that there is some soundness and truth in them, more at any rate than what I've done up to now. And so I reckon that I am now at the beginning of the beginning of doing something serious. And because I can now call on a couple of technical resources, that is to say, paint and brush, everything seems fresh again, as it were.

But - now we have to put it all into practice. And so the first thing I must do is find a room large enough for me to keep at a proper distance.

As soon as he saw my studies Mauve told me, “You are sitting too close to your model.” In many cases that means it's virtually impossible to achieve the proper proportions, and so that is definitely one of the first things I must attend to. I simply must find a large place to rent somewhere, be it a room or a shed. And it won't be all that terribly expensive. It costs 30 guilders a year to rent a workman's cottage in these parts, so I reckon that a room twice as large as one in a workman's cottage would come to, say, 60 guilders. And that's feasible.

I have already seen a shed, but it may have too many drawbacks, especially in wintertime. But I could work there, at least when the weather is a bit milder. And then there are models to be found here in Brabant, I think, and not just in Etten but in other villages too, should objections be raised here.

However, though I am very fond of Brabant I still have a feeling for figures other than the Brabant peasant type. Thus I still think Scheveningen is beautiful beyond words. But I happen to be here, and most probably it works out more cheaply here. In any case, I have promised M. to do my best to find a good studio, and besides, I must start using better paint and better paper now.

For studies and sketches, though, the Ingres paper is excellent. And it works out much cheaper to make my own sketchbooks in various sizes from that than to buy the sketchbooks ready-made.

I still have a small supply of Ingres paper, but if you could include some more of the same kind when you send those studies back to me, I should be greatly obliged to you. Not snow-white, but rather the colour of unbleached linen, no cold tones.

Theo, what a great thing tone and colour are. And those who fail to learn to have feelings for them will remain far removed from real life. M. has taught me to see so many things that I used not to see and one day I shall try to tell you what he has told me, as there may well be one or two things you do not see properly either. Anyway, I hope we'll have a good discussion about artistic matters some day.

And you cannot imagine the feeling of liberation I am beginning to have when I remember the things M. has told me about earning money. Just think of how I have been muddling along for years, always in a kind of fausse [false] position. And now there is a glimmering of real light.

I wish you could see the two watercolours I have brought back with me, for you would realize that they are watercolours just like any other watercolours. They may still be full of imperfections, que soit, I am the first to say that I am still very dissatisfied with them, and yet they are quite different from what I have done before and look fresher and brighter. That doesn't alter the fact, however, that they must get fresher and brighter still, but one can't do everything one wants just like that. It will come little by little.

However, I need those two drawings I did, for I must be able to compare them with the ones I am going to do here, in order to keep the standard at least up to what I did at M.'s. Now although M. tells me that if I muddle along here for another few months and then go back to him, say in March, I shall be producing saleable drawings on a regular basis, I am still passing through a fairly difficult period right now. The cost of model, studio, drawing and painting materials keeps going up and I'm not earning any money yet.

To be sure, Father has said that I needn't worry about any unavoidable expenses, and he is pleased with what M. himself has told him and also with the studies and drawings I brought back. But I still think it is quite dreadful that Father should be out of pocket as a result. Of course, we hope it will turn out all right later on, but still, it is a load on my mind. For since I have been here Father has made really nothing at all out of me, and more than once, for instance, he has bought me a coat or a pair of trousers that I would really rather not have had, although I needed them, but Father should not have to be out of pocket because of that. The more so as the coat or trousers in question don't fit and are of little or no use. Well, here is yet another petite misère de la vie humaine.

Besides, as I told you earlier, I loathe not being completely independent. For though Father doesn't expect me to account literally for every cent, he always knows exactly how much I spend and on what. And though as far as I am concerned I have no secrets, I still don't like showing my hand to people. As far as I am concerned even my secrets are not secrets to those with whom I am in sympathy. But Father is not someone for whom I can feel what I feel for, say, you or Mauve. I really do love Father and Mother, but it is quite a different feeling from the one I have for you or M. Father can't feel for or sympathize with me, and I can't settle into Father's and Mother's system, it is too stifling and would suffocate me.

Whenever I tell Father anything, it goes in one ear and out the other, and that certainly applies no less to Mother, and similarly I find Father and Mother's sermons and ideas about God, people, morality and virtue a lot of stuff and nonsense. I too read the Bible occasionally, just as I sometimes read Michelet or Balzac or Eliot, but I see quite different things in the Bible from what Father does, and what Father in his little academic way gleans from it I cannot find in it at all.

Now that the Rev. Mr. ten Kate has translated Goethe's Faust, Father and Mother have read it, for since a clergyman has translated it, it cannot be all that immoral (???qu'est ce que ça? [What's that?]). But they see it as no more than the disastrous consequences of an indelicate love.

And they certainly understand the Bible no better. Take Mauve, for example. When he reads something profound, he doesn't immediately come out with: that man means this or that. For poetry is so deep and intangible that one cannot define it systematically. But Mauve has a keen sensibility and, you see, I find that sensibility worth a great deal more than definitions and criticisms. And when I read, and actually I don't read all that much and then only a few writers, men whom I have discovered by accident, then I do so because they look at things more broadly and generously and with more love than I do and are acquainted better with reality, and because I can learn from them. But I really don't care for all that twaddle about good and evil, morality and immorality. For to be sure, I find it impossible always to tell what is good and what is bad, what is moral and what is immoral.

Morality or immorality brings me back willy-nilly to K. V. Ah! I wrote to you at the time that it was beginning to seem less and less like eating strawberries in the spring. Well, that is indeed the case.

Forgive me if I repeat myself, but I don't know if I've already written to you exactly what happened to me in Amsterdam. I went there thinking, perhaps the no, never, ever will thaw, the weather is so mild.

And so one fine evening I trudged along the Keizergracht looking for the house, and indeed I found it. And naturally I rang the doorbell and was told the family were still at dinner. But then I was told to come in all the same. And all of them were there, including Jan and that very learned professor - except for Kee. And there was a plate in front of each person, but no extra plate. This small detail struck me. They had wanted to make me think that Kee wasn't there and had taken away her plate, but I knew that she was there, and I thought it all a bit of a farce or charade.

After a while I asked (after the usual small talk and greetings), “But where is Kee?”

Then J. P. S. repeated my question to his wife, “Mother, where is Kee?”

And Mother, the wife, said, “Kee is out.”

So for the moment I inquired no further, but chatted with the professor about the exhibition at Arti which he had just seen. Well, then the professor disappeared and little Jan disappeared and J. P. S. and his spouse and yours truly remained alone and squared up to each other.

J. P. S. took the floor, as clergyman and Father, and said that he had been on the point of sending yours truly a letter and that he would read that letter out.

First, however, interrupting the Rev. or Very Rev. gentleman, I asked again, “Where is Kee?” (For I knew she was in town.)

Then J. P. S. said, “Kee left the house the moment she heard you were here.” Now I know a few things about her and I must make clear to you that I did not know then nor do I know now with any certainty whether her coldness and rudeness are a good or a bad sign. This much I do know, that I have never seen her so apparently or actually cold and stern and rude to anyone else but me. So, staying perfectly calm, I did not say much.

“Let me hear the letter then,” I said, “or not, I don't much care either way.”

Then came the epistle. The document was Very Reverend and Most Learned and so did not really amount to anything, but it did seem to say that I was requested to cease my correspondence and advised to make energetic efforts to put the matter out of my mind. Finally the reading came to an end. I felt just as if I had been listening to the clergyman, after his voice had been doing a sing-song, saying amen in church. It left me as cold as any ordinary sermon.

And then I began and said as calmly and civilly as I could, well, yes, I had heard this kind of argument very often before, but what now? - et après ça [and after that]? J. P. S. looked up then…indeed, he seemed faintly alarmed that I was not completely convinced that the utmost limit of the human capacity to think and feel had been reached. According to him, no `et après ça' was possible any longer.

And so we continued, and every so often Aunt M. would add a peculiarly Jesuistical word, and I got a bit steamed up and for once I did not pull my punches. And J. P. S. did not pull his punches either, going as far as a clergyman could. And although he did not exactly say `God damn you,' anyone other than a clergyman in J. P. S.'s mood would have expressed himself thus.

But you know that I love both Father and J. P. S. in my way, despite really detesting their system, and I shifted my ground a bit, and gave and took a little, so that at the end of the evening they told me I could stay for the night if I wished.

Then I said, “Thank you very much, but if Kee walks out of the house as soon as I come calling, I don't think this is the right moment to spend the night here. I'll go to my lodgings.”

And then they asked, “Where are you staying?”

I said, “I don't know yet,” and then Uncle and Aunt insisted on taking me themselves to a good cheap hotel.

And my goodness, those two old people went with me through the cold, foggy, muddy streets and they did indeed show me a very good and very cheap hotel. I absolutely insisted on their not coming and they absolutely insisted on showing me. And, you see, I found something very human in that and it calmed me down a bit.

I stayed in Amsterdam another two days and had another talk with J. P. S., but I didn't see Kee, who spirited herself away every time. And I said that they ought to know that though they wanted me to consider the matter over and done with, I for my part was unable to do so. And to that they continually and steadily replied that I would learn to understand things better in time.

I saw the professor too, again a few times, and I have to say he improves upon acquaintance, but, but, but, what else can I say about the gentleman? I told him I wished he might fall in love one day. There you are. Can professors fall in love?

Do clergymen know what love is?

I read Michelet's La femme, la religion et le prêtre the other day. [The correct title is Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille.] Books like that are filled with reality, but what is more real than reality itself and where is there more life than in life itself? And we who are doing our best to live, if only we lived a great deal more!

Time hung heavily on my hands those three days in Amsterdam. I felt thoroughly miserable and found all that grudging kindness of Uncle's and Aunt's and all those discussions very hard to take. Until in the end I began to find myself hard to take as well and said to myself, “You don't want to get melancholy again, do you?” And then I said to myself, “Don't let yourself be browbeaten.”

And so it was that on a Sunday morning I went to see J. P. S. for the last time, and said, “Look here, dear Uncle, if Kee V. were an angel, then she would be too exalted for me and I don't think I could stay in love with an angel. If she were a devil, I shouldn't want to have anything to do with her. In the present case I see in her a real woman, with feminine passions and whims and I love her very much indeed and that is a fact and I'm glad of it. As long as she doesn't become an angel or a devil, then the present case is not over.”

And J. P. S. couldn't add much to that and even said something about feminine passions, I don't quite know what he said, and then J. P. S. went off to church. No wonder one grows hardened there and turns to stone, as I know from my own experience.

And so, as far as the person in question, your brother, is concerned, he refused to allow himself to be browbeaten. But that didn't alter the fact that he had a browbeaten feeling, as if he had been standing too long against a cold, hard whitewashed church wall.

And yes, if I may say so, my dear fellow, it is a little risky to remain a realist, but Theo, Theo, you are a realist yourself after all, well, please put up with my realism! I told you that as far as I am concerned even my secrets are no secrets, well, I am not taking that back, think of me what you will, and whether or not you approve of what I did does not really affect the issue.

I continue - from Amsterdam I went to Haarlem and spent a very enjoyable time with our dear little sister Willemien and went for a walk with her and in the evening I left for The Hague and ended up at M.'s at about seven o'clock.

And I said, “Look here, M., you were supposed to come to Etten to try to initiate me, more or less, into the mysteries of the palette. But it occurred to me that that would take more than just a few days, so I have come to you, and if you agree I shall stay here for about four to six weeks, or for as long or as short a time as you like, and then we shall see what is to be done. It's a bit impertinent of me to ask so much of you, but, well, j'ai l'épée dans les reins.” [I am under great pressure.]

Anyway, then M. said, “Have you bought anything with you?”

“Certainly, here are a few studies,” and then he said many, far too many, kind things about them, but he also made a few, far too few, criticisms. Well, the next day we set up a still life and he started by saying, “This is how you must hold your palette.” And since then I have done a few painted studies and then later two watercolours.

So that is the summary of the work, but working with one's hands and head is not the whole of life.

I still felt chilled to the marrow, that is, to the marrow of my soul, by the above-mentioned imaginary or non-imaginary church wall. And I said to myself, you don't want to let that fatal feeling browbeat you. Then I thought to myself, I should like to be with a woman for a change, I cannot live without love, without a woman. I wouldn't give two cents for life if there were not something infinite, something deep, something real.

But, said I to myself then, you said “she and no other” and now you want to go to another woman? But that's unreasonable, isn't it, that's illogical, isn't it?

And my answer to that was: who is the master, logic or I, does logic exist for me or do I exist for logic, and is there no reason or sense in my unreasonableness or my lack of sense? And whether I do right or wrong, I have no choice, that damned wall is too cold for me, I need a woman, I cannot, will not, may not, live without love. I am only a man and a man with passions, I must have a woman, otherwise I shall freeze or turn to stone or, in short, I shall have let things browbeat me.

I had in the circumstances, however, fought a great battle with myself and in that battle some of the things I believe concerning one's constitution and hygiene, that I have come to know more or less through bitter experience, gained the upper hand. One cannot forgo a woman for too long with impunity. And I do not believe that what some call God and others the supreme being and others nature, is unreasonable and pitiless, in short I came to the conclusion: I want to see whether I can find a woman.

And, my goodness, I didn't have to look all that far. I found a woman, by no means young, by no means beautiful, nothing special if you like. But perhaps you are a little curious. She was fairly tall, and strongly built, she didn't have the hands of a lady, like K. V., but the hands of a woman who does a great deal of work. But she was not coarse or common and had something very feminine about her. She reminded me of some quaint figure by Chardin or Frère or perhaps Jan Steen. Anyway, what the French call “un ouvrière” [a woman worker]. She had had many cares, you could see, and life had been hard for her. Oh, nothing refined, nothing out of the ordinary, nothing unusual.

Tout femme à tout âge, si elle aime et si elle est bonne, peut donner â l'homme non l'infini du moment, mais le moment de l'infini. [Any woman, at any age, if she loves and is a good woman, can give a man not the infinity of a moment, but a moment of infinity.]

Theo, for me that faded je ne sais quoi, that something over which life has passed, has infinite charm. Ah! For me she did have charm, something of Feyen-Perrin, of Perugino. See here, I am not quite as innocent as a “bec blanc” [greenhorn], much less a baby in a cradle.

It was not the first time that I was unable to resist that feeling of affection, that special affection and love for those women who are so damned and condemned and despised by clergymen from the lofty heights of their pulpits. I do not damn them, I do not condemn them, I do not despise them.

See here, I am nearly thirty and do you really think that [I] have never felt the need for love? K. V. is even older than I am, she has also known love in the past, but she is all the dearer to me for it. She is not inexperienced, but neither am I. If she wants to hold on to an old love and have nothing to do with a new, that is her affair, but if she insists on doing that and cold-shoulders me, I shan't stifle my energy and my mental powers on her account. No, I refuse to do that, I love her but I will not allow myself to become frozen and my mind crippled because of her. And the spur, the spark we need, is love, and not mystical love either.

That woman has not cheated me - oh, he who takes all such women for cheats is so wrong and has so little understanding. That woman was good to me, very good, very dear, very kind, in a way I shall not even tell my brother Theo, because I strongly suspect that my brother Theo has had a similar experience. Tant mieux pour lui. [So much the better for him.]

Did we spend much money? No, because I didn't have much, and I said to her, “Look here, you and I don't have to make ourselves drunk to feel something for each other, you had best put what I can spare in your pocket.” And I wish I could have spared more, for she was worth it. And we talked about everything, about her life, about her worries, about her misery, about her health, and I had a more exhilarating conversation with her than, for instance, with my learned, professorial cousin Jan.

Now I am telling you these things not least because I hope you will realize that though I do have some sentiment, I don't want to be sentimental in a silly way. That I want quand bien même [all the same] to keep some warmth and vitality and my mind clear and my constitution sound in order to be able to work.

And that I conceive my love for K. V. in this light, that for her sake I don't want to get down to work feeling melancholy and will not allow myself to be thrown off course.

That is something you will understand, you who have written something on the question of hygiene in your letter. You mentioned the fact that you haven't been enjoying good health lately - make every effort you can to get better again.

The clergymen call us sinners, conceived and born in sin. Bah! What confounded nonsense that is. Is it a sin to love, to feel the need for love, not to be able to live without love? I consider a life without love a sinful and immoral state.

If there is anything I regret then it is that period when I allowed mystical and theological profundities to mislead me into withdrawing too much into myself. I have gradually come to change my mind. When you wake up in the morning and find you are not alone but can see a fellow creature there in the half-light, it makes the world look so much more welcoming. Much more welcoming than the devotional journals and whitewashed church walls beloved of clergymen. She lived in a modest, simple little room lent a quiet grey tone by the plain wallpaper, yet warm like a picture by Chardin, a wooden floor with a mat and a piece of old dark-red carpet, an ordinary kitchen stove, a chest of drawers, a large, perfectly simple bed, in short, a real ouvrière's home. The next day she had to work at the washtub. Fair enough, I should have found her no more charming in a purple camisole jacket and a black skirt than I did now in a dress of brown or reddish-grey. And she was no longer young, perhaps the same age as K. V., and she had a child, yes, life had left its mark and her youth was gone. Gone? - il n'y a point de vielle femme [there are no old women]. Ah, and she was strong and healthy - and yet not coarse, not common.

Are those who set such great store by distinction always able to spot the distinguished? Good heavens, people search high and low for what is right under their noses, and I do too, now and then.

I am glad I did as I did because I can think of no earthly reason that would keep me from my work or cause me to lose my good humour. When I think of K. V., then yes, I still say, “she and no other,” then I still think as I did in the summer about “looking for another girl in the meanwhile.” But it isn't since yesterday that I have been taking a warm interest in those women whom the clergy condemn, despise and damn, indeed my love for them is rather older than that for Kee Vos. Many times when I walked the streets all alone with time hanging heavily on my hands, half sick and down in the dumps, with no money in my pocket, I would look at them and envy the people who would go with one, and I felt that those poor girls were my sisters in respect of circumstances and experience in life. And, you see, that is an old feeling of mine, and goes deep. Even as a boy I would often look up with infinite sympathy, indeed with respect, at a woman's face past its prime, inscribed as it were with the words: here life and reality have left their mark.

But my feeling for K. V. is quite new and something quite different. Sans le savoir [without realizing it], she is in a kind of prison, she too is poor and cannot do as she pleases, she feels a kind of resignation, and it is my belief that the Jesuitisms of clergymen and devout ladies often make a greater impression on her than on me, Jesuitisms which, precisely because I have acquired some dessous de cartes [inside information], no longer have any hold on me now. But she is devoted to them and would be unable to bear it if the system of resignation and sin and God and I know not what else, proved to be vain.

And I don't think it ever occurs to her that God may only appear once we say the words, those words with which Multatuli ends his prayer of an unbeliever: “Oh God, there is no God.” You see, for me that God of the clergy is as dead as a doornail. But does that make me an atheist? Clergymen consider me one - que soit - but you see, I love, and how could I feel love if I were not alive myself or if others were not alive, and if we are alive there is something wondrous about it. Now call that God or human nature or whatever you like, but there is a certain something I cannot define systematically, although it is very much alive and real, and you see, for me that something is God or as good as God. You see, when in due course my time comes, one way or other, to die, well, what will keep me going even then? Won't it be the thought of love (moral or immoral love, what do I know about it?)

And good heavens, I love Kee Vos for a thousand reasons, but precisely because I believe in life and in something real I am no longer as given to abstractions as before, when I had more or less the same ideas about God and religion as Kee Vos seems to have now. I am not giving her up, but that spiritual crisis with which she is perhaps struggling must be given time, and I am prepared to be patient about it and nothing she says or does now makes me angry. But while she cherishes and clings to the old, I must work and keep my mind clear for painting and drawing and for business. So I did what I did from a need for affection and for reasons of mental hygiene.

I am telling you all this so that you won't think that I am in a melancholy or abstracted, brooding mood. On the contrary, most of the time I am fiddling around with and thinking about paints, making watercolours, looking for a studio, etc., *etc.* Old fellow, if only I could find a suitable studio!

Well, my letter has become rather long, but there you are. Sometimes I wish that the three months before I can go back to M. were already over, but as it is they may do me some good. But do write to me now and then. Is there any chance of your coming here this winter?

And believe me, I shan't rent a studio, etc., without first finding out what Mauve thinks. I shall send him the floor plan, as agreed, and he may come and have a look at it himself if need be. But Father must stay out of it. Father is not the man to get mixed up in artistic matters. And the less I am involved in dealings with Father, the better I get on with him. I must be free and independent in very many respects, that goes without saying.

I sometimes shudder when I think of K. V. and of her burying herself in her past and clinging to old and dead ideas. There is something fatal about it and, oh, it would not diminish her if she were to change her views. I think it quite possible that there will be some reaction, there is so much that is healthy and spirited in her.

And so in March I shall go back to The Hague and, and, to Amsterdam as well. But when I left Amsterdam that time, I told myself: under no circumstances will you become melancholy or allow things to get you down, letting your work suffer just when you have started to make some headway. Eating strawberries in the spring is indeed part of your life, but it is only one short moment in the year and right now it is still a long way off.

And so you envy me for some reason or other? Oh, my dear fellow, no need for that, since what I seek can be found by everyone, perhaps even sooner by you than by me. And oh, I am so backward and narrow-minded in many things, if only I knew exactly where the trouble lay and how to go about putting it right. But alas, we often do not see the beams in our own eye.

Write to me soon and try to separate the wheat from the chaff in my letters. If there is some good in them, some truth, tant mieux, but there is, of course, much in them that is more or less wrong, or exaggerated perhaps, without my always being aware of it. I am anything but a man of learning, and I am so amazingly ignorant, oh, just like so many others and even more so than others, but I am unable to judge that myself and can judge others even less than myself, and am often mistaken. But we pick up the scent as we wander about and il y a du bon en tout mouvement [there is some good in every movement] (I chanced to hear Jules Breton say that, by the way, and remembered the remark).

Incidentally, have you ever heard Mauve preach? I've heard him mimicking several clergymen - once he preached about Peter's boat. The sermon was divided into 3 parts: 1st, was he given the boat or did he inherit it? 2nd, did he purchase it in installments or by taking out shares? 3rd, had he (dreadful thought) stolen it? Then he went on to preach about “the Lord's good intentions” and about “the Tigris and the Euphrates” and finally he mimicked J. P. S.

marrying A. [Anna Carbentus, Vincent's cousin] and Lecomte.

But when I told him that I had once said during a discussion with Father that I believed that even in church, even in the pulpit, one could say something edifying, M. agreed. And then he mimicked Father Bernhard: “God - God - is almighty - He has made the sea, He has made the earth and the sky and the stars and the sun and the moon, He can do everything - everything - but - no, He is not almighty, there is one thing that He cannot do. What is that thing that God Almighty cannot do? God Almighty cannot cast out a sinner.”

Well, goodbye, Theo, write soon, a handshake in my thoughts, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Etten, 22-24 December 1881

Dear Theo,
As Father and Mother are sending you a letter, I'm enclosing a word, but I hope to write you at length soon, that is, after Mauve has been here; he is expected one of these days at Prinsenhage and will also come here. You must know, Theo, that Mauve has sent me a paintbox with paint, brushes, palette, palette knife, oil, turpentine - in short, everything necessary. So it is now settled that I shall begin to paint, and I am glad things have gone so far.

Well, I have been drawing a good deal recently, especially studies of the figure. If you saw them now, you would see in what direction I am going. Of course, I am now longing to hear what Mauve will have to say. The other day I made some drawings of children, too, and liked it very much.

These are days of great beauty in tone and colour; after I have made some progress in painting, I will succeed in expressing a little of it. But we must stick to the point, and now that I have begun drawing the figure, I will continue it until I am more advanced; and when I work in the open air, it is to make studies of trees, viewing the trees like real figures. I mean especially with a view to the outline, the proportion and the construction - that is the first thing one has to consider. Then comes the modelling and the colour and the surroundings, and it is about these that I need Mauve's advice.

But, Theo, I am so very happy with my paintbox, and I think my getting it now, after having drawn almost exclusively for at least a year, better than if I had started with it immediately. I think you will agree with me in this.

Now in my last letter I forgot to tell you that I think it's fine that you are going to London. I should not like you to go and stay there, but it is a good thing to become acquainted with it.

In the long run I do not think you would like it there, at least it becomes clearer and clearer to me that I never felt in my element there. Here in Holland I feel much more at home, yes, I think I shall again become a thorough Dutchman, and don't you think that's most reasonable, after all? I think I shall become quite a thorough Dutchman again, in character as well as in my drawing and painting style. But I think that my having been abroad for some time and my having seen a few things there which it is not superfluous to know will prove useful to me. When you get to London, I wish you would give my best regards to my old friends, George Read and Richardson.

I met Mr. Obach at The Hague this summer.

George Read is, if you like, a very ordinary man, in that he is not superior either in business or in knowledge; but if one knows him somewhat intimately, as a man and a personality, there is none more faithful, more kind-hearted, more sensitive than he. He is so humorous and so witty, and so smart in everyday things, that he is quite a valuable friend in that respect. If I might choose whom I should most like to see again of all my acquaintances in England, it would certainly be George Read. Therefore, if you would do me a favour, you must be sure to look him up and tell him that I hope we will renew our former acquaintance, and that I will write to him someday.

But I will do so only after you have seen him and after I have started painting.

For, Theo, with painting my real career begins. Don't you think I am right to consider it so?

And now adieu, a handshake in thought, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 29 December 1881

Thursday evening
Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and the enclosed. I was in Etten again when I received it; as I told you, I had arranged this with Mauve. But now you see I am back again in The Hague. On Christmas Day I had a violent scene with Father, and it went so far that Father told me I had better leave the house. Well, he said it so decidedly that I actually left the same day.

The real reason was that I did not go to church, and also that if going to church was compulsory and if I was *forced* to go, I certainly should never go again out of courtesy, as I had done rather regularly all the time I was in Etten. But oh, in truth there was much more at the back of it all, including the whole story of what happened this summer between Kee and me.

I do not remember ever having been in such a rage in my life. I frankly said that I thought their whole system of religion horrible, and just because I had gone too deeply into those questions during a miserable period in my life, I did not want to think of them any more, and must keep clear of them as of something fatal.

Was I *too* angry, *too* violent? Maybe - but even so, it is settled now, once and for all.

I went back to Mauve and said, “Listen, Mauve, I cannot stay in Etten any longer, and I must go and live somewhere else, preferably here.”

Well, Mauve said, “Then stay.”

And so I have rented a studio here, that is, a room and an alcove which can be arranged for the purpose, cheap enough, on the outskirts of the town, in Schenkweg, ten minutes from Mauve. Father said if I wanted money, he would lend it to me if necessary, but this is impossible now, I must be quite independent of Father. How? I do not know yet, but Mauve will help me if necessary, and I hope and believe you will too, and of course I will work and try as hard as I can to earn something.

I am in for it now, and the die is cast. At an inconvenient moment, but how can it be helped?

I must have some simple furniture, and besides, all my expenses for drawing and painting materials will increase.

I must also try to dress somewhat better.

It is a risky affair, a question of sink or swim. But someday I should have had to set myself up, so what shall I say? It has happened sooner than I expected. As to the relation between Father and me, that will not be redressed so very easily. The difference in our views and opinions is too great. It will be a hard pull for me; the tide rises high, almost to the lips, and perhaps higher still - how can I know? But I will fight my battle, and sell my life dearly, and try to win and get the best of it.

January 1 I shall move into the new studio. I will take the simplest furniture, a wooden table and a few chairs. I would be satisfied with a blanket on the floor instead of a bed. But Mauve wants me to get a bed, and will lend me the money if necessary.

As you can imagine, I have a great many cares and worries. But still it gives me a feeling of satisfaction to have gone *so* far that I cannot go back again; and though the path may be difficult, I now see it clearly before me.

Of course I must ask you, Theo, if you will occasionally send me what you can spare without inconveniencing yourself. And send it to me rather than give it to others, for if it is possible, we must not get Mauve mixed up in the financial affairs. His helping me with advice in art matters is already of such enormous value. But he insists on my buying, for instance, a bed and a few pieces of furniture. He says, I will lend you the money if necessary. And according to him I must dress somewhat better and not try to skimp too much.

I will soon write you at greater length. I *will not consider it a misfortune* that things have gone so far; on the contrary, notwithstanding all kinds of emotions, I feel a certain calm. There is safety in the midst of danger. What would life be if we hadn't courage to attempt anything?

I have been walking around everywhere to find that studio, in town as well as in Scheveningen. Scheveningen is terribly expensive. This studio costs only 7 guilders a month - it's the furniture that makes it so expensive. But once one has a house of one's own, it is a good possession and gives one a more solid footing. The light comes from the south, but the window is large and high, and I think the room will look very pleasant after a while. You can imagine that I feel quite animated. How will my work be a year from now? If I could only express what I feel! Well, Mauve understands all this, and he will give me as much technical advice as he can - the things which fill my head and my heart must be expressed in drawings or pictures.

Mauve himself is very busy with a large picture of a fishing smack drawn as far as the dunes by horses.

I think it delightful to be in The Hague, and I find so many beautiful things here, I must try to express something of it. Adieu, boy, a handshake in thought and write soon, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Kind regards from Mauve and Jet.

I have a little money left, but how long will it last? I must stay at the inn until January 1. Address your letters, A. Mauve, Uileboomen 198. I go there almost every day.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 30 December 1881

Dear Rappard,

I received your letter from Brussels. I do not like it at all, but no matter, for as you said yourself, you wrote it at a moment when you were somewhat abnormal. There is nothing, or hardly anything, in your letter that holds water. However, I am glad you are back from Brussels. In my opinion you do not belong there, and as for the “technical proficiency” you hope to acquire at the academy, I am much afraid your hopes will be deceived. Not even fellows like Stallaert can teach one.

Now I am busy with all kinds of work, for I have rented a small studio that I shall move into by January 1, so I have to arrange a lot of things.

When I have quieted down a bit later on, I shall write you again about all sorts of things in a calmer vein, but don't take it ill of me if at present I have more serious things to do than write letters.

Of course my letters don't pretend to be invariably right, always to explain things correctly - oh no, I am often mistaken. But when I tell you, Rappard, that those academic fellows you are making so much of aren't worth a cent - and when I say this, I mean Stallaert and Severdonk - I am in dead earnest, and I tell you, If I were you, I'd let them go. But I have already told you so several times, and I won't repeat it. I won't hear another syllable about the whole academy, nor will I say another syllable about it - it really isn't worth the trouble. Herewith I send you my greetings - what kind of fellows are those artists with whom you drank a glass of lambiek - why don't you mention the names of some of them? Are they fellows who might be important to you? I hope so, but I doubt it very much - goodbye, old fellow, I have no more time to spare, nor do I feel inclined to write a longer letter. When you are back in your studio, be sure to work regularly with models; it will give you more satisfaction in the long run.

Well, well - cheerio.

Vincent

In case you want to write me again, you can send your letters to Etten; they will send them on to me. I am wavering between two or three studios, and before January 1st I shall decide which one to take, but for the moment I have no fixed address; you will get it later on.

I left Etten because I had too much botheration with my father about all kinds of things that really are not worth while talking about - about going to church and such things, which, even though I was working hard and much, got me into a mood of boredom and chilliness that was all wrong. Therefore I have settled down here, and I am glad I am in different surroundings. Of course, now I have rather a lot of financial worries, but after all it is better than those everlasting bickerings and squabbles.

1882

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 1-2 January 1882

Dear brother,
I just send you my best wishes for the New Year. May it be a good year for you in every respect, and egotistically I add, for me too. Well, as for me it will perhaps please you to hear that I am installed in a studio of my own - a room with an alcove. The light is bright enough, for the window is large, twice as large as an ordinary window, but it faces the south.

The furniture I have taken is in the real "village policeman style," as you call it; but I think mine is more so than yours, although you invented the word. (I have, for instance, real kitchen chairs, and a real strong kitchen table.)

Mauve has lent me 100 guilders for rent and furniture, and to have the window and light adjusted. You can imagine that this is a load on my mind, but, well, it was the only possible way, because in the long run it is much cheaper to have things of your own than always to spend money for a so-called furnished room.

Well, I had a lot of trouble getting everything, and before I could arrange the furniture so as to make it do.

But now, boy, I have a real studio of my own, and I am so glad.

I did not dare hope that it would happen so soon, but now I am very glad, and I hope you also will approve of it.

Listen, you know that my expenses will be greater than in Etten, but I shall try to struggle along. Mauve gives me great hope that I shall soon begin to earn something. And now that I am in a studio of my own, this will not make an unfavourable impression on the persons who until now suspected me of amateurism, of idleness, of sponging on others. I hope you will be able to send me something these days. If I were greatly in need and asked Mauve, he would not refuse me, but I really think he has already done enough.

It happens that once in his life every man has to set up housekeeping, and though at first I greatly dreaded the feeling of being in debt, I feel after all it is better so.

We arranged that I shall work regularly from the model; it is the most expensive and yet the cheapest way in the end.

De Bock does not improve on further acquaintance; he rather lacks backbone, and he gets angry when one says some things which are only the ABC. He has some feeling for landscape, he knows how to put some charm into it (for instance, in a large picture which he is making now), but one gets no hold on him. It is too vague and insubstantial - du coton filé trop fin. His pictures are the shadow of an impression, and in my opinion that impression is hardly worth repeating so often.

I do not wish to associate much with other painters. Each day I find Mauve cleverer and more trustworthy, and what more can I want? However, Theo, I shall have to dress a little better now. I know now the direction in which I have to go, and need not hide myself, so I shall not avoid meeting other people - neither shall I seek them. Mauve and Jet send you their compliments.

Adieu, I sill have a lot to do, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5-6 January 1882

Dear brother,
Listen, Theo, what's the matter with you?
Didn't you receive my last letter, in which I told you what happened at home, and how in consequence I left the house and went back to The Hague and am now settled in my own studio: address Schenkweg No. 138 (near Rynspoor station).

You know Mauve helped me to get settled, but I still have a great many expenses, and for the last few days I really have not had a penny in my pocket. Of course I had counted positively on your sending me at least 100 frs. for the month of January.

But up to now I have not received anything, not even a letter from you. The worst is that I cannot work with a model until I have some money in my pocket again, so I can hardly do anything, as the weather is too bad to sit outside, though I tried it several times.

I am all right, but the last few days I have been faint with suspense. I have been looking for models, and found a few, but I cannot take them.

In desperation I went today to Goupil's, for according to what you wrote me I thought as a last resort I would ask Tersteeg to lend me something. But Tersteeg had just gone out of town for a few days.

I must put a good face on the matter when I'm with Mauve; Mauve has really done enough.

Tersteeg had promised to come to see me, but he has not been here yet. If for some reason or other you cannot send the 100 frs. at once, send me at least part of it by return mail.

I found a stamp in my pocket just now, otherwise I should not be able to send you this letter. It is a time of struggle for you and for me, but I think we are making progress. So let us keep courage. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Theo van Gogh/Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5-8 January 1882

[Letterhead Goupil & Cie., Paris. Letter from Theo to Vincent.]

[Vincent's handwriting] Please don't think I'm sending your letter back to offend you, I simply believe this is the quickest way of answering it clearly. And if you didn't have your own letter to hand, you might not be able to understand quite so well what my answer refers to. Now the numbers will guide you. I'm short of time, I'm still expecting a model today.

[Theo's handwriting]

Paris, 5 January 1882

My dear Vincent,

I have received your two letters and thank you for keeping me in the picture. I think it is a very good thing that you have settled permanently in The Hague and hope to do as much as I can to help you out until you can start earning your own money. But what I do not approve of is the way in which you contrived to leave Father and Mother, (1)

That you could not bear it there is possible and that you should differ in your views from people who have lived in the country all their lives and who have had no chance of participating in modern life, is only too natural, but what the devil made you so childish and so shameless as to embitter Father and Father's life and render it almost impossible by setting about things in the way you did? (2) It isn't hard to fight with someone who is already weary. (3)

When Father wrote to me about it, I thought it must be a misunderstanding, but you yourself say in your letter, “As far as the relationship between Father and me is concerned, it will not be remedied in a hurry.” (4) Don't you know him then, and don't you realize that Father cannot live while there is all this bickering between the two of you? (5) Coûte que coûte [at all costs], you *are in duty bound* to ensure that matters are put right and I guarantee that one day you will be extremely sorry for having been so callous in this matter. (6)

It is Mauve who attracts you at the moment, and, carried away as usual, you find anyone who is not like him objectionable, because you look for the same qualities in everybody. (7) Is it not a bitter pill for Father to swallow to see himself belittled by someone who claims to be more of a freethinker, (8) and whom, au fond [deep down], he possibly envies from time to time for his clearer insights? (9) Does his life count for nothing then? (10) I don't understand you.

(11) Write to me again when you can (12) and give my regards to Mauve and Jet.

Ever yours, Theo

[Vincent's handwriting]

7 or 8 January 1882

Because I have only a little time to spare, I can think of no better means of replying to your letter than by doing it in this way, answering your points one by one in orderly sequence.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 12-16 January 1882

Dear brother,

In my last letter I gave you, as I have before, a short and concise answer to some things; but for all that, you must not think that I am always in a freezing, unfriendly mood, which Mauve would perhaps call a yellow-soap or salt-water mood. Well, and even if I had written a yellow-soap or salt-water letter, that would not be worse than if I had taken things too sentimentally.

You say, “you will deeply regret it someday.” My dear boy, I think I have done much of that regretting before this. I saw it coming and tried to avoid it; well, I did not succeed, and bygones are bygones. Shall I continue to have regrets? No, I really haven't time for regret. Drawing becomes more and more a passion with me, and it is a passion just like that of a sailor for the sea. Mauve has now shown me a new way to make something, that is, how to paint watercolours. Well, I am quite absorbed in this now and sit daubing and washing it out again; in short, I *am* trying to find a way. “Puisqu'il faut faire des efforts de perdu. Puisque l'exécution d'une aquarelle a quelque chose de diabolique. Puisqu'il y a du bon en tout mouvement énergetique.” [Because one must make efforts like those of the lost souls. Because there is something diabolical about executing a watercolour. Because there is something good in every energetic motion.]

Although I intended to write you more explicitly about what happened at home and to try to explain things as they seemed to me, although I wanted to speak to you about some other subjects too, I have no time for it now, and I think it better to write you about drawing again. I started at once a few smaller watercolours and also a large one, at least almost as large as one of those figure studies which I made at Etten. Now of course it doesn't all succeed right away. Mauve himself says that I shall spoil at least ten drawings before I know how to handle the brush well. But behind it is a better future, so I work with as much composure as I can, and am not disheartened even by my mistakes.

This is a little sketch of one of the smaller watercolours; it is a corner of my studio with a little girl grinding coffee.

You see, I am seeking for tone, a head or little hand which has light and life in it, and which stands out against the drowsy dusk of the background, and then boldly against it all that part of the chimney and stove - iron and stone - and a wooden floor. If I could get the drawing as I want it, I would make three-fourths of it in a yellow-soap style, and would treat only the corner where the little girl sits tenderly, softly and with sentiment.

You understand that I cannot express everything as I feel it, but the problem is to attack the difficulties; the yellow-soap part is not yet yellow-soapy enough, and, on the other hand, the tenderness is not tender enough.

But at any rate I have hammered the sketch onto the paper, and the idea is expressed, and I think it a good one.

Of course, one cannot master the technique in a day.

This is the subject of the large drawing, but I made it in a hurry and the sketch is horrible.

They tell me somebody came to see me today, I think Mr. Tersteeg. I hope so, for he has promised to come and I should like to talk with him about a few things.

He said he would be back tomorrow morning.

Theo, I have great trouble with models: I hunt for them, and when I find them, it is hard to get them to come to the studio; often they do not come at all. For instance, this morning a blacksmith's boy could not come because his father wanted me to pay a guilder an hour; of course I refused to do it. Tomorrow that old woman will sit for me again, but she could not come for three days.

When I go out, I often make sketches in the soup kitchens or in the third-class waiting room, and such places. But outside it is so deuced cold, especially for me, as I do not draw as quickly as the more advanced, and must finish my sketches in more detail if they are to be of any use.

So you see that I do not sit idle, and for the present I think no more about Etten, but try to get rooted here. Of course the models cost a lot of money, and I must tell you that I also spend what is necessary for myself, though living as cheaply as possible. (I take my meals in the soup kitchen.) Yet I hope you will not object to my going on.

But I repeat what I already said in my last letter, let me know as nearly as possible what I can expect; and I wish you could make some arrangement with Mr. Tersteeg, so that in case of difficulties, I can go to him without any scruples. For my part, I promise you to work as hard as I can; but with models, for instance, whether I can work *full speed, half speed, or not at all* often depends on the money I have or haven't got in my pocket. So now I am making arrangements with a mother and her baby, but I am afraid it will be too expensive. Of course you understand that I like best to go full speed, but…well, you know what I mean. I must hold myself in until I have a little more scope and freedom.

Write me soon, and do send me the money for February as early as possible, for I am quite sure I shall not have a cent left by that time. Meanwhile I intend to go on making those little pen drawings, but in a style different from that of last summer's large one. Somewhat more fiercely and savagely.

This is a little sketch of the Schenkweg, the view from my window.

Well, adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 21 January 1882

Dear Theo,
Now that another week has passed, I am writing you again.
I have had a model regularly, every day from morning until evening, and the model is good.

Mauve has been to see me and Mr. Tersteeg also, and I am very glad of it. I have been working all the time now in watercolour, and I am getting to like it more and more.

How I wish you were here, I have so many things to ask and tell you. Do you think you will come in the spring? Will you know some time in advance?

What I have done now is far from good, but it is different and has more power and freshness, and is without body colour.

Now, I hope you will write me soon, and especially that we shall try to make some arrangement about the money. For though 100 fr. a month would be sufficient for my own expenses, it is quite a different matter when I have to pay models daily and must feed them, etc., *etc.* And then the expenses of paint, paper, *etc.* I told you in my last letter that whether I can work at full speed or half speed depends on my income.

Now that I am settled here, small expenses spring up afresh every day, which do not make life easy for me at all. However, I have worked on regularly for some time, but now I am without a cent.

It is only natural that when one settles somewhere, there are all kinds of expenses.

But in spite of this I am making progress and I shall learn to make watercolours, and then it will not be so very long before my work becomes saleable.

Mr. Tersteeg himself said something about it, and if some of those smaller ones turn out well, he will probably buy some. And I have completed still further the drawing of the little old woman which I sent you a sketch of, and someday it will surely sell.

Believe me, I work, I drudge, I grind all day long, and I do so with pleasure; but I should get very discouraged if I could not go on working as hard or even harder. If you write to Mr. Tersteeg about it, he will certainly credit you for an amount which you yourself fix, and he can control its expenditure if he does not trust me. But it would be terrible if I couldn't go on working the way I have these last three weeks.

As to the size of the drawings or the subjects, I will readily listen to Mr. Tersteeg's and Mauve's suggestions. I undertook some large ones recently because I wanted by all means to get rid of the dryness in last summer's studies. And now Mauve said to me last night, though of course he found some things to criticize, “It is beginning to look like a watercolour.” Well, if I gain that much, I suppose I've wasted neither time nor money. And now that I've tried the use of the brush and the strength of the colours on a large scale, I can again risk some smaller ones. For that matter, I started two small ones, but as I did not get on with them and partly washed them out again, I started a very large one, which I'm sending you a sketch of.

So I have enough work for the week that begins tomorrow, but I'm afraid I haven't enough money, for 2.50 guilders and a few cents is all I have left. What should I do now? If I go and ask Mauve or Mr. Tersteeg, I do not think either would refuse me. But Mauve has already done so much, and I would rather sell a few small drawings to Mr. Tersteeg than borrow money from him. So answer me soon, and if possible do something, send me some money so that I can go on working. I feel, Theo, that there is a power in me, and I do what I can to bring it out and free it. All the worry and troubling over my drawings is hard enough, and if I had too many other cares and could not pay the models, I should lose my head. It is bad enough that you have to pay for everything, but things are not so bad as they were last winter. I feel that I am nearer success. I shall do what I can, I shall work hard, and as soon as I have more power over my brush, I shall work even harder than I do now. And if we push on energetically now, it will not be long before you need not send me money any more.

Well, boy, do what you can, and I shall also do what I can. Adieu. I count on your writing soon; you need not send so much at a time if only I can go on from week to week.

Receive a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

[Sketch of a Scheveningen Woman Sewing enclosed.]

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 22 January 1882

Sunday evening Schenkweg 138 (near Ryn station)
Dear Theo,
It is true I wrote you only yesterday, but I thought I would write you again. For though I still have a dose of courage left, it is sometimes very hard always to show a good face to Mauve and Tersteeg and others. Yet I must, for though I do not pretend to be carefree, I need not tell them all the details and particulars. But it happens often enough that I am quite at a loss as to what to do. Now this morning I felt so miserable that I went to bed; I had a headache and was feverish from worry because I dread this week so much, and do not know how to get through it. And then I got up, but went back to bed again; now I feel a little better, but I wanted you to know that I did not exaggerate in yesterday's letter. If only I continue working hard, it will not be long before I earn something with my work; but meanwhile I am greatly harassed by scarcity of funds. Besides, I still have relatively few drawing materials, or else defective ones. For the present it is sufficient - I have my paintbox and easel and brushes; but, for instance, this week my drawing board warped like a barrel because it was too thin, and my easel also got damaged in delivery, which is bad enough.

Well, there are a lot of things which I still want to or have to improve; of course it needn't all be done at once, but daily it causes small expenses which, added together, worry me a great deal. Sometimes my clothes need repairing, and Mauve has already given me a few hints about that too, which I shall certainly carry out; but it cannot all be done at once. You know my clothes are chiefly old things of yours which have been altered for me, or a few have been bought ready-made and are of poor material. So they look shabby, and especially all my dabbling in paint makes keeping them decent even more difficult; it is the same with boots. My underwear is also beginning to fall apart. You know that I have been without means for a long time already, and then many things get dilapidated.

And sometimes one involuntarily becomes terribly depressed, if only for a moment, often just when one is feeling cheerful, as I really am even now. That's what happened this morning; these are evil hours when one feels quite helpless and faint with overexertion. I think it was really because I had arranged with Mauve about what I would do with a model out-of-doors, and then all at once I thought, Perhaps I cannot do it because in two days I shall not have a cent left, and than Mauve will think I was afraid. So I got up again to write you once more because I felt so anxious. Having to think about too many other things against my will hampers me so much in my work; even when I am in front of my model, I do not know how I shall pay him or whether I shall be able to go on the next day or not. And I must, I must be calm and quiet in order to work - it is difficult enough anyhow. And especially now I must keep up my spirits; but I felt so clearly this morning that my strength was failing me, not my ardour or my courage, and therefore I'm telling you once more.

I can quite imagine that you also have your difficulties, but I think some arrangement might be made with Tersteeg which would settle everything.

Now that I can work at Pulchri with a model two evenings a week, perhaps four days with the model would be enough if necessary; and now I have found that old woman, it needn't be so expensive as it was at first when I had a new one every day. For I have already had several models, but they are either too expensive or they think it's too far to come here, or they make objections afterward and do not come back. But I think I have hit on the right one in this old woman.

Yesterday I had a lesson from Mauve on drawing hands and faces so as to keep the colour transparent. Mauve knows things so thoroughly, and when he tells you something, he exerts himself and doesn't just say it to hear himself talk; and I exert myself to listen carefully and to put it into practice. Yesterday I told Mauve again that it was so necessary for me to earn something, but I will not ask him for money, as he gives me something that is much better than money; and besides, he has already helped me with my furniture, and that is more than enough.

Now that I have written you, I will set to work again tomorrow full of confidence. When you were in Etten last summer, you spoke about my working in watercolours. At that point I didn't even know how to start it. Now the light is beginning to dawn, and in spite of everything, the sun is rising.

Well, adieu, Theo, receive a handshake in thought and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 26 January 1882

Schenkweg 138, Thursday
Dear Theo,
I received your letter with the enclosed 100 fr., and thank you very much for both. What I had already feared when I wrote you last has really happened, meaning that I have not been well, and have been in bed for almost three days with fever and nervousness, now and then accompanied by headache and toothache. It is a miserable condition and is caused by overexertion. Mauve has again been to see me, and once more we agreed to keep up courage through all.

But I am so angry with myself now because I cannot do what I should like to do, and at such a moment one feels as if one were lying bound hand and foot a the bottom of a deep, dark well, utterly helpless. Now I have recovered enough so that I got up again last night and rummaged around, straightening things. When the model came of her own accord this morning, though I only half expected her, I put her into the right pose with Mauve's help and tried to draw a little; but I could not do it, and I felt miserable and weak the whole evening. But if I rest a few more days, it will be over, and I need not be afraid of its coming back soon if I am careful.

I am very sorry to hear that you don't feel well either. When I was in Brussels last winter, I also took a bath at the bathing establishment as often as I could, two or three times a week; and as it did me a lot of good, I will do it here too. No doubt if you keep it up for some time, it will help you a great deal, because it keeps the blood circulating well and the pores of the skin open; that way the skin can fulfill its function - otherwise it would shrivel up, especially in winter.

And I tell you frankly that in my opinion one must not hesitate to go to a prostitute occasionally if there is one you can trust and feel something for, as there really are many. For one who has a strenuous life it is necessary, absolutely necessary, in order to keep sane and well. One must not exaggerate such things and fall into excesses, but nature has fixed laws which it is fatal to struggle against. Well, you yourself know all you have to know on that subject. It would be well for you, it would be well for me, if we were married - but what can we do?

I'm sending you a little drawing, but you must not conclude that they are all like that; this has been washed in quickly and thinly, but this does not always succeed with the larger ones, indeed, it seldom does. It will perhaps show you that it is not a hopeless business and that I have learned the knack of making them.

The last time Mauve was here, he asked me again if I needed money. I was then able to say I did not want it, but you see, in case of need, he would be willing to do something. And so though there will be some difficulties now and then, I hope we can manage to struggle through. Especially if Mr. Tersteeg would be so kind as to give me some credit in case you're unable to send me money, and when it is absolutely necessary.

You speak of *fair promises* - with me it is more or less the same. Mauve says it will be all right; but for all that, the watercolours I make are not quite saleable. Now I have some hope myself, and I will work hard on them, but it is often hopeless enough, for when I try to work them up, they become too heavy. It's exasperating, for it's no small difficulty. And experiments with watercolours are rather expensive - paper, paint, brushes, model, and time, and whatnot.

But even so, I think the most economical way is to keep going without losing time.

For this bad time *must* be lived through.

I must try to forget some things I taught myself, and learn to look at things in quite a different way.

It takes a lot of effort before one has a steady eye for the proportion of things.

It is not always easy for me to get on with Mauve or vice versa, because I think we are equally nervous; and it costs him a real effort to show me things, and no less for me to understand them and try to put them into practice.

But I think we are both beginning to understand each other better and the feeling is becoming somewhat deeper than superficial sympathy. He is very busy with his large picture, which was at one time intended for the Salon; it is a splendid thing. And he is also busy with a winter landscape. And some fine drawings.

I think he gives each picture and each drawing some small part of his life. A times he is tired to death, and recently he said, “I do not seem to get any stronger”; and whoever had seen him at that moment would not soon forget the expression on his face.

When my drawings become heavy, thick, muddy, black and dull, Mauve comforts me by saying, “If your work were transparent *now*, it would only possess a certain chic, and it would probably become heavy later on. Now you are pegging away at it and it becomes heavy, but later it will go quickly and become light.” I have no objections if this is true. And you can see it now from the little one I am sending: it was started and finished in a quarter of an hour, but only after I had made a larger one which had become too heavy. And just because I had worked so hard on that large one, when the model accidentally resumed the pose, I was able to sketch this little one on a bit of paper that was left from a sheet of Whatman. This model is a beautiful girl - she is the model for Artz and many others - but she wants 1.50 guilders a day, and that is too expensive for me just now. So I try to manage with my little old woman.

I think the success or failure of a drawing also depends greatly on the mood and the condition of the painter. Therefore I try to do what I can to keep cheerful and clear-headed. But sometimes, like now, a heavy depression comes over me, and then it's hell.

The only thing to do then is to go on with the work; for Mauve and Israëls and so many others who are examples to the rest of us know how to profit from every mood.

Well, I have some hope that as soon as I am quite well again, things will go better than they are now. If I have to rest awhile, I shall, but probably it will soon be over. In general, I do not feel so strong as a few years ago; then I never had to stay in bed a day, but now there is always something the matter with me, although nothing serious.

Well, my youth is gone - not my love of life or my energy, but I mean the time when one feels so lighthearted and carefree. I really say, So much the better, now there are much better things, after all.

Keep heart, boy, I think it rather mean and cheap of Messrs. Goupil & Co. to refuse you when you wanted to draw some money. You certainly don't deserve such stinginess, for you have pulled many of their chestnuts out of the fire, and do not spare yourself. So you deserve to be treated with some consideration.

A handshake in thought, I hope soon to have better news to tell you than I have had lately, but you must forgive me, I feel rotten. Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 13 February 1882

Dear Theo,
This morning when I wrote you I was still in doubt about something that worried me exceedingly, but about which I am now reassured for a time. I must tell you some bad news, which is that Mauve is far from well - of course the usual thing.

But also some good news - I have the assurance that it is only due to his illness that he has treated me so very unkindly of late, and that it was not because he thought my work was going wrong.

I have already told you in a previous letter that I had a visit from Weissenbruch. At present Weissenbruch is the only one allowed to see Mauve, and I thought I would go and have a talk with him. So today I went to his studio, the attic which you know too. As soon as he saw me, he began to laugh and said, “I am sure you have come to talk about Mauve”; he knew at once why I came, and I did not have to explain.

Then he told me that the reason for his visiting me was really that Mauve, who was doubtful about me, had sent Weissenbruch to get his opinion about my work.

And Weissenbruch then told Mauve, He draws confoundedly well, I could work from his studies myself.

And he added, “They call me `the merciless sword,' and I am; I would not have said that to Mauve if I had found no good in your studies.”

Now as long as Mauve is ill or too busy with his large picture, I may go to Weissenbruch if I want to find out anything, and Weissenbruch told me that I need not worry about the change in Mauve's attitude toward me.

Then I asked Weissenbruch what he thought of my pen drawings. “These are the best,” he said.

I told him that Tersteeg had scolded me about them. “Pay no attention to it,” he said. “When Mauve said you were a born painter, Tersteeg said No, and I will take your part too, now that I have seen your work.”

I do not care so much about that “taking my part,” but I must say that sometimes I cannot bear Tersteeg's saying to me over and over again, “You must begin to think about earning your own living.” I think it is such a dreadful expression, and then it is all I can do to keep calm. I work as hard as I can and do not spare myself, so I deserve my bread, and they ought not to reproach me with not having been able to sell anything up to now.

I tell you these details because I do not understand why you have neither written nor sent me anything this month.

Is it possible that you have heard something from Tersteeg that has influenced you?

I can assure you once more that I work hard to make progress on things which would be easy to sell, that is, watercolours, but I cannot succeed immediately. If I succeed in making them by and by, it would still be rapid progress, considering the short time I have been working. But I cannot succeed right away. As soon as Mauve is better and comes to see me again or I go to see him, he will give me some useful hints on the studies I am making meanwhile. Lately Mauve has done very little for me, and once he himself said, I am not always in a mood to show you things; sometimes I am too tired, and then you will damn well have to wait for the right moment.

I think it a great privilege to visit such clever people as Weissenbruch occasionally, especially when they take the trouble, as Weissenbruch did this morning, for instance, to show me a drawing they are working on but which is not yet completed, and explain how they are going to finish it. That is just what I want. Whenever you have an opportunity to see anyone paint or draw, watch carefully, for I think many an art dealer would judge many pictures differently if he knew how they were made. It is true one can understand it somehow by instinct, but this much I know - I got a clearer insight into many things by having seen artists at work and by trying some things myself.

I should like to have some more of that Ingres paper someday; perhaps the weather will soon be good enough to work outdoors, and then it will be of great use to me. I am getting more sparing with my studies and should like to get back those you have.

Adieu, dear fellow, a handshake in thought; poor Mauve, he will not get better until his large picture is finished, and after that he will be exhausted.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 13 February 1882

Dear Theo,
Though I have been expecting a letter from you every day, I am writing you once more.
I heard some news of you from Mr. Tersteeg when he came back from Paris. He told me that you were all right, and he seemed quite satisfied with his trip. When I went to see him, I took a few drawings with me; he said they were better than the others, and told me to make some more small ones. I am busy with them now.

I also made a new pen drawing of an old woman knitting. And I think this one is better than last summer's, at least it has more tone. When I have finished a few pen drawings which are well done, I think I know a purchaser for them.

A few days ago I also wrote C. M. to tell him that I have taken a studio here, and that I hoped he would let me know whenever he came to The Hague and that he would come to see me. Last summer Uncle Cent also told me that whenever I had finished a drawing somewhat smaller than those I was doing and more watercolours, I must send them to him and he would buy them. Perhaps the time is really not far off when I shall earn some money with my work; I need to very much, for no other reason than to go on working seriously.

You must tell me if you can find out what kind of drawings the magazines would take. I think they could use pen drawings of types from the people, and I should like so much to make something that is fit for reproduction; I do not think that all the drawings are made directly on the blocks - there must be some means of getting a facsimile on the block. But I do not know exactly what process is used. Sometimes I long so much to see you and have a talk with you. Will it be long before you can come to Holland? I think that Father rather expected you on his birthday.

I was very glad that Mr. Tersteeg thought the drawings somewhat better. Well, I am getting more used to my model, and for that very reason I must continue with her. In the last two studies I grasped the character much better - everyone who saw them told me so.

At present I sometimes go out drawing with Breitner, a young painter who is acquainted with Rochussen the same way I am with Mauve. He draws very well, and in quite a different style from mine, and we often make sketches together in the soup kitchen or in the waiting room, *etc.* now and then he comes to my studio to see wood engravings, and I go to see him too. He has the studio that Apol used to have at Siebenhaar's.

Last week I went to a small art show at Pulchri, where I saw sketches by Bosboom and Henkes. Very fine; Henkes had much larger figures than one usually sees from him. He ought to do more of them, I think. Weissenbruch has also been to see me.

Every day I look for a letter from you, for I hope that you will send me some money soon. We must keep on and persevere, brother, you as well as I, and someday we shall reap the fruit of it.

I am so glad I have worked on the figure up to now. If I had done only landscapes, yes, then I should probably do something that would sell at a small price now, but then later I would be stranded. The figure takes more time and is more complicated, but I think that in the long run it is more worthwhile.

De Bock came to see me this afternoon, just as I was working with my model. When he saw her, he said he would also like to draw from the figure; but for all that, he doesn't do it. But he made a very beautiful drawing recently.

In your last letter you told me something about the question of your not being able to draw an advance before the inventory was made. But if you cannot get the money, then be so kind as to write at once to Mr. Tersteeg about it, for I have only about 3 guilders left, and it is nearly the middle of February already.

At all events, I expect a letter from you one of these days.

I think that in my last drawings the proportions are much better than before, which has been the worst fault in my drawings up to now; thank God it is changing, and then I shall not fear anything.

Adieu, Theo, write soon, a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 18 February 1882

Dear Theo,

It is now February 18 and I have not heard anything from you this month. I thought you might perhaps be ill, because in your last letter you mentioned not feeling well. But Mr. Tersteeg told me that you were better, at least he was not aware of your being ill.

As you can imagine, I am very hard pressed for money. Mr. Tersteeg bought a small drawing from me for 10 guilders, with which I managed this week. But he wants them small and only in watercolour, and I do not always succeed in that. But at least the first sheep has crossed the bridge. I work as much as I can, but don't forget that I shall break down if I have too many cares and anxieties.

So write by return mail, send me some money if you can, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

This week I made three other studies beside the one Mr. Tersteeg bought; the technique is not perfect yet, but, thank God, the drawing is better.

I am very glad that I feel my drawing is improving, it gives me courage. Drawing is the principal thing, whatever they may say, and it is the most difficult too. It is for this reason that I venture to say I shall make something saleable within a year. For the one Mr. Tersteeg bought does not count - I shall make them much better when I have made more progress in drawing, as then it will come more easily to me.

Adieu, boy, do write soon!

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 25 February 1882

Dear Theo,
I received your last letter with the 100 fr. enclosed in good order, and thank you very warmly for sending it.

I should have acknowledged it at once, but I was very busy with a few drawings, for which I had a model.

For you should bear in mind that if you are busy, it is the same with me, and will be increasingly so because my work is becoming more and more absorbing to me, and it is only with effort that I tear myself away from it to write a letter or call on someone when necessary.

I was very glad that you wrote that you would soon come to Holland. After you have seen what I have been doing lately, we shall perhaps get a clearer understanding of the future. When you come, I hope we shall spend some quiet time in the studio, and I also hope you will let me know beforehand so that I can arrange things with my model, and not have her during the days of your visit.

You write about Father's birthday. I must tell you that I am so glad to be free of it all, it gives me such a feeling of tranquillity, something I need so much for my work. My head cannot hold more than it does, and I dread beginning a new correspondence so much that for the present I am leaving things as they are. When I think of Etten it gives me the shudders, as if I were in church. Well, qu'y faire, and once more qu'y faire?

By the way, you must not take it amiss, Theo, or think I'm finding fault with you, but you wrote me something which you thought would perhaps please me, but it didn't please me at all. You said that small watercolour was the best of mine that you had seen - well, it isn't, because those studies of mine which you have are much better, and last summer's pen drawings are better too. That little drawing is of no importance whatever, I only sent it to show you that it is not impossible that I may work in watercolour sometime. But there is much more serious study and more character in those other things, though they may look rather yellow-soapy. And if I had anything against Mr. Tersteeg (but I have nothing against him), it would be the same thing, which is that he encourages me not in the difficult study from the model, but rather in a style of work which really is only half fit to render what I want to express, according to my own character and my own temperament.

Of course I should be very happy to sell a drawing, but I am happier still when a real artist like Weissenbruch says about an unsaleable??? study or drawing, “That is true to nature, I could work from it myself.” although money is of great value to me, especially now, the principal thing is for me to make something serious.

Well, the same thing that Weissenbruch said about a landscape, a peat bog, Mauve said about the figure, i.e., an old peasant who sits brooding by the hearth, as if he saw things from the past rising in the glow of the fire or in the smoke.

It may take a longer or a shorter time, but the surest way is to penetrate deep into nature. “Il reste à être vrai,” Gavarni says. One may be in pecuniary difficulties for some time; but one gets over that, and then the drawings that were refused at first are sold.

I have written C. M. to tell him that I have taken a studio here, and he wrote back that he will be coming to The Hague soon, and will visit me then. The other day I received greetings from my old friend Wisselingh in London; he promised to come too, and he was glad that I was working.

Well, I hope you will succeed in getting a vacation, for I long very much to see you. I think when you have seen these last weeks' studies, you will quite approve of my having models regularly. Of course I can draw the models better when I have come to know them well. And I have had rather good luck in finding them.

Today while I am writing you I have a child who has to rest for half an hour, and I'm using the half hour for this letter.

Once more thanks for what you sent me and a handshake in thought. Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

P.S. I have made two more studies of the child today. It is getting dark now. Good night.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3 March 1882

My dear Theo,
Since I received your letter and the money, I have had a model every day and am now up to my ears in work.
I've a new model now, though I had done a hasty drawing of her once before. Or rather, there is more than one model, for I have already had 3 individuals from the same family, a woman of about 45 who is just like a figure by Ed. Frère, and her daughter, about 30, and a younger child of 10 or 12. They are poor people and, I must say, splendidly willing. I only managed to get them to agree to pose with some difficulty and on condition that I promise them regular work. Well, that was exactly what I wanted so badly myself, so I consider the deal a good one.

The younger woman's face isn't beautiful, because she has had smallpox, but the figure is very graceful and I find it rather charming. They have the right clothes, too, black merino and a nice style in bonnets and a beautiful shawl, *etc.*

You needn't worry too much about the money because I reached an agreement with them at the beginning. I promised that I would give them a guilder a day as soon as I sold something. And that I shall make up then for paying too little now.

But I simply must sell something. If I could afford to, I would keep everything that I am doing now for myself, since if I could just keep it for a year, I feel sure I would get more for it.

But anyway, in the circumstances I should find it very gratifying if Mr. Tersteeg did take something now and then, if necessary on condition that it will be exchanged if it isn't sold. Mr. Tersteeg has promised to come round to see me as soon as he can find the time.

The reason I should like to keep them is simply this. When I draw individual figures, it is always with a view to a composition with more figures, for instance a 3rd-class waiting room, or a pawnshop, or an interior. But the larger compositions must mature gradually, and for a drawing with, let's say, 3 seamstresses, one might have to draw 90 seamstresses. Voilà l'affaire. [There you have it.]

I have had a kind note from C. M. with a promise that he will be coming to The Hague soon and visit me then. Well, it's just another promise, but perhaps something will come of it. We'll see.

For the rest I'm going to run after people less and less, dealers or painters, it doesn't matter who they are. The only people I shall run after will be models, since I'm sure that working without a model is quite wrong, at least for me.

It's gratifying, isn't it, Theo, when there's a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel, and I'm seeing a little bit of light now. It's gratifying to draw a human being, something alive - it may be damned difficult, but it's wonderful anyway.

Tomorrow I shall be giving a children's party, two children whom I have to entertain and draw at the same time. I want there to be some life in my studio and already have all sorts of acquaintances in the neighbourhood. On Sunday I am having a boy from the orphanage, a real type, but unfortunately I can only get him for a short time.

It may be true that I don't have the knack of getting on with people who are sticklers for etiquette, but on the other hand perhaps I get on better with poor or common folk, and what I lose on the one hand I gain on the other. Sometimes I just leave it at that and think: after all, it's right and proper that I should live like an artist in the surroundings I'm sensitive to and am trying to express. Honni soit qui mal y pense.

Here we are at the beginning of another month, and although it's not yet a month since you sent me something, I would ask you to be kind enough to send me some more soon, if you can. It doesn't have to be 100 frs. all at once, but just a little to be going on with between now and when you can send the rest. I mention this because you said in a previous letter that you wouldn't be able to raise any money until after stocktaking.

It grieves me sometimes when I realize I'm going to have to keep a model waiting, because they need it so badly. So far I have been paying them, but next week I shan't be able to. But I'll be able to get a model anyway, either the old woman or the younger one or the child.

Incidentally, Breitner mentioned you to me the other day, saying there was something he was very sorry for and which he thought you might still be cross about. Apparently, he still has a drawing that belongs to you, but I didn't understand exactly what it was all about. He is at work on a large affair, a market that will be full of figures. Last night I went out with him to look for different types of figures on the street so as to do a study of them later with a model in the studio. I've drawn an old woman in this way whom I saw on the Geest, where the madhouse is.

Well, bonsoir, I hope to hear from you soon,

Ever yours, Vincent

I had to pay the rent too this week. Good-night, it's two o'clock already and I haven't finished yet.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5-9 March 1882

Dear Theo,
In your letter of February 18 you said, “When Tersteeg was here, we of course spoke about you and he told me that whenever you wanted anything, you could always go to him.”
Then why is it that when I asked Tersteeg some days ago for 10 guilders, he gave them to me, but accompanied by so many reproaches - I might almost say insults - that I could hardly control myself, though I did. I would have thrown the 10 guilders in his face if the money had been for myself, but I had to pay the model, a poor sick woman whom I cannot keep waiting. So I kept quiet. But for six months I will not go to Tersteeg again, or speak to him or show him my work.

I'm not going to say that to him, but I'm saying it to you.

Dear Theo, you may say, “You must remain on good terms with Tersteeg, he is almost like an elder brother to us.” But my dear fellow, he may be kind to you, but for years he has only shown his unfriendly and harsh side to me.

He would have the right to reproach me if I did not work, but it is unjust to someone who toils patiently, hard, and continuously on a difficult work, to make reproaches like this:

“Of one thing I am sure, you are no artist.”

“One objection which has great weight with me is that you started too late.”

“You must earn your own living.”

Then I say, “Stop, watch what you say.”

One cannot always be friends, one must quarrel sometimes. As to the arrangement between you and me about receiving money from you, when you come to The Hague, which I hope will be soon, I want to speak about that with you in Mauve's presence and with nobody else. Mauve's large picture will soon be finished, and then I suppose Mauve will give me some hints about watercolours again.

The substance of what Mauve has said up to now is, “Vincent, when you draw, you are a painter.”

And therefore I have worked, and worked hard, on drawing, on proportion, on perspective, for weeks and weeks; Tersteeg doesn't fully appreciate this and only talks about “things that don't sell.”

I do not deserve his reproaches, but I will be calm because I certainly do respect him; therefore I say, After six months we shall speak to each other again, for six months we shall not see each other.

If you can, send me the money for this month soon. I am making progress with my work, but cannot work without money or with too little.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I would rather go without dinner for six months and save in that way than occasionally receive 10 guilders from Tersteeg accompanied by his reproaches.

I should like to know what painters would say to his argument, “Work less from the model because it is cheaper,” when after a long search one has found models who are not too expensive.

Working without a model is the ruin of a painter of the figure.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 11 March 1882

Dear Theo,

You will have received my letters, I now answer yours, which came this afternoon. According to your wish I immediately sent Tersteeg the 10 guilders I had borrowed from him this week.

I wrote you about C. M.'s order - it happened this way. C. M. seems to have spoken with Tersteeg before he came to see me, at least he began by saying the same things about “earning my bread.” My reply came on the spur of the moment, quick, and I believe this is exactly what I said, “Earn bread - how do you mean? Earn bread, or deserve bread? Not to deserve one's bread - that is, to be unworthy of it - is certainly a crime, for every honest man is worthy of his bread; but unluckily, not being able to earn it, though deserving it, is a misfortune, and a great misfortune. So if you say to me, “You are unworthy of your bread,” you insult me. But if you make the rather just remark that I do not always earn it - for sometimes I have none - well, that may be true, but what's the use of making the remark? It does not get me any further if that's all you say.”

So then C. M. didn't talk about “earning bread” any more.

However, the thunderstorm threatened once more, for when by chance I mentioned De Groux's name in speaking about expression, C. M. said abruptly, “But do you not know that in private life De Groux has a bad reputation?”

As you can imagine, C. M. touched a delicate point there, and ventured on slippery ground. I could not stand to hear this said of honest father De Groux. So I replied, “It has always seemed to me that when an artist shows his work to the public, he has the right to keep the inner struggle of his own private life to himself (which is directly and inevitably connected with the peculiar difficulties involved in producing a work of art), unless he wants to confide them to a very intimate friend. I repeat, it is very improper for a critic to dig up a man's private life when his work is above reproach. De Groux is a master like Millet, like Gavarni.”

C. M. had certainly never considered Gavarni a master. (To any other but C. M. I would have expressed myself more briefly and strongly by saying, An artist's work and his private life are like a woman in childbirth and her baby. You may look at the child, but you may not lift her chemise to see if it is bloodstained. That would be very indelicate on the occasion of a post-partum visit.)

I had already begun to be afraid that C. M. would be angry, but luckily things took a better turn. To change the subject, I got out my portfolio with smaller studies and sketches. He did not say anything until we came to a little drawing which I once sketched at twelve o'clock at night while strolling around with Breitner, the Paddemoes (that Jewish quarter near the New Church) as seen from the Peat Market. Next morning I had worked on it again with my pen.

Jules Bakhuyzen had also looked at the little thing and immediately recognized the spot.

“Could you make some more of these views of the city?” asked C. M.

“Yes, I make them for a change sometimes when I am tired from working with the model - there is the Vleersteeg - the Geest - the Fish Market.”

“Then make twelve for me.”

“Yes,” said I, “but this is business, so we must fix a price at once. I have set the price for a small drawing of this size, either in pencil or pen, at 2.50 guilders - do you think that unreasonable?”

“No,” he said, “but if they turn out well, I will ask you to make twelve more of Amsterdam, and then I shall fix the price myself, so that you will get a little more for them.”

Well, I think that pretty successful for a visit which I more or less dreaded.

Seeing that we agreed, Theo, that I should tell you things spontaneously, in my own way, I describe those little scenes to you just as they happen. Particularly since in this way, though you are absent, you get a glimpse of my studio.

I long very much for your coming, because then I can speak more seriously with you, for instance, about what happened at home.

C. M.'s order is like a ray of hope to me.

I will do my best on these little drawings and try to put some character into them. At all events you will see them, and I think, boy, that there is more of that kind of business to be done. One can find buyers for small drawings at 5 fr. With some practice I can make one every day. And look here, if they turn out well, they will provide me with a crust of bread and a guilder for the model every day. Summertime with the long days is approaching; I make my “soup ticket” - meaning the bread and model drawing - either in the morning or in the evening, and in the daytime I study seriously from the model. C. M. is one buyer whom I found myself; perhaps you will succeed in finding a second, and perhaps Tersteeg, when he has got over his fit of reproaches, may find a third, and then we'll be in business.

Tomorrow morning I will go out to find a subject for C. M.'s drawings. This evening I was at Pulchri. Tableaux vivants and a kind of farce by Tony Offermans. I did not stay for the farce because I do not like them and I cannot stand the close air of a crowded hall, but I wanted to see the tableaux, especially as there was one after an etching which I had given to Mauve, “The Stable at Bethlehem” by Nicolaes Maes (the other was Rembrandt's “Isaac Blessing Jacob,” with a splendid Rebecca looking on to see if her trick will succeed). The Nicolaes Maes was very good in tone and colour, but the expression was not worth anything. The expression was decidedly wrong. Once I saw this in reality, not of course the birth of Christ, but the birth of a calf. And I remember exactly how the expression was. There was a little girl in the stable that night - in the Borinage - a little brown peasant girl with a white nightcap: she had tears of compassion in her eyes for the poor cow when the poor thing was in throes and was having great trouble. It was pure, holy, wonderful, beautiful, like a Correggio, a Millet, an Israëls. Oh, Theo, why don't you give up the whole thing and become a painter? You can if you want to, boy; I sometimes suspect you of concealing a famous landscape painter within yourself. Entre nous soit dit, I think you would draw birch trees wonderfully, and the furrows in the field or a field of stubble, and paint snow and the sky, *etc.* With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Say, Theo, won't you think about the idea that there is a famous landscape painter hidden inside you? We both must become painters, court et bon, we will earn our crust anyhow. For drawing the figure one must be more or less of a drudge or a beast of burden, more homme de peine. There's a long, long thought for you - old boy.

Theo, do not become materialistic like Tersteeg. The problem is, Theo, my brother, not to let yourself be bound, no matter by what, especially not by a golden chain.

Quoiqu'il en soit, to be an artist is sounder; the money difficulty especially is very bad, but I repeat, as a landscape painter you would overcome it sometime also. But if you once start, you are bound to overtake me, for figure drawing is more complicated, advances more slowly.

You understand I am completely serious.

Here follows a list of Dutch pictures intended for the Salon.

Israëls', “An Old Man” (if he were not a fisherman, it might be Thomas Carlyle, the author of the French Revolution and Oliver Cromwell, for he decidedly has a head characteristic of Carlyle) is sitting in a corner near the hearth, on which a small piece of peat is faintly glowing in the twilight. For it is a dark little cottage where that old man sits, an old cottage with a small white-curtained window. His dog, which has grown old with him, sits beside his chair - those two old friends look at each other, they look into each other's eyes, the dog and the man. And meanwhile the old man takes his tobacco pouch out of his pocket and lights his pipe in the twilight. That is all - the twilight, the silence, the loneliness of those two old friends, the man and the dog, the understanding between those two, the meditation of the old man - what he is thinking of, I do not know, I cannot tell, but it must be a deep, long thought, something, but I do not know what; it comes rising from a past long ago - perhaps that thought gives the expression to his face, an expression melancholy, contented, submissive, something that reminds one of Longfellow's famous poem with the refrain: But the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts. [Longfellow: "Lost Youth"]

I should like to see this picture by Israëls hanging beside "Death and the Woodcutter" by Millet. I certainly do not know a single picture except this Israëls which is the equal of Millet's "Death and the Woodcutter," or is worthy of being shown with it. And then I feel in my mind an irresistible longing to bring these two pictures together, so they can complete each other. I think what is wanting in this Israëls is Millet's "Death and the Woodcutter" hanging near it, one at one end, the other at the other end of a long, narrow gallery - with no other pictures in that gallery but these two, they and no others. It is a famous Israëls; I could not really see anything else, I was so struck by it.

And yet there was another Israëls, a small one, with five or six figures, I think, a peasant family at mealtime.

There is a Mauve, the large picture of the fishing smack drawn up to the dunes; it is a masterpiece.

I never heard a good sermon on resignation, nor can I imagine a good one, except that picture by Mauve and the work of Millet.

That is *the* resignation - the real kind, not that of the clergymen. Those nags, those poor, ill-treated old nags, black, white and brown; they are standing there, patient, submissive, willing, resigned and quiet. They have still to draw the heavy boat up the last bit of the way - the job is almost finished. Stop a moment. They are panting, they are covered with sweat, but they do not murmur, they do not protest, they do not complain, not about anything. They got over that long ago, years and years ago. They are resigned to living and working somewhat longer, but if they have to go to the knacker tomorrow, well, so be it, they are ready. I find such a mighty, deep, practical, silent philosophy in this picture - it seems to say, "Savoir souffrir sans se plaindre, ça c'est la seule chose practique, c'est là la grande science, la leçon à apprendre, la solution du problème de la vie." [Knowing how to suffer without complaining, that is the only practical thing, it is the great science, the lesson to learn, the solution of the problem of life.] I think this picture by Mauve would be one of the rare pictures before which Millet would remain standing a long time, and mutter to himself, “Il a du coeur ca peintre-là.”

There were some more pictures - I must tell you that I hardly looked at them - these two were enough for me.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 11 March 1882

Dear Theo,

Perhaps you will think what I wrote you about Tersteeg rather harsh. But I cannot take it back. He must be told straight out, or else it doesn't penetrate his armour. For years he has considered me a kind of incompetent dreamer; he still does; and even says of my drawing, “That is a kind of narcotic which you take in order not to feel the pain not being able to make watercolours causes you.”

Well, that's a very fine idea, but it is thoughtless, superficial and not to the point; the main reason for my not being able to make watercolours is that I must draw even more seriously, paying greater attention to proportions and perspective.

Enough of that. I don't deserve his reproaches, and if my drawings don't amuse him, then it doesn't amuse me to show them to him.

He condemns my drawings, which have a great deal of good in them, and I did not expect this of him.

If I make serious studies after the model, it is much more practical than his practical talks about what is saleable or unsaleable; I do not need so much instruction on that as he supposes, having been in the business of selling pictures and drawings myself. So I would rather lose his friendship than give in to him in this matter.

Though there are moments when I feel overwhelmed by care, I am still calm, and my calmness is founded on my serious method of work and on earnest reflection. Though I have moments of passion aggravated by my temperament, yet I am calm, as he who has been acquainted with me so long knows quite well. Even now he said to me, “You have too much patience.”

That's not right - in art one cannot have *too much* patience - it's out of all proportion. Perhaps in my case Mr. Tersteeg has *too little* patience.

He must see now, once and for all, that I take things seriously and will not let myself be forced to produce work that does not show my own character. My own character has begun to show especially in my last drawings and studies, which Tersteeg condemned.

Perhaps, perhaps I could succeed even now in making a watercolour that would sell if one tried very hard. But that would be forcing watercolours in a hothouse. Tersteeg and you must wait for the natural season, and that is not here yet.

He spoke English when he was here because of the model. I said to him, In due time you will have your watercolours, but not now - they are not due yet, take your time. And that is all I have to say. Enough of it.

Since Tersteeg's visit I made a drawing of a boy from the orphanage, blacking shoes. It may be this is done by a hand that does not quite obey my will, but still the boy's type is there. And though my hand may be unruly, that hand will learn to do what my head wishes. So I have made a sketch of the studio with the stove, the chimney, easel, footstool, table, etc., of course not quite saleable at present, but very useful for practicing perspective.

I am longing for your visit, there are so many things for you to see that I have made since you were here last summer. Theo, I count on your judging my work with sympathy and with confidence, and not with hesitation and dissatisfaction.

Because I work so much, Tersteeg thinks it is so easy; in that he is also quite wrong. For in fact I am a drudge or a plodding draft ox.

Do not forget the Ingres paper when you come. It is especially the *thick* kind that I like to use and which I think must also be good for studies in watercolour.

Believe me, in art matters the saying, “Honesty is the best policy,” is true; rather more trouble on a serious study than a kind of chic to flatter the public. Sometimes in moments of worry I have longed for some of that chic, but thinking it over I say, No, let me be true to myself, and express severe, rough but true things in a rough manner. I shall not run after the art lovers or dealers; let whoever wants to come to me. In due time we shall reap, if we faint not!

Say, Theo, what a big man Millet was! I borrowed Sensier's great work from De Bock; it interests me so much that I wake up at night and light the lamp and sit up to read. For I must work in the daytime.

Do send me some money soon, if possible. I wish Tersteeg had to live for a week on what I have to spend, and had to do what I have to do. Then he would see that it is not a question of dreaming and brooding, or of taking narcotics, but that one must be wide-awake to fight against so many difficulties. Neither is it easy to find models and get them to sit for me. This discourages most painters. Especially when one must save on food, drink, and clothes to pay them.

Well, Tersteeg is Tersteeg, and I am I.

But let me tell you that I am not opposed or hostile to him, but I must make him understand that he judges me too superficially, and - and I believe that he will change his opinion; I fervently hope so, for it grieves and worries me when there is an unfriendly feeling between us.

I hope your letter will come soon - I spent my last penny on a stamp for this letter. It is true I received the 10 guilders from Tersteeg only a few days ago, but that same day I had to pay 6 of those guilders to the model, to the baker, to the little girl who sweeps the studio.

Adieu, I wish you health and courage; in spite of everything, I myself am not without good courage.

Je te serre la main,

Vincent

I have had a very pleasant visit from Jules Bakhuyzen [A Dutch painter], and I may go to see him whenever I like.

[Postscript]

Theo, it is almost miraculous!!!

First comes your registered letter, second, C. M. asks me to make 12 small pen drawings for him, views of The Hague, apropos of some that were ready. (The Paddemoes, the Geest and the Vleersteeg were finished.) At 2.50 guilders apiece, price fixed by me, with the promise that if they suit him, he will take 12 more at his own price, which will be higher than mine. In the third place, I just met Mauve, happily delivered of his large picture, and he promised to come and see me soon. So, “ça va, ça marche, ça ira encore!”

And another thing touched me - very, very deeply. I had told the model not to come today - I didn't say why, but nevertheless the poor woman came, and I protested. “Yes, but I have not come to pose - I just came to see if you had something for dinner.” She had brought me a dish of beans and potatoes. There are things that make life worth living after all. The following words in Sensier's Millet appealed to me, and touched me very much, sayings of Millet's:

“L'art c'est un combat - dans l'art il faut y mettre sa peau.”

“Il s'agit de travailler comme plusieurs nègres: *J'aimerais mieux ne rien dire que de m'exprimer faiblement*.”

[Art is a fight - one must put one's hide (i.e. one's utmost) into art.

The thing to do is to work like a lot of Negroes: I would rather say nothing than express myself feebly.]

It was only yesterday that I read this last saying of Millet's, but I felt the same thing before; that's why I sometimes like to scratch what I want to express with a hard carpenter's pencil or a pen instead of with a soft brush. Take care, Tersteeg, take care, you are decidedly wrong.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 14-18 March 1882

My dear Theo,

On second thoughts, it occurred to me that you must have found it odd to see a reference in my last letter to something I have never mentioned before, and a reference made, moreover, in a rather peremptory tone, something like: Theo, throw the whole lot overboard and become a painter, there is a famous paysagiste [landscape painter] inside you.

These words might well have escaped me at the moment when my passions were aroused. But that doesn't alter the fact that it happens like that with other things that I allow to slip out in spite of myself sometimes, once I've got in a passion or have been aroused in some way or other. In other words, what I say at such times is what I've been bottling up for a long time and then blurt out, sometimes quite bluntly. But although in a calmer mood I would put it better, or keep it to myself, the fact is that, especially in a calm mood, I am most decidedly of that particular opinion.

Now it is out, and out it must stay, I have said it at last in spite of myself - inadvertently - in short, bluntly - but now you know my innermost thoughts. And when I wrote, “remain something better than H. G. T.”, and when I intimated that I do not hold art dealers in general in high esteem - it's true, I could well have kept those things to myself, but now that my silence is broken and I have spoken - well then, that is how I will speak.

As to H. G. T., I knew His Honour during a curious period of his life, when he had just `worked his way up' as they say, and, moreover, was newly married. At the time he made a strong impression on me - he was a practical man, tremendously able and good-humoured, energetic in small and large things, in addition he radiated poetry, so to speak, but poetry of the genuine, unsentimental sort. I felt so much respect for him at the time that I always kept my distance and looked upon him as a being of a higher order.

Since - since - since then - I have come - more and more - to have my doubts - but I lacked the courage to take up an analytical scalpel to dissect him more closely. Now, however, having reached the point at which I must be very much on the qui vive and not allow my career to be ruined for no matter whom, the above-mentioned scalpel has not spared him. And all the time I sat in his small office or talked to him in the gallery with a perfectly natural expression on my face and asked him some very ordinary questions, I was taking his measure as cold-bloodedly as I knew how.

I used to think he was the sort of person who put on the air of a man of means, of an homme du monde, I don't know how to put it in one word, I'm sure you'll take my meaning, and who hid a great deal of feeling and a warm heart behind that iron mask. But I found his armour enormously thick, so thick that I cannot make up my mind for sure whether the man is made of solid metal, be it steel or silver, or whether deep, deep down inside the iron there is one small corner in which a human heart still beats. If there is no heart in him, then my affection for him has truly run its course, making way for a “Qu'est ce que tu me fais - toi? Tu m'agaces.” [What are you doing to me? You are getting on my nerves.] So that in six months or a year he will either leave me utterly cold, or, or I will perhaps have found a way of getting on better with His Hon. Meanwhile - he is still His Hon. to me. Those are not the terms in which one thinks of somebody for whom one feels warm sympathy. “His Hon.” expresses something trite. Enough, suffit [that will do].

Theo, I am definitely not a landscape painter, when I do landscapes *there will always be something of the figure in them*. However, it seems to me a very good thing that there are also people who are essentially `paysagistes'. And - the thought that you might be just such a person - sans le savoir [without knowing it] - greatly preoccupies me. I am just as preoccupied with the antithesis, namely whether you, Theo, are really cut out to be a dealer.

If I had to prove the thesis, I might perhaps try to do so by indirect reduction. Quoi qu'il en soit [however that may be], do think it over. I don't need to tell you to consider carefully before you begin to paint, but perhaps you won't take it amiss if I add: Theo, until now you were free to do as you please but should you ever come to an arrangement with Messrs. G. & Cie and promise to stay on in their business for the rest of your life, then you would be a free man no longer. And - it seems quite possible to me that there may come a moment in life when one regrets having committed oneself in that way.

You will no doubt tell me, the moment may well arrive when one regrets having become a painter. And what could I then reply on my own behalf? They who have such regrets are those who neglect solid study in the beginning and who race hurry-scurry to be top of the heap. Well, the men of the day are men of just one day, but whoever has enough faith and love to take pleasure in precisely what others find dull, namely the study of anatomy, perspective and proportion, will stay the course and mature slowly but surely.

When, pressed for money, I forgot myself for a moment and thought, I'll try to produce something with a particular appeal, the result was dreadful, I couldn't do it. And Mauve rightly became angry with me and said, that's not how to do it, tear that stuff up. A first I found that hard to do, but later I did cut them up. Then when I began to draw more seriously, Tersteeg took exception and became angry - and overlooked the good things in my drawings and asked straight out for ones that were `saleable'.

Well, you can see immediately from this that there is a difference between Mauve and Tersteeg. Mauve appears more and more serious the more one thinks about him, but is Tersteeg going to be able to pass this test? I hope so, but doubt if he will stand up to it as well as M. And how about those who are serious at heart, although they often have something disagreeable about them? One gets to like them and to feel at home with them - one quickly gets bored with those who are not serious enough.

You mustn't imagine that I have overlooked the change in your financial circumstances which a change of career would entail. But what makes me mention this matter to you at all is that although I find myself in financial difficulties, I nevertheless have the feeling that there is nothing more solid than a `handicraft' in the literal sense of working with one's hands. If you became a painter, one of the things that would surprise you is that painting and everything connected with it is quite hard work in physical terms. Leaving aside the mental exertion, the hard thought, it demands considerable physical effort, and that day after day.

Well, I shall say no more about it now, except to add just this: when you come to Holland, I should like to speak to you alone, not just for half an hour but for, say, a whole morning, about some practical things which I have picked up - either from my own experience or from Mauve and others - just as if I had to explain them to you, teach them to you. I hope you won't have any objection - at worst you will be bored for a morning, but perhaps you won't be bored. I only hope that in the meantime you won't be thinking about the “selling” of pictures, but about the “how to do it.” And that you won't consider it being tempted by Satan. Enfin, nous verrons. [Well, we shall see.]

If you could send me some money towards the end of this month, it would be very welcome. By then I also hope to have finished the 12 for C. M.! If he pays for them straight away, that will put 30 guilders in my pocket. If something from you were added to that, I would risk buying a few shirts and drawers which I need very, very badly, seeing that the shirts, etc., I own are really getting into a deplorable state and I have only a very few of them.

Since I wrote to you I have been working with the same models the whole time and I must say I'm glad to have found them. I am busy drawing heads, and I urgently need to draw hands and feet as well (but it can't be done all at once).

And when summer comes and the cold is no longer a handicap, I must needs in one way or another do some studies of the nude. Not exactly academic poses. But I would, for example, be tremendously pleased to have a nude model for a digger or a seamstress. From the front, from the back, from the side. To learn to see and sense the shape properly through the clothes and to have an idea of the movement. I estimate that about 12 studies, 6 men, 6 women, would throw a lot of light on the matter. Each study takes a day's work. However, it is difficult to find models for this purpose, and if I can I shall avoid having a nude model hanging about in the studio in case I frighten the other models away.

The fear “that they will have to strip naked” is usually the first scruple one has to overcome when approaching people about posing. Or at least that has been my experience here already more than once. Actually it even happened with a very old man, who would probably have been very Ribera-like as a nude model. But après tout, I am not looking for a Ribera, still less a Salvator Rosa, I don't see things that way. I am not even enthusiastic about Decamps. I am ill at ease in front of their pictures and cannot visualize them without the feeling that I am missing something and losing sight of something. I'd rather have Goya or Gavarni, although both of them say “Nada”. As the last word? `Nada,' it seems to me, means precisely the same as Solomon's saying `Vanité des vanités, tout est vanité' [vanity of vanities, all is vanity], but that is something on which I cannot lay down my head without having nightmares. So there you are.

However, it's too late to philosophize, seeing that I must be up at half-past five tomorrow morning, because the carpenter is coming round to do a job for me before he goes off to work. So goodnight and believe me, I mean it very seriously when I talk about your becoming a painter. Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

I've done two more small drawings for C. M., a bit of the Scheveningen road and workers in the sand dunes.

Now that I've paid the money back to Tersteeg, I'm afraid that when the landlord comes round at the end of March I shan't have much left for him. So if you can, I do hope you will send me what you can towards the end of March.

Theo, on Sunday I went round to De Bock's again - I don't know why, but every time I go and see him I get the same feeling: the fellow's too weak, he'll never make good - unless he changes, unless - unless - I see something weary, something blasé, something insincere in him that oppresses me, there is something consumptive about the atmosphere in his house.

And yet - it doesn't hit you in the eye - and there are probably few among his acquaintances who think of him as I do.

Well, anyway, he does do things that are nice sometimes, or at least not without charm and grace, but, ça suffit-il? [Is that enough?] So much is demanded nowadays that painting seems like a campaign, a military campaign, a battle or a war.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 24 March 1882

The Hague, 24 March 1882
Theo,

I have been working very hard lately, and am busy from morning till night. First, the little drawings for C.M. They are finished, and I have sent them to him. I had hoped he would pay me at once, and since he has not, I am afraid he will forget it, and when will he send it now??? I continue to make such little views of the city almost every day, and have the knack now.

I wish Tersteeg or others who pretend to be friendly or to want to help me would ask for things that *I can make,* instead of asking for impossible things which discourage instead of encourage me. Enfin, que soit. But I had expected C.M. to pay me at once. The drawings were certainly no worse than the specimen which he saw, and I had trouble enough making them, perhaps more than 30 guilders' worth. If people understood that *nothing is nothing*, and that days without a penny in my pocket are very hard and difficult, I think they would not begrudge me the little money I get from you which keeps me afloat in these hard times, not unnerve me by reproaches for taking it from you.

Don't I deserve my bread if I work hard? Or am I not worthy of the means which enable me to work? I only wish, brother, that you would come here soon and see for yourself whether I'm cheating you or not.

Blommers spoke to me about showing a collection of wood engravings after Herkomer, Frank Holl, du Maurier, etc., some evening at Pulchri. I should like very much to do so. I have enough of them for at least two evenings.

Well, I'm getting on all right and feel that I am making progress. I must go on drawing for a year or at least a few months more until my hand has become quite firm, and my eye steady; and then I don't see any obstacle to my becoming quite productive in things that will sell. It is only reasonable for me to want these few months' time. I cannot go quicker than that, for I should produce bad work, and that isn't necessary: with a little patience my work can be good.

Can you send me some money soon? I hope so. You know I sent the 10 guilders back to Tersteeg.

I wish you would become a painter; you can if you want to, and you wouldn't lose by it — you would only become something better than if you remained an art dealer, even if you were the best of all art dealers. But you'll have to plunge into it with all your strength to bring out the best that's in you.

I haven't sent you any little sketches recently, I'm waiting until you come to see them for yourself — that's better. I am busy drawing some figures and also a few landscapes, for instance a nursery here on Schenkweg.

I should like to know since when they can force or try to force an artist to change either his technique or his point of view. I think it very impertinent to attempt such a thing, especially for a man like Tersteeg, who pretends to stand on “good form.” Theo, if you can send me some money, do, the sooner you send it, the sooner I shall be relieved of the worry.

Well — I have to work anyhow — adieu, write soon,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, early April 1882

Dear Theo,
You must not wonder at my writing urging you to become a painter. Because just now I myself am in a period in which my former drudgery has become more of a pleasure.

For every week I now do something which I couldn't do before, and as I have already mentioned, it is like growing young again. And the consciousness that nothing, except illness, can take from me the force which is now beginning to develop - this consciousness is what gives me courage for the future and helps me bear the many difficulties of the present.

It is splendid to look at something and admire it, to think about it and keep hold of it, and then to say, I am going to draw and work at it until I have fixed it on paper. Of course I do not mean to say I am so satisfied with my work that I think I need not do better still. But the way to do better later on is to work as well as one can today, then there will be progress tomorrow.

Of course I don't know what you will think of my drawings when you see them, but this much I do know - I long very much for your coming.

(I haven't many studies after the nude yet, but there are some which greatly resemble the Bargues; are they less original for that? Perhaps it is more because I have learned to understand nature from the Bargues.)

And when I write you, Become a painter, it isn't, after all, because I think your present position without charm of its own. But I think it is even better to be a painter, and I wish you could work in a studio of your own instead of at a desk in your office. That's it.

I am sure that there in your studio something would be roused in you that you do not know now - a great hidden force of working and creating. And this, once roused, is roused forever.

When I hear Tersteeg talk about “charm” and “saleable,” I merely think, Work which one has plodded hard at and which one has tried to put some character and sentiment into is neither unattractive nor unsaleable. And it is perhaps better not to please everybody at first.

What fine weather we are having, there are signs of spring everywhere. I cannot drop drawing from the figure, this comes first with me, but sometimes I cannot keep from working outdoors. But I am busy with very difficult things which I must not give up.

Recently I have made many studies of parts of the figure - head, neck, breast, shoulder. You will find a little sketch enclosed.

I should love to make more studies from the nude. You know I drew Exercices au Fusain, several times even, but no female figures are included.

Of course, it is quite different to draw it from life.

A little sketch such as the enclosed is quite simple in line. But when you are sitting in front of your model, it is difficult enough to get those simple characteristic lines. Those lines are so simple that one can trace them with the pen, but I repeat, the problem is to find those principal lines, so that the essence is expressed with a few strokes or scratches. It is not easy to select the lines *which will seem entirely natural*.

It is true, Theo, that recently, since I've been here in The Hague, I have spent more than 100 fr. a month; but if I didn't, I shouldn't be able to work with models and I shouldn't make any progress.

I see it in other painters, Breitner, for instance; they are afraid to take models regularly and they work little and slowly - and even then, not always well. Lately Breitner, however, has taken models again, and then there is much more character in his work; but now he is ill. The English painters, especially the draughtsmen for the Graphic, etc., have models almost every day. One really cannot do without it, I think. It's all right when somebody with years of experience draws the figure from memory after having studied it a great deal, but it seems to me too risky to work from memory systematically. Even Israëls, Blommers and Neuhuys don't do it, though they have so much experience.

So if I have spent more than 100 fr. a month here, it is because I couldn't do with less. And, believe me, I don't spend thoughtlessly or carelessly. I do wish I did not have to give Tersteeg back those 25 guilders, for I need the money so badly to continue working with energy. Tersteeg is no poorer for it, and at first he said himself that I need not worry about the money. My work must suffer for every 25 guilders I can't have, and if I can't do the things that ought to be done.

If I get my portfolios full of studies, they will repay me in money later on. I would rather earn more by and by than now; I would rather learn my profession well than hurry to get a little drawing sold for pity's sake. The little sketch enclosed is scrawled after a larger study [Drawing lost]which has a more melancholy expression. There is a poem by Thomas Hood, I think, telling of a rich lady who cannot sleep at night because she went out to buy a dress during the day, she saw the poor seamstress - pale, consumptive, emaciated - sitting at work in a close room. And now she is conscience-stricken about her wealth, and starts up anxiously in the night. In short, it is the figure of a slender, pale woman, restless in the dark night.

If you want me to, I will send Tersteeg the 25 guilders from your next allowance and will not speak of it again; but, if possible, I would rather wait until later, when he will take a drawing for it.

Well, good luck, and I repeat, I wish you might be at work in a studio of your own someday. Adieu.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, early April 1882

Dear Theo,

I have sat down to write you several times, but I couldn't bring myself to finish the letter. The reason was that I wanted to write about several things which had made me think the necessity of your becoming a painter so very evident. But what I had written wasn't quite right, and I couldn't find words strong enough.

Your objections are true, but on the other hand there are many other things which counterbalance them. By thirty you would have made such progress that people would have to acknowledge you as a painter and value your work. And at thirty you will still be young.

What you have learned at Goupil's, your knowledge of many things, will simply enable you to overtake many who “started early.” For those early beginners often have a sterile period, remaining on the same level for years; someone who begins energetically later on need not go through such a period.

Painting is a profession in which one can earn a living just as well as a blacksmith or a physician. At all events an artist is the exact opposite of a man who lives on his income, and I repeat, if one wants to make a comparison, there is more similarity between an artist and either a blacksmith or a physician.

I remember quite well, now that you write about it, that at the time when you spoke of my becoming a painter, I thought it very impractical and would not hear of it. What made me stop doubting was reading a clear book on perspective, Cassange's Guide to the ABC of Drawing; and a week later I drew the interior of a kitchen with stove, chair, table and window - in their places and on their legs - whereas before it had seemed to me that getting depth and the right perspective into a drawing was witchcraft or pure chance. If only you drew one thing right, you would feel an irresistible longing to draw a thousand other things. But one sheep has to cross the bridge to get the others to follow.

If a painter seized you by the arm and said, Look, Theo, you must draw that field like this: the lines of the furrows go this way, for such and such reasons and no other; they are brought into perspective this way. And that pollard willow being *so* tall, the other one higher up is *so* small, and you can measure the difference in size in this way. Look, when you hammer that onto the paper, those lines will be correct, and you have a solid foundation under your feet on which to work.

Such a conversation, provided he can put his theory into practice, would be much more effective in my case than many talks on either abstract or financial matters. I will not continue that train of thought much longer, but you are just on the verge of someday getting an insight into this practice, and if you happen to draw something correctly - in other words, if you learn to see the perspective of things - then you will be through with art dealing and will feel, like Correggio, I too am a painter. At the same time you will see that you are in your element, and then - then you will be younger and more hopeful than ever before; then your second youth begins: it is better than the first, for, thank God, the second one does not pass away - does not pass away like the first. For my first youth is gone, and yours will soon be gone too.

As to Cor's education or Mother's support, the money for these two things will not be lacking, even if you become a painter. And as to yourself, your food, drink, sleep, your studio, your model…they are not far off; if the thought of painting should be aroused in you, you would see that it can be done.

But so that you won't suspect me of overlooking the financial end, I should like to say - though with all respect for your present position as a dealer - unless one has a real handicraft and can make something with one's own hands, I doubt the soundness of the position. For instance, I think Jaap Maris's social position sounder and more independent than Tersteeg's. I have great respect for thought and intelligence; where these are wanting, one will be ruined in spite of one's handicraft because one cannot make a firm stand and defend one's own work, as is proved by Thijs Maris. But people who possess thought and intelligence, and of course I count you among them and should also like to count myself among them, are the best fitted for handicraft.

To sum up. If you take up painting, you will succeed, and at about your thirtieth year you will have a good position as a painter - anyway, no worse than the one you have now. If you begin to paint, you will certainly not be a mediocrity in the bad sense of the word.

Now, I see a chance of making my money do if you can arrange to send another 100 fr. about the middle of this month; it will last me until the beginning of May. I have not been able to pay Tersteeg out of the 100 fr. you just sent me: I have so many expenses, and, for instance, I could no longer put off paying the rent or buying a pair of trousers. If you send again about the middle of April, I *can* return it to him then (and will do so if you insist). But I would rather make a drawing for it sometime. I must not do it this way - I must not pay cash to *dealers*. My debt to you is different, we don't know how things will go. If you remain an art dealer, you will get drawings and pictures for it in time; if you become a painter, I will pay you back the money with interest into the bargain.

As to the money for Tersteeg, when I first arrived here, he and Mauve were so kind and said I need not worry; but in less than a month they suddenly changed and spoke quite differently, thinking perhaps that I should give up. At first it hurt me, and then later it left me rather cold, and I thought, I will try not to mind.

Breitner is in the hospital; I visit him now and then to bring him either books or drawing materials. C. M. has paid me and given me a new order, but a very difficult one - six special detailed views of the town. However, I will try to make them, for if I understand it correctly, I shall get as much for these six as for the first twelve. And later perhaps he will still want some sketches of Amsterdam.

Blommers came to see me about the exhibition of wood engravings. He looked at them for three hours and was angry at the committee of Pulchri for saying something like, “Those things one sees now and then in the South Holland café.” If that's all they know about wood engravings, they are indeed competent to judge them! However, Pulchri had objections. But Blommers wants to have his way, and has asked me to keep them ready for next Saturday. It is very curious to hear some painters talk about what they call “illustrators,” about Gavarni, for instance, or Herkomer. *Not* knowing anything about the matter is what makes up part of their so-called *general information*. Much good may it do them. With a handshake

Yours sincerely, Vincent

My thanks for the package of splendid Ingres paper and for the studies. Perhaps someday when people begin to say that I can draw a little but not paint, I shall suddenly come out with a picture at a moment when they least expect it. But I certainly won't as long as it looks as though I were *obliged* to, and as though *I must not* do something else.

There are two ways of thinking about painting, how not to do it and how to do it: *how to do it* - with much drawing and little colour; *how not to do it* - with much colour and little drawing.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 10 April 1882

Dear Theo,

Today I have mailed you a drawing which I send to show my gratitude for all you have done for me during what would otherwise have been a hard winter. Last summer when you showed me Millet's large woodcut “The Shepherdess,” I thought, How much can be done with one single line. Of course I don't pretend to be able to express as much as Millet in a single contour. But I tried to put some sentiment into this figure. I only hope this drawing will please you.

And at the same time you can see that I am hard at work. Now that I have started, I should like to make about thirty studies from the nude.

In my opinion the enclosed is the best figure I have drawn yet, therefore I thought I should send it to you. It is not the study from the model, and yet it is directly after the model. You should know that I had two underlayers beneath my paper. I had been working hard to get the right contour; when I took the drawing from the board, it had been imprinted quite correctly on the two underlayers, and I finished them immediately according to the first study. So this one is even fresher than the first. I am keeping the other two for myself, I wouldn't like to part with them.

You will see from this that it is not without reason that I wrote you, I would rather not return the money to Tersteeg now; I need it so much myself, and I think that working hard with a model is the fastest way to succeed. It is true the model I have is not so very expensive, but as the expense recurs almost daily, it is often hard enough for me to pay. Well, arrange it the way you think best; but if it's convenient, send what you promised not too late in the month. Adieu, a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I think this drawing would look well on a simple grey mount. Of course I don't always draw this way, but I'm very fond of the English drawings done in this style, so no wonder I tried it for once; and as it was for you, and you understand these things, I didn't hesitate to be rather melancholy. I wanted to say something like

“Mais reste le vide du coeur,
Que rien ne remplira”
[But there remains the void in the heart

That nothing will fill],
As in Michelet's book.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 15 April 1882

Dear Theo,

I received your last letter with the 180 fr. enclosed in good order; my heartfelt thanks for it.

I am very glad you liked the drawing I sent you; I think there really is something in it.

I wish you would have it put on a simple grey mount, for it will look best that way.

Further, I partly agree with you in what you say about the aspect of some drawings having something which can best be compared to an eau-forte non ébarbée [unpolished copperplate etching]. However, I believe that this peculiar effect in drawings, which I think the connoisseurs rightly appreciate, is caused more by a peculiar tremor of the hand when working under emotion than by the material one uses (of course, with etchings it is different - there it is caused by the barbe, burr, of the plate). Among my studies I myself have a few which look rather like what I shall call non ébarbée. If I have not fixed your drawing, or have worked on it again here and there after having fixed it, so that there are spots with an unpleasant shine, just pour a large glass of milk, or water and milk, over it and let it dry; you will see that it gives a peculiar saturated black, much more effective than is generally seen in a pencil drawing.

To get that peculiar look, non ébarbée, I think one ought not to use crayon but rather charcoal which has been soaked in oil.

Of course I sent the 25 guilders to Mr. Tersteeg at once, and have received a receipt for it *without one written word*. He may talk about being “hurt,” but I wish he would only consider how hurt I must have felt, always hearing such things as, “You do not earn your living, you have lost your rights,” and I don't know what else. Such things really don't hurt less but infinitely more *than what I said to him* - such things sometimes pierce the heart and deeply grieve the soul.

But what's the use of talking about it any more?

As to his buying or not, I consider that quite different, quite separate from personal disputes or differences of view on some subjects; I should think whether or not he buys from me would depend not on me but on my work. Let him buy my work (as I make more progress) or not buy it because he either does or doesn't like it. He may buy it for himself or another, but it is not exactly fair to let a personal antipathy influence one's judgement, or, on the other hand, to let the personal charm of some artist influence one into overlooking faults in his work.

There certainly is an affinity between a person and his work, but it is not easy to define what this affinity is, and on that question many judge quite wrongly.

And now, yes, I know that Mother is ill, and I know many other sad things besides, either in our own family or in others'.

And I am not insensible to it, and I don't think I should be able to draw “Sorrow” if I didn't feel it. But since last summer it has become clear to me that the disharmony between Father, Mother and myself has become a chronic evil because there has been misunderstanding and estrangement between us for too long a time. And now it has gone so far that we must suffer for it on both sides.

I mean, we might have helped each other more if long ago we had tried on both sides to live in closer understanding and to share weal and woe, always remembering that parents and children must remain one. We didn't make these mistakes on purpose, and for the greater part they must be ascribed to the force majeure of difficult circumstances and a hurried life. Now I have become little more than a half strange, half tiresome person to Father and Mother; and for my part, when I'm at home, I also have a lonesome, empty feeling. Opinions and professions differ so much that we unintentionally annoy each other, but I repeat, it is quite involuntary. This is a very sad feeling, but life and the world are full of such unsatisfactory relationships, and it really does more harm than good to reproach each other - sometimes the best thing to do in such a case is to avoid each other. But I don't know what's best; I wish I did.

Well, Father and Mother find comfort in their work and I in mine. For, brother, in spite of all the little miseries, I work with great animation.

I have just received a letter from Rappard; I have been “en froid” with him for some time, but now we are interested in each other's work again. Probably he will come to see me soon. The other day I was at Blommers' studio; the exhibition of wood engravings did not come off after all, but I gained this much by it that I at last found time to sort and arrange them. But it is impossible for me to give enough time to it or to take the trouble to find new wood engravings, as day by day I become more absorbed in drawing.

Today I made another nude study of a woman's figure, kneeling, and yesterday one of a girl knitting, but also nude, which I told you before I wanted to do.

Now, sleep well, it is late at night; once more thanks for what you sent, and believe me with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I hope to make you a pendant for “Sorrow.”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 15-27 April 1882

Dear Theo,

Today I sent you a drawing, “Vegetable Gardens on the Laan van Meerdervoort.”[Drawing lost]

So now you have one of my figures and one of my landscapes, and I think you will see that I have made some progress.

Though this be “only black and white” and unsaleable??? and without charm??? I still hope there may be some character in it. And I think that instead of reproaching me for applying myself only to drawing things, this certainly proves that I am taking the most practical way. For it is easier to proceed from drawing to painting than, conversely, to make pictures without drawing the necessary studies.

Of course it causes me a great deal of worry and makes my life far from easy when those whom I thought I could depend on for sympathy, like Mauve and Tersteeg, become indifferent or hostile and spiteful. I have not heard anything from Mauve; one day he is ill, and then again he needs rest, or he is too busy. How beautiful his picture for the Salon is!

But you understand these things yourself, so enough.

This little drawing also needs a narrow grey mount. You write that you have moved; I will do my best to make something for the walls of your new home now and then. I also have a few good wood engravings you could perhaps use if you like them, as I have duplicates of some good ones. But you must see and choose those for yourself when you come this summer.

I have not moved, but I have had an alteration made in my house, that is, I have had a little bedroom partitioned off in the attic; now I have more room in the studio, especially as the stove has been removed.

You see, there are a great many things in drawing which lots of people often overlook. There is the correct perspective of an interior, for instance (I will send you a specimen of that too, someday); there are the great lines of a landscape; and then I personally see no way to eliminate study of the nude.

All this is essentially *drawing* - once having fairly mastered this, one sees the way out; and I personally go quietly along this way, knowing that if only I persist, before long I shall overtake a few of those who think they can skip such things.

All good luck to you. The weather is very cold and windy here, and it worries me a great deal, as I cannot go on with the views of the city for C. M., which I would otherwise make between times; but surely the mild weather will come again.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

This little drawing has caused me more trouble than has been expended on many a watercolour. I send it to the Bd. Montmartre because then you can have it pressed and mounted at once.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 15-27 April 1882

Dear Theo,

I sometimes think, If my life were somewhat easier, how much more and how much better I should then be able to work! But I do work, and as you must have noticed from my last drawings, I begin to see a light that will conquer the difficulties. But you know that in addition to the exertion of drawing, scarcely a day passes without bringing some difficulty or other which in itself would be hard enough to bear. And, you see, there is a sorrow which I think I don't really deserve - at least I don't know in what way I deserve it - and which I should like to get rid of. You must tell me frankly, if you will be so kind, whether you know the cause of the following, and can give me any information about it.

Near the end of January, I think a fortnight after my arrival here, Mauve's attitude toward me changed suddenly - became as unfriendly as it had been friendly before. I ascribed it to his not being satisfied with my work, and I was so anxious and worried over it that it quite upset me and made me ill, as I wrote you at the time. Mauve then came to see me, and again reassured me that everything would turn out all right, and encouraged me.

But then on a certain evening shortly thereafter, he again began to speak to me in such a different way that it seemed as if quite a different man was before me. I thought, My dear friend, it seems as if they have poisoned your ear with slander; but I was in the dark as to the side from which the poisonous wind had blown. Among other things, Mauve began to imitate my speech and my manners, saying, “Your face looks like this,” “You speak like this” - all in a spiteful way. But he is very clever at those things, and I must say it was like a good caricature of me, but drawn with hatred.

On that occasion he said a few things that only Tersteeg used to say, and I asked him, Mauve, have you seen Tersteeg lately? “No,” said Mauve, and we talked on, but about ten minutes later he remarked that Tersteeg had been to see him that same day.

Then involuntarily the thought of Tersteeg stayed with me, and I thought, Is it possible, my dear Tersteeg, that you are behind all this? And I wrote him a note, *not impolite*, deliberately not impolite, I only said to him, Sir, I am so sorry when things such as “You do not earn your living” or “You do not work” are said about me; you must understand such things are too unreasonable for me to let them pass, and they dishearten me. During recent years I have had too many such things to grieve me, and I think there must come an end to it now.

This was the note which Tersteeg spoke to you about on his first visit to Paris.

When he came back from Paris, I went to see him and told him that if I had charged him with things for which he was not responsible, I hoped he would excuse me, because I was quite in the dark as to the cause of my difficulty. Well, then he was very kind to me again - but though I still visited Mauve once in a while, Mauve was moody and rather unkind. And I was told he was not at home a few times, in short, there were all the signs of a decided estrangement. I went to see him less and less, and Mauve never came to my house again, though it is not far away.

Mauve's talk also became narrow-minded, if I may call it so, as it used to be broad-minded. I had to draw from casts, that was the principal thing, he said. I hate drawing from casts, but I had a few plaster hands and feet hanging in my studio, though not for drawing purposes. Once he spoke to me about drawing from casts in a way such as the worst teacher at the academy would not have spoken; I kept quiet, but when I got home I was so angry that I threw those poor plaster casts into the coalbin, and they were smashed to pieces. And I thought, I will draw from those casts only when they become whole and white again, and when there are no more hands and feet of living beings to draw from.

Then I said to Mauve, Man, don't mention plaster to me again, because I can't stand it. That was followed by a note from Mauve, telling me that he would not have anything to do with me for two months. Indeed, we did not see each other during those two months, but meanwhile I have not been idle, though I have not drawn from casts, I can tell you, and I must say I worked with more animation and earnestness once I was free.

When the two months were almost up, I just wrote to congratulate him on having finished his large picture, and once I spoke to him on the street for a moment.

Now the two months have long since past, and he has not come to see me. And since then things have happened with Tersteeg which made me write Mauve: “Let us shake hands and not feel animosity or bitterness toward each other, but it is too difficult for you to guide me and it is too difficult for me to be guided by you if you require `strict obedience' to all you say - I cannot give that. So that's the end of the guiding and being guided. But it does not alter my feeling of gratefulness and obligation toward you.”

Mauve has not answered this and I have not seen him since. What urged me to say to Mauve, We must each go our own way, was the evidence that Tersteeg really influenced Mauve. I learned it from Tersteeg himself when he told me he would see to it that you stopped sending me money, “Mauve and I will see to it that there is an end to this.”

I then wrote H. G. Tersteeg a less amiable note than the first - and I particularly thanked him for his kind endeavours to “guide” me. This time I thought fit to speak my mind, Theo, for you see, I remembered that on the first evening I recognized one of H. G. T.'s expressions, Mauve did not want to confess he had seen him. And then I thought, Well, Tersteeg, are these your “distinguished manners,” that first you go and poison Mauve's mind, and later try to take from me the only assistance I receive! I didn't know such things were called “distinguished manners”; I thought they were called *treachery*.

Theo, I am a man with faults and errors and passions, but I don't think I ever tried to deprive anyone of his bread or his friends. I have sometimes fought people with words, but attempting a man's life because of a difference of opinion is not the work of an honest man - at least, these are not honest weapons.

Can you understand now that I am sometimes grieved over many things, grieved to the heart; and that I am grieved about Mauve? For though I shouldn't want to have the same “guidance” from him again, I should like to shake hands with him once more, and I wish he would do the same with me.

Do you perhaps know something that I do not, or can you give me some information about this matter? Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Forgive me if I trouble you about it, but, you see, I am so in the dark. I finished another drawing of a woman's figure such as “Sorrow,” but larger and I think better than the first; and I am doing a drawing of a street where they are digging to lay sewer or water pipes, “Diggers in a Trench.”

Breitner is still in the hospital and will perhaps have to stay there another month.

I am making the drawings for C. M., but I have been so depressed about what I have written you that it hindered my work; and then I thought, I must have light, perhaps Theo can give me some information.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 15-27 April 1882

Theo,

Since I wrote Mauve: “Do you know that those two months you spoke of have long since passed? Let us shake hands, and then each go his own way, rather than have a quarrel between you and me,” I repeat, since I wrote this and received no sign in reply, my grief chokes me.

Because - and you know this - I love Mauve, and it is so hard that all the happiness he pictured to me will come to naught. For I am afraid that the better my drawings become, the more difficulty and opposition I shall meet. Because I shall have to suffer much, especially from those peculiarities which I *cannot* change. First, my appearance and my way of speaking and my clothes; and then, even later on when I earn more, I shall always move in a different sphere from most painters because my conception of things, the subjects I want to make, inexorably demand it.

Enclosed is a little sketch of diggers, I will tell you why I'm sending it. Tersteeg said to me, “You failed before and now you will fail again - it will be the same story all over again.” Stop - no, it is quite different now, and that reasoning is really nothing but a sophism.

My not being fit for business or for professional study does not prove at all that I am not fit to be a painter. On the contrary, if I had been able to be a clergyman or an art dealer, then perhaps I should not have been fit for drawing and painting, and I should neither have resigned nor accepted my dismissal as such.

I cannot stop drawing because I really have a draughtsman's fist, and I ask you, have I ever doubted or hesitated or wavered since the day I began to draw? I think you know quite well that I pushed on, and of course I gradually grew stronger in the battle.

Now, to come back to this sketch - it was done on the Geest, in the rain, in a street where I was standing in the mud, amid all the noise and confusion, and I send it to you to show that my sketchbook proves I try to catch things “in motion.”

Now put Tersteeg himself, for instance, in front of a sand trench on the Geest, where workmen are busy putting in water or gas pipes; I should like to see what face he would pull and what kind of sketch he would make of it. Strolling on wharves and in alleys and streets and in the houses, waiting rooms, even saloons, is not a pleasant pastime, *except for an artist.* As such, one would rather be in the dirtiest place where there is something to draw than at a tea party with charming ladies. Unless one wants to draw ladies - then a tea party is all right even for an artist. What I want to say is this, searching for subjects, living among working people, the worry and trouble with models, drawing from nature on the very spot, is rough work, even dirty work at times. Indeed, a salesman's manners and clothes are not exactly the most suitable for me, or for anyone else who does not have to talk with fine ladies and rich gentlemen and sell them expensive things and make money, but who has, for instance, to draw diggers in a trench on the Geest. If I could do what Tersteeg can, if I were fit for that, I would not be fit for my profession; for my profession it is better that I am as I am than that I squeeze myself into forms which do not fit me.

I, who did not feel at ease in a fine store, who would not feel so especially now, and would certainly be bored and bore others - I am quite a different person when I am at work on the Geest or on the heath or in the dunes. Then my ugly face and shabby coat harmonize perfectly with the surroundings and I am myself and work with pleasure. As for the “how to do it,” I hope to be able to push on.

When I wear a fine coat, the working people that I want for models are afraid of me and distrust me, or they want more money from me.

Well, I struggle along as well as I can, and I don't think I belong among those who complain, “There are no models in The Hague.”

So if remarks are made about my habits - meaning dress, face, manner of speech - what answer shall I make…that such talk annoys me?

Am I ill-mannered in another sense, that is, insolent and indelicate?

Look here, in my opinion all politeness is founded on goodwill towards everybody, founded on the necessity everyone who has a heart in his breast feels, to help others, to be of use to somebody, and finally, on the need to live together, and not alone. Therefore I do my best; I draw, not to annoy people, but to amuse them, or to make them see things which are worth observing and which not everybody knows.

I cannot believe, Theo, that I could be such a monster of insolence and impoliteness as to deserve to be cut off from society, or as Tersteeg says, “should not be allowed to stay in The Hague.”

Do I lower myself by living with the people I draw? Do I lower myself when I go into the houses of labourers and poor people and when I receive them in my studio?

I think my profession requires it, and only those who don't understand anything of painting or drawing could object to it.

I put the question, where do the draughtsmen who work for the Graphic, Punch, etc., get their models? Do they personally hunt for them in the poorest alleys of London - yes or no?

And their knowledge of the people, were they born with it - or did they acquire it in later years by living among the people and paying attention to things that many another overlooks, by remembering what many another forgets?

When I go to see Mauve or Tersteeg I cannot express myself as I should wish, and perhaps I do myself more harm than good. When they are more accustomed to my way of speaking, they will no longer take offense.

But do tell them now, in my name, how things are - that if I have hurt them in speech or action, I hope they will forgive me. Tell them in better words than I can, with as much style and grace as necessary, how *they* on their part have caused *me* much sorrow, much grief, much trouble in these few months which have seemed so long to me because of all these worries. *Make them understand this, they don't know it: they think I am unfeeling and indifferent.*

You will render me a great service by doing this, and I think things can be settled in this way.

I wish they would just take me as I am. Mauve has been kind to me and has helped me thoroughly and well, but - it lasted only a fortnight - *that is too short*.

Adieu, Theo, try to do what you can. If I have some good luck instead of bad luck, I needn't be such a burden on you. Enough for this time, believe me,

Yours sincerely. Vincent

[On a separate sheet]

You have doubtless heard about Father's new call, and that Mother is well again but Uncle Cent is sick. I am working on the drawings for C. M., but lately I have been so depressed by the things I wrote you about that they interfered with my work; and then I thought, I want to see light, perhaps Theo can give me some information.

It is not surprising that it depressed me, for Tersteeg told me to my face that I "*should not be able to stay in The Hague*"; and I thought he is certainly the kind of person who, once his mind is made up, will try to obstruct or thwart me in all things. But how is it possible, and what's got into him? Even if he doesn't think my drawings any good, is that any reason for crossing me so determinedly, and with such weapons?

[Written in the margin}

Where there is a difference of opinion in artistic matters I do not consider taking the bread out of somebody's mouth an honest weapon, nor taking steps to make his friends turn against him because of circumstances in his private life.

Occasionally I have wanted to pick a quarrel with somebody who often got bread from me. No, I thought, I can't do this; I will put up with it, for otherwise he will have nothing to eat. You see? But people with certain “distinguished manners” have different ideas about such things.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, late April 1882

Dear Theo,
I want to explain somewhat more clearly my answer to your line, “Tersteeg has been almost like an older brother to us, try to stay friends with him.” My answer was that he might be that to you, but for years I personally have seen only his unfriendly and harsh side.

In all those years, between the time when I left, or got my dismissal from Goupil and the time when I began to draw (which I acknowledge was a mistake not to have done at once), in those years when I was abroad without friends or help, suffering great misery (so that in London I often had to sleep in the open air, and did so three nights in succession in the Borinage), did he ever give me a piece of bread? Did he ever encourage me, he who knew me of old, did he ever lend me a helping hand when I almost broke down?

I think not. Did he ever help me in any way? No, except when he lent me the Bargues after I had literally implored him four times.

When I sent him my first drawings, he sent me a paintbox but not a cent of money. I readily believe those first drawings were not worth any money; but, you see, a man like Tersteeg might have argued, “I know him of old, and I will help him get on,” and he might have known I needed it so badly in order to live.

When I wrote him from Brussels, “Wouldn't it be possible for me to work in The Hague awhile and have some intercourse with painters?” he tried to put me off, and wrote, “Oh no, certainly not, you have lost your rights”; I had better give lessons in English and French; of one thing he was sure, I was no artist. Or I had better try to get *copying work* from Smeeton and Tilly, though the latter was not exactly in my neighbourhood, and besides, in Brussels several lithographers had refused me this; there was no work, business was slow, was the answer.

When I showed him drawings again last summer, he said: “I hadn't expected this.” But he didn't *help* me, and didn't take back what he had said before. When I came to The Hague after all, without asking his advice, he tried to cut me out; I hear he laughed at my becoming a painter.

I perceived that Mauve thought me a greenhorn, and Mauve was quite astonished to find me a different person from what he had heard. I did not ask Mauve for money, but of his own accord Mauve said, You need money, I will help you earn money, you may be sure that now your hard years are over and the sun is rising for you - you have worked hard and honestly deserve it. And the first thing Mauve did was help me get settled. And then all this changed - Mauve's sympathy, which was like water to a parched plant to me, ran dry.

Because Tersteeg poisoned Mauve's ear by saying, “Be careful, you can't trust him with money. Let him go, don't help him any longer; as a dealer I see no good coming of it” - or at least something like this.

And when I said to him, Tersteeg, take it easy with that slander of yours, he looked astonished, he hadn't said a thing; he pretended I had only imagined it. Until one fine day he threatened me, “Mauve and I will see to it that you don't receive any more money from Theo.” Then I no longer doubted, but realized he was betraying me. Because I knew what Mauve had told me about the money I get from you - that it would be very good for me to receive it for at least another year.

When you forsake somebody in the winter and then try to take his bread away from him, is that *forcing* a person or not?

It is not considerate, not delicate, it is not good manners, it is not humane. And what am I? - only a man who has difficult, trying work to do, for which he needs quiet and peace and some sympathy; otherwise the work is impossible.

Theo, think these things over and write me soon. Though I felt terribly grieved at Mauve's neglecting me, I have struggled through this winter as best I could. But can you wonder that it was a shock to me, and that it sometimes seems as if my heart would break?

The likes of Tersteeg “laugh” at that; but you are my brother, and I hope you will not laugh.

I still have more to tell you about my plans for the future, how I intend to carry on my work. But first you must come here, and so I won't write about it now, as I hope it will not be so very long before you come. You have seen the two drawings I sent you. These were not made by accident; I can produce such work regularly, and it improves as I go on. So it is not unreasonable for me to insist upon its being arranged so that I no longer need be afraid that what is strictly necessary will be taken from me, nor always feel as if it were the bread of charity.

Bread, clothes, rent, models, and drawing materials are strictly necessary. And the way I arrange it, this is not so very much, and I can make drawings in return if people will only take them. I have no desire to become rich, but of course I can't do without those necessary things. A workman is worthy of his hire.

I wish it might be arranged so I could receive the money weekly, because it is so hard to reckon a month in advance.

If Tersteeg takes back the worst of what he has said, I will assume he said it unintentionally, and then all will be forgiven and forgotten. If he persists, I won't consider him a friend, but an enemy who begrudges me the very light of my eyes.

Do not be angry with me, Theo, for troubling you with this. But this is the way things have been all winter long, and what have I done to deserve all this trouble? All the anxiety and worry cannot but make me nervous and flurried in speech and manner. When Mauve imitated me, saying, “This is the sort of face you make,” “This is the way you speak,” I answered, My dear friend, if you had spent rainy nights in the streets of London or cold nights in the Borinage - hungry, homeless, feverish - you would also have such ugly lines in your face and perhaps a husky voice too.

Adieu, Theo, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

It was impossible to make the views of the city for C. M. because of all the rain and wind, so I didn't receive the money for them. Therefore, as I have to pay the rent on the first of May, if you could send something about that time, it would be very welcome.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 1 May 1882

Dear Theo,
I received your letter with enclosed 100 fr. and thank you very much for it.

Your letter has given me more light than all my own worry and fretting about that problem of Mauve and Tersteeg. I congratulate you on finding it out, for now I think I understand it better. And if I understand you correctly, the only thing I have to do is to work on quietly without worrying and thinking about it as much as I did. If I think too much about it, I get that same dizzy feeling which you say a person who has not studied perspective gets, when he tries to follow the fugitive lines in a landscape and to account for them.

And just as the whole perspective changes with the shifted position of the eye, which does not depend on the object, but on the man who is looking (whether he stoops or stands on an elevation), so I think the change in Mauve and Tersteeg has been in part only imaginary, and can be accounted for by my own state of mind. I do not see clearly in such things, but your letter showed me distinctly that there is no reason for me to worry if only I work on. And now enough of this, there are other things I want to write about.

I was greatly touched by Heyerdahl's sympathy. Give him my best regards, and tell him I certainly hope to make his acquaintance someday, and shall greatly appreciate it.

Now I have finished two larger drawings. First, “Sorrow” in a larger size - only the figure, without any surroundings. The pose has been changed a little: the hair is not hanging down the back, but falls over the shoulder partly in a plait, so more of the shoulder, neck and back is in view. And the figure has been drawn more carefully. The other, “The Roots,” shows some tree roots on sandy ground. Now I tried to put the same sentiment into the landscape as I put into the figure: the convulsive, passionate clinging to the earth, and yet being half torn up by the storm. I wanted to express something of the struggle for life in that pale, slender woman's figure, as well as in the black, gnarled and knotty roots. Or rather, because I tried to be faithful to nature as I saw it, without philosophizing about it, involuntarily in both cases something of that great struggle is shown. At least it seemed to me there was some sentiment in them, but I may be mistaken; well, you must judge for yourself.

If you like them, they will perhaps be fit for your new home; and then I have made them for your birthday, for which I send you my best wishes. But as they are rather large (a full page Ingres), I don't know if I can send them immediately. Tell me, do you think Tersteeg would call me impudent or pretentious if I asked to have them enclosed when a box goes to Paris?

Though “The Roots” is only a pencil drawing, I have brushed it in with lead pencil and scraped it off again, as I would if I were painting.

This is how I reason about the carpenter's pencil. What did the old masters use for drawing? Certainly not Faber B, BB, BBB, etc., etc., but a piece of rough graphite. Perhaps the instrument which Michelangelo and Dürer used somewhat resembled a carpenter's pencil. But I was not there to see it for myself, so I don't know; I only know that with a carpenter's pencil one can get effects quite different from those with thin Fabers, *etc.*

I prefer the graphite in its natural form to that ground so fine in those expensive Fabers. And the shininess disappears by throwing some milk over it. When working outdoors with conté crayon, the strong light prevents one from seeing clearly what one is doing, and one perceives that it has become too black; but graphite is more grey than black, and one can always raise it a few tones by working in it with the pen, so that the strongest graphite effect becomes light again in contrast to the ink.

Charcoal is good, but if one works at it too long, it loses its freshness, and one must fix it immediately to preserve the delicacy of touch. In landscape too, I see that draughtsmen like, for instance, Ruysdael and Van Goyen, and Calame and Roelofs too among the moderns, used it to great advantage. But perhaps there would be more pen drawings in the world if somebody invented a good pen for use outdoors, with an inkstand to go with it. One can do great things with charcoal soaked in oil, I have seen Weissenbruch do it; the oil fixes the charcoal and at the same time the black becomes warmer and deeper.

But I say to myself that it's better to do it in a year than to do it now, because I do not want the beauty to come from the material, but from within myself. When I am a little more advanced I shall occasionally dress up nicely - that means I shall work with a more effective drawing material. And then if only I have some power within me, things will go doubly smoothly and the result will be better than I expected.

But before any success there must first come the hand-to-hand struggle with the things in nature.

Last year I wrote you a great many letters full of reflections on love. Now I no longer do so because I am too busy putting those same things into practice. She for whom I felt what I wrote you about is not in my path, she is out of my reach in spite of all my passionate longing. Would it have been better to have kept thinking of her always and to have overlooked what came my way? I cannot decide myself whether I acted consistently or inconsistently.

Suppose I began today a drawing of a digger, for instance, but he said, I must go, I will not or cannot pose any longer. As I had begun to draw him without asking his permission, I have no right to be angry with him for leaving me with an unfinished drawing. But must I now give up drawing a digger entirely?

I think not, especially if tomorrow I may meet another who says, I will come not just today, but tomorrow and the day after tomorrow; I understand what you want, do as you like, I have the patience and goodwill to help you. Though I should not then remain true to my first impression, would it have been better to have said, No, I must decidedly have that first digger, even though he says, I cannot and I will not? And once I begin No. 2, I certainly can't work with the thought of No. 1, for then I should not be true to nature; that is the point. And I add this to my previous letter. I want your help in order to succeed, but I think the expenses would not be more, but rather less than what you have sent these past months.

I will and dare undertake it if I may count on 150 fr. a month for another year.

Well, I hope to earn something besides, and if this fails, I shall have to stint myself, it's true; but I shall manage. And then afterward when that year is past? -

I think nothing in my work indicates I shall fail, if I only can continue to work and do my best. And I am not a person who works slowly or irresolutely. Drawing becomes a passion with me, and I throw myself into it more and more; and where there's a will, there's a way.

Where [there] is a will, [there] is a way , but it must come from both sides. *The will* in me must be the making of things; *the will* in those who have or might get sympathy for me must be the buying or selling of those things. *The will* being there, I think *the way* may be found.

But if everybody talked like Tersteeg about “unsaleable” and “without charm,” heaps of annoyances would be in store for me. However this may be, I will try even harder to conquer the “unsaleable” and “without charm.”

It has been very stormy for three nights. Last Saturday night the window of my studio gave way (the house I live in is very shaky); four large window panes broke and the frame was torn loose. You can imagine it was not pleasant. The wind came blowing across the open meadows and my window got it firsthand - the drawings torn from the wall, the easel upset, the railing downstairs also thrown down. With my neighbour's help I have been able to tie up the window, and I nailed a blanket in front of the hole, which is at least three feet square.

[art id=216_V-T_1950>Sketch of the layout of the studio.]

I didn't sleep a wink all night, as you can imagine. And there was great trouble about getting it fixed the next day, because it was Sunday. The landlord is a poor devil; he gave the glass, I paid for the labour. But this is another reason why I want to take the house next door. It is arranged thus:

The studio, larger than mine, the light very good. The attic is finished, so that you do not see the rafters and tiles; very large, so that you can divide it into as many rooms as you like (I have the partitions for it). The rent is 12.50 guilders a month for a strong, well-built house; it is that cheap because it is “only in the Schenkweg,” and the rich people whom the owner expected to get do not want to live there. I should like to take it very much, and the owner would like to have me; he spoke to me about it first, and then I went to see it.

And now I close by saying that I assure you I often think of home, and I suppose when six months have passed by and the thing I wrote you about has happened, and Father and Mother come to see me, on both sides this would produce a change in our feelings. But alas, the moment has not arrived yet, and first we must try to get things started. For Father and Mother, whom I consider outsiders in this respect, will like it very much when it is more finished (has more finesse, as the Belgian dealers say, according to Mauve); but the rough sketch that you would understand if you were here would make them dizzy, to say the least. Adieu, best wishes,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I will not send the drawings if you intend to come soon. But it is time you received some of my things now and then; I do my best, and if these two, for instance, please you, I will send you some more of various kinds.

If you show those you think suitable to people who happen to come to your room, it may be the beginning of selling them. When more and different ones by the same hand are together, they show to better advantage, and one explains and compliments the other.

The thing I value most is your sympathy. If I win that, the selling will follow.

But that sympathy of yours cannot be forced by either you or me. I think I can produce a great deal - I mean I can work quickly, without dawdling. After you returned the old studies as I asked you, I sent you two new ones (“Laan van Meerdervoort” and “Sorrow”) to prove I can do more if you like them. If you say it is not ripe yet, I will work on without sending them; what I sent was no accident - I am really *able* to do what I'm doing now. I shall have to study for some time to do better. But what I want to say is: If the last ones I have sent you are good enough for you to show, then I can begin to send what I have ready.

Those you think the best ought to be mounted in grey, and so by degrees you will get a small collection. Think it over. I have some more drawings - an old man by the hearth, an old woman of the Geest, a few female figures - which, added to the others, would do well, I think. Also more small sketches.

I am not saying this to hurry you, but it will do no harm to think it over. You began to help me without knowing what the result would be and when others refused their help. I should be glad if the result were that you could say quite coolly to those who think it foolish of you to help me that you have not lost by it. And that stimulates me to work even harder, and I think you must begin to take a few drawings, and every month I will send some more. There are days when I make five of them, but one has to count on the fact that out of twenty drawings one is successful. But that one of the twenty is no accident - I can count on it. There will be one every week, of which I feel, it will last.

It is better if you keep those that are “lasting” for the present than if I sell them for 10 guilders to somebody here who takes them out of pity or charity. Here they all criticize the technique, but they all say the same hackneyed things about the English drawings, for instance. Only Weissenbruch - when I told him, I see things like pen drawings - said, “Then you must draw with the pen.”

He, Weissenbruch, has not seen the small but the large “Sorrow,” and has said pleasing things about it to me. That's why I dare to speak as I do about the large one. I have had no “guidance or teaching” from others to speak of, but taught myself; no wonder my technique, considered superficially, differs from that of others. But that's no reason for my work to remain unsaleable. I feel pretty sure that the large “Sorrow,” “The Old Woman of the Geest,” the “Old Man,” and others, will find a purchaser someday. But maybe I shall work a little more on them later. I have worked on the “Laan van Meerdervoort” again. In front of me is a drawing of a woman in a black merino dress; I know for sure that after you have had it for a few days, you will be quite reconciled to the technique, and not wish it were done differently. I did not understand the English drawings the first day either, but “I took the trouble to become acquainted with them,” and have not regretted it.

Adieu, enough for today.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 2 May 1882

[Postcard, written in English]
Today I sent you by post 1 drawing, “A Root in a dry ground.” Just let me know what you think of it. “The Roots” is very similar to this one, but I cannot send that one, neither “Sorrow” in this manner on a roller, the drawings being mounted on cardboard. With regard to this one I hammered it off in a single day, having studied the same spot and trees for “The Roots.” So it has been done “tout d'un trait” out of doors, and has not even been in my studio.

But the paper has been slightly damaged in 2 or 3 places, as I worked through it; please have this seen to at once, else it might get worse. I think it wants a grey mount. Good bye, I hope to hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Vincent

Tuesday evening.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3-12 May 1882

Please feel free to tell Mauve anything you like about the contents of this letter, but there is no need for it to go any further.

My dear Theo,

I met Mauve today and had a most regrettable conversation with him, which made it clear to me that Mauve and I have parted for good. Mauve has gone too far to retract, and anyhow he certainly wouldn't want to.

I invited him to come and see my work, and then to talk things over. Mauve flatly refused: `I will certainly not be coming to see you, that's all over.'

In the end he said, `You have a vicious character.' I turned away then - it was in the dunes - and walked home alone.

Mauve takes it amiss that I said, `I am an artist,' which I won't take back, because it's self-evident that what that word implies is looking for something all the time without ever finding it in full. It is the very opposite of saying, `I know all about it, I've already found it.' As far as I am concerned, the word means, `I am looking, I am hunting for it, I am deeply involved.'

I have ears, Theo - if somebody says, `You have a vicious character,' what am I supposed to do? I turned away and went home alone, but with a very heavy heart that Mauve should have been prepared to say that to me. I shall not ask him for an explanation, nor shall I apologize.

And yet - and yet - and yet. I wish Mauve did feel some compunction. I am suspected of something…it is in the air…I am keeping something back, Vincent is concealing something that mustn't see the light of day.

Well, gentlemen, I shall say to you, you people who prize manners and culture, and rightly so, provided it is the genuine article - which is more cultured, more sensitive, more manly: to desert a woman or to concern oneself with one who has been deserted?

Last winter I met a pregnant woman, deserted by the man whose child she was carrying. A pregnant woman who walked the streets in the winter - she had her bread to earn, you'll know how. I took that woman on as a model and have worked with her all winter. I couldn't pay her a model's full daily wages, but I paid her rent all the same, and thus far, thank God, I have been able to save her and her child from hunger and cold by sharing my own bread with her.

When I first came across this woman, she caught my eye because she looked so ill. I made her take baths and as many restoratives as I could manage, and she has become much healthier. I have been with her to Leyden, where there is a maternity hospital in which she will be confined.*

It strikes me that any man worth his salt would have done the same in a case like this. I consider what I did so simple and natural that I thought I could keep it to myself. She found posing difficult, yet she has learned, and I have made progress with my drawing because I have had a good model. The woman is now attached to me like a tame dove. For my part, I can only get married once, and when better than now, and to her, because it is the only way to go on helping her and she would otherwise be sent back by want on to the same old path which leads to the abyss. She has no money, but she is helping me to earn money with my work.

I am filled with zest and ambition for my job and my work, and the reason why I have put aside paintings and watercolours for a time is that Mauve's desertion gave me a great shock, and if he sincerely retracted I should start again with renewed courage.

At the moment I cannot look at a brush, it makes me nervous.

I wrote: Theo, can you enlighten me about Mauve's attitude? - perhaps this letter will help to enlighten you in turn. You are my brother, it is only natural that I should speak to you about private matters, but the moment someone tells me, `You have a vicious character,' I don't feel like talking to him any more.

I could not do otherwise, I did what was ready to hand, I worked. I thought I would be understood without words. To be sure I thought of another woman for whom my heart was beating - but she was far away and did not want to see me, and this one - there she was, walking about sick, pregnant and hungry - in winter. I could not do otherwise. Mauve, Theo, Tersteeg, you people have my livelihood in your hands, are you going to reduce me to beggary, turn your backs on me? Now I have spoken and wait for whatever else will be said to me.

Vincent

I am sending you a few studies because you may perhaps see from them that she has helped me considerably with her posing. My drawings are `by my model and me,' the one with the white bonnet is her mother. But since in a year's time, when I shall probably be working quite differently, I shall have to base my work on these studies, which I am doing now as conscientiously as I can, I should like to have at least these three back.

You can see that they are done with care. If I need an interior or a waiting room or something of the kind later on, they will prove useful, because I shall be able to look to them for the details. But I thought it would perhaps be a good idea to keep you up to date on how I spend my time. These studies demand a rather dry technique. Had I tried for effect they would have been less useful to me later. But I'm sure you will see this for yourself.

The paper I should really like best is that on which the female figure bending forward is drawn, but if possible the colour of unbleached linen. I don't have any of it left *in that thickness*. I believe they call it *double* Ingres. I can't get any more of it here. When you see how that drawing is done, you'll understand that the thin stuff is hardly able to take it. I wanted to send you a small figure in black merino as well, but I can't roll it. The chair near the large figure isn't finished, because I want an old oak chair there.

* Small wonder she wasn't well, the child was in the wrong position and she needed an operation, that is, the child had to be turned round with forceps. But there is a good chance that she will pull through. *She is due to give birth in June*.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 4-12 May 1882

Dear Theo,

If I told you some rather gloomy things about her in my last letter, it's because I want to state from the beginning that I am not living in a garden of roses, but in reality. And because I want to protest against sentimental considerations in advance, for instance, like those Father and Mother would not fail to bring into it, if I asked their advice or merely told them the story.

Sentiment and sentimentality are two very different things which they cannot distinguish between. And if I spoke of it, Father would perhaps think he had to play the part of a gendarme, which would be quite out of place and of little use. So you must excuse me if I don't say a word about it to Father and Mother, and don't want them to interfere. If Father refused to give his consent, there are terms in the law which, as I am of age, guarantee my independence; but I don't think Father will go so far as to oppose me.

They will say, "You are marrying beneath yourself, and you are too poor."

My answer to this is, If I intended to live in style, the result would be very bad. But as I intend to live in a house consisting of a studio, one room, and a little kitchen, with a bedroom in the attic, and as my way of living will be very simple, it can be done; and two persons living together can live more cheaply than one.

"On est sûr de périr à part, on ne se sauve qu'ensemble" [You are sure to perish alone, only together you can save yourself].

I asked Kee if she would risk marrying me. You know how I was refused, but the way I was received in Amsterdam was much worse than I let on. They told me I wanted to coerce her; she refused to see me, to speak to me - not during *one* visit, but during the three days of my stay. Theo, only those who misunderstand me completely would tell me, "You are trying to coerce her."

What I am doing now proves sufficiently that I didn't want to coerce Kee then.

This woman whom I am with now understands me better. In a short time she became as meek as a tame dove, certainly not from my coercing her, but because she saw that I was not rough. Well, this one has understood, and she said to me, "I know that you haven't much money, but even if you had less, I would put up with everything if only you stay with me and let me stay with you; I am so attached to you that I could not be alone again."

If someone says that to me, and shows by everything - in deeds more than in words - that she means it, then no wonder that with her I drop the mask of reserve, almost of roughness, which I have worn so long because I did not want to flatter.

And has this woman been the worse for it, or have I been the worse for it, now that things have turned out as they have? i am quite astonished to see her become brighter and more cheerful every day; she is so changed that she seems quite different from the pale, sick woman I met this winter. Yet I have not done so much for her, I only told her, Do this or that, and you will get well again. She hasn't thrown my advice to the winds, and when I realized this, I tried even harder to help her.

Perhaps I can understand her better than anyone else because she has a few peculiarities which would have been repulsive to many others. First, her speech, which is very ugly and is a result of her illness; then her temper, caused by a nervous disposition, so that she has fits of anger which would be unbearable to most people.

I understand these things, they don't bother me, and until now I have been able to manage them. On her side she understands my own temper, and it is sort of a tacit understanding between us not to find fault with each other.

If you know the large drawing in the Graphic by Frank Holl, “The Deserter,” I should say she resembles the woman in it.

Every day she learns how to pose better, and this is worth *so* much to me. She is no trouble, no hindrance, but she helps and she works with me. She has no pretensions, wanting this or that; when there's nothing but bread and coffee, she puts up with it and doesn't complain.

But, Theo, I am pining to see you and speak to you. I am also longing for a letter. If I knew that you would not turn your back on me for this reason, I should be as happy as a man can be. It is true that at first I shall need some help. If I should have to do without it, it would be very bad indeed for me, and also for her; but that help need not be more than I received when alone. And my energy increases, and although I have been trying hard to get ahead, of course I am trying even harder now; if I may count on your help and sympathy a little longer, I will succeed in earning what's necessary through the sale of my work. The first step I should like to take is to rent the house next door, about which I wrote you. As soon as she comes back from Leyden, I will marry her - without telling anyone, quietly and without any fuss; then we should be glad to have that house. We are prepared to live as simply as possible.

And if you could come and see for yourself, you would realize that you can count on both her and me working as hard as we can.

I wish her confinement were over - a heavy ordeal is still ahead of her. But so far everything has gone well since the visit to Leyden. But neither she nor I is living in a rose garden or dreaming in the moonlight; we have a hard time ahead of us, so much the better.

I certainly hope you won't take this in a melancholy way. Of course if Kee had only responded a little to my feelings, this wouldn't have happened. But during my visit to Amsterdam I had such a definite refusal that there wasn't the slightest chance of winning her unless my financial circumstances changed totally in a short time. This will not happen now, for though I shall eventually earn so much that this woman can live on it with me, it will not be enough to keep up a social standing; besides, I don't have the slightest inclination or longing for it. You know what I want: just enough to live on, but I don't care for more than that. What I should like best would be to have fixed weekly wages, like any labourer, for which I should work with all my strength and energy.

Being a labourer, I feel at home in the labouring class, and more and more I will try to live and take root there.

I cannot do otherwise, I do not want to do otherwise, I cannot understand any other way. Adieu, a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 12 or 13 May 1882

Dear Theo,

Today I sent you some drawings and sketches; what I want to show you first of all is that what I told you about does not keep me from my work; on the contrary, I am literally absorbed in my work and enjoy it, and have good courage.

Now I hope that you will not be angry at my saying so, but I am rather anxious because you have not yet answered. I do not believe that you will disapprove of my being with Christine. I do not believe that you would completely desert me for such a reason, or for appearances' sake or I do not know what else. But after what happened with Mauve and Tersteeg, can you wonder that I sometimes think with a certain sadness, Perhaps *he* will do the same?

At least I am eagerly waiting for a letter from you, but I know that undoubtedly you are very busy and that it is not so very long since you wrote. But perhaps sooner or later you will experience it yourself when you are with a woman who is with child - a day seems like a week, and a week, longer than a month. And that is why I write you so often these days, as long as I have no answer.

I wrote to you about intending to take the house next door, it being more suitable than this one, which seems to get blown apart so easily, *etc.* but surely you know, don't you, that I don't ask imperatively for anything whatever. I only hope that you will remain to me what you were; I do not think I lowered or dishonoured myself by what I did, though perhaps some will think so. I feel that my work lies in the heart of the people, that I must keep close to the ground, that I must grasp life in its depths, and make progress through many cares and troubles.

I can't think of any other way. I do not ask to be free from trouble or care, I only hope the latter will not become unbearable, and this need not be the case as long as I can work and keep the sympathy of people like you. In life it is the same as in drawing - one must sometimes act quickly and decisively, attack a thing with energy, trace the outlines as quickly as lightning.

This is not time for hesitation or doubt; the hand must not tremble, nor must the eye wander, but remain fixed on what is before one. And one must be so absorbed in it that in a short time something has been brought onto the paper or the canvas which was not there before, in such a way that later one hardly knows how it was hammered off. The period of discussing and thinking must precede the decisive action. There is little room for reflection or argument in the *action* itself.

To act quickly is the function of a man, and one has to go through much before one is able to do it. The pilot sometimes succeeds in using a storm to make headway, instead of being wrecked by it.

What I wanted to say to you again is this: I have no great plans for the future; if momentarily I feel rising within me the desire for a life without care, for *prosperity*, each time I go fondly back to the trouble and the cares, to a *life full of hardship*, and think, It is better this way; I learn more from it, it does not degrade me, this is not the road on which one perishes. I am absorbed in my work and I have confidence enough so that with the help of such as you, Mauve, Tersteeg - though we disagreed last winter - I will succeed in earning enough to keep myself, not in luxury, but as one who eats his bread in the sweat of his brow. Christine is not a hindrance or a trouble to me, but a help. If she were alone, perhaps she would succumb; a woman must not be alone in a society and during a time like the one in which we live, which does not spare the weak but treads them underfoot, and crushes a weak woman under its wheels when she has fallen down.

Therefore, because I see so many weak ones trodden down, I greatly doubt the sincerity of much of what is called progress and civilization. I do believe in civilization, even in a time like this, but only in the kind that is founded on real humanity. I think whatever destroys human life is barbarous, and I do not respect it. Well, enough of this. If it might be that I could rent the house next door and could have regular weekly wages, that would be delightful. If it cannot be, I will not lose courage and will wait awhile longer. But if it can be, I should be so happy, and it would save much of my strength for work, which is otherwise absorbed by cares.

You will see there are all kinds of drawings in the portfolio. Keep whatever you think best of what I send, then you can show them whenever there is a chance. I should like to get the rest back some time or other. If I thought you would come soon, I would of course keep these things until you came. But now it is perhaps as well for you to see the things together, and I hope that from it you will see that I do not live idly on your money. Considering it superficially, you would perhaps view the affair with Christine quite differently from what it really is. But when you have read this letter and the previous one, it will be easier for you to understand.

I wish those who mean well by me would understand that my actions stem from a deep feeling and need for love, that recklessness and pride and indifference are not the springs which move the machine, and this step is proof of my taking root in a lowly station on the road of life. I do not think I should do well to aim for a higher station or to try to change my character. I must have much more experience, I must learn still more, before I shall be ripe, but that is a question of time and perseverance.

Adieu, write soon. If you can send me something, it will certainly not be unwelcome. Believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

If I thought my leaving The Hague would please anyone, I would do it, and go anywhere rather than be in anybody's way.

But I do no harm to anybody, and after what you wrote me, I suppose I must not take what Tersteeg said too seriously.

The house which I wrote you about is for rent now, and I am afraid someone else will take it if I don't do it soon. That is another reason why I am looking for your letter. For you will understand that after what happened with Mauve and Tersteeg, and after what I told you about Christine, I must ask you frankly: Theo, will these things cause a change or separation between you and me? I would be so happy if they don't, and will be twice as glad of your help and sympathy as before; if it does, it is better for me to know the worst than to be kept in suspense.

I like to look things in the face, whether adversity or prosperity. I have your answer on the problem of Mauve and Tersteeg, not on the other one. That is something quite apart - there is a barrier between artistic and personal matters - but it is right to settle how we look at those things beforehand.

And therefore I say to you:

Theo, I intend to marry this woman, to whom I am attached and who is attached to me. If unfortunately this should bring about a change in your feeling toward me, I hope you will not withdraw your help without giving me warning some time in advance, and that you will always tell me frankly and openly what you think. Of course, I hope that your help and sympathy will in no way be withdrawn, but that we shall continue to join hands like brothers, notwithstanding things which the “world” opposes.

So, brother, if you have not already written when you receive this letter, answer me by return post, for after the things I wrote you, I must be reassured or must know the worst. Adieu, I hope the sky will remain clear between you and me.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 14 May 1882

My dear Theo,

Having received your letter of 13 May, which must have crossed a letter of mine to you, I find it necessary to explain a few things to you without delay.

A great deal of what I read in your letter I certainly appreciate very much, for instance, `One must be narrow-minded or hypocritical to set one class without question above another.'

The world, however, does not reason like that and never sees or respects man's `humanity' but only the greater or lesser value of the money or goods he carries with him so long as he is on this side of the grave. The world takes no account at all of what happens beyond the grave. That is why the world goes no further than its feet will take it.

For my part, however, I feel sympathy or antipathy for men just as men, and their circumstances leave me relatively indifferent.

Yet even I take some note (and were my own circumstances to *allow* me, I should make even further concessions) when you say, `There are many who maintain a certain social standing in order to avoid attention from others and lest people meddle too much in their affairs.' Very often, indeed, I let things pass, thinking, I'm not going to do or say this or that in case I give offence to somebody or other.

But when it comes to important, serious maters one must act, not in accordance with l'opinion publique, not according to one's own passions, but following the ABC which is the basis of all morality: `Love thy neighbour as thyself.' Act in a way you can justify before God. Do the right thing and act loyally.

Now, when it comes to Christien, this is my reasoning: how should I like it if someone first helped me and then left me in the lurch? Wouldn't I think… someone who behaves like that would have done better to have left me alone. If he doesn't finish what he started - he really has deceived me.

The father of Xtien`s [Christien's] child argued in the exact spirit of your letter, Theo, but in my opinion quite wrongly. He was very kind to her, but did not marry her, even when he had made her pregnant, for the sake, he said, of his position and his family, *etc.* Xtien was young at the time and had met him after her father's death, didn't know then what she knows now, and when the man died there she was alone with her child - forsaken, without a penny. À contrecoeur [reluctantly] went on the streets, became ill, was taken to hospital, in all sorts of trouble…

That man's behaviour made him guilty before God, although in the eyes of the world he had kept up his position, `had paid her off.' But at the moment when he faced death, do you imagine he felt no regret and remorse???

Now, in this world, the characters of people like him come up against characters like, say, mine. I care as little for the world as the aforesaid person cared for what is right. The semblance of doing right was enough for him. As for me, I wouldn't give you tuppence for the world's opinion. What comes first and foremost with me is this: *I will not deceive or forsake a woman*. If a woman refuses to have anything to do with me, like Kee Vos, I don't try to force her, no matter how strong my passion. I turn away with desolation in my heart the moment my own `she and no other' is met by her `certainly not him.'

I will not force and I will not forsake. And I, too, protest when I myself am forced or forsaken.

If I were married to a woman and I realized that that woman was carrying on with another, I wouldn't stand for any nonsense, but even then I wouldn't forsake her before I had tried everything possible to bring her back. So you see what I think of marriage and that I take it seriously.

Now as you know, when I met Xtien she was pregnant, ill, left out in the cold. I was alone, and had just had the experience in Amsterdam I wrote to you about. I started it - though not immediately with marriage in mind. However, when I got to know her better, it became obvious to me that if I wanted to help her I must set about it more seriously.

Then I spoke to her frankly and said, I think about this and that, in such and such a way, I see your position and mine in such and such a way. I am poor - but I am no seducer. Will you be able to put up with me? Otherwise there isn't any point in going on.

At which she said, I want to be with you, no matter how poor you are.

And that is how it all came about. And before very long now she will be going to Leyden and I should like to marry her without any fuss straight after that. Because otherwise there will be something false about her position and mine, which I most decidedly wish to avoid.

I shall be like a workman with a trade in which she is my assistant. My drawings are in your hands and for the first year at least my bread and hers will depend on you and on all those who are willing to help me, because you can see that I am doing my best and that I have the gift of drawing, and I believe of painting as well, which little by little will become more evident.

Now, Theo, I do not think I am disgracing my family by what I have done - and I wish my family would come to terms with it. Otherwise we will remain in opposite camps and I will have to declare: I will not forsake a woman to whom I am attached by a bond of mutual aid and respect in order to oblige anybody. I have come to terms with her past and she has come to terms with my past. If my family disowned me for seducing a woman and I had actually done it, then I should feel like a blackguard, but if I were to be opposed because I remained loyal to a woman to whom I had pledged my troth, I should despise my family.

Not everyone is suited to be a *painter's* wife - *she is willing*, she learns something every day. I understand peculiarities in her character that have repelled others. But H. G. T. would probably think of her what he thinks of me, and say, `She has a disagreeable nature and there is something unattractive about her,' and there the matter would rest.

But it goes without saying that I have enough knowledge of the world and of human nature to ask for nothing more than that people should not oppose my marriage - and I hope that I will not be wanting for my daily bread as long as I can show that I am doing my best and straining every nerve to become a good painter, or perhaps merely a draughtsman. I shall not be visiting my family or anything of the sort, however, either by myself or with her, but shall remain in the walk of life to which my work has allotted me. And then nobody can take offence, unless `men of iniquity should deliberately try to find a stumbling block,' which I trust will not be the case.

However, you will find me most obliging in everything I am able to do without being disloyal to Christien. I should very much like to have your advice on, for instance, where I should live, and the like. If there is some objection to my remaining in The Hague, then I owe The Hague no loyalty. And I can find somewhere to work wherever you think fit, be it a village or a town. The figures and the landscape that come my way will no doubt always be interesting enough for me to do my best, so you are welcome to speak your mind freely on the subject. But it goes without saying that there must be no question of putting me under guardianship, I made my feelings concerning that perfectly clear during the Gheel affair: that sort of thing would be quite hors de saison [inopportune].

But as far as being loyal or disloyal to Christien is concerned, my feeling is: `*I must not break a promise of marriage*.'

Had Kee Vos been willing to listen to me last summer in Amsterdam, she might not have been so quick to send me packing and then things would have been quite different. At the time, however, as you know, although I followed her all the way, although I pursued her as far as Amsterdam, all my attempts to speak to her or to establish anything with a certainty - anything I could rely on, that is - proved futile.

Now the very pace of life is driving and urging me on, as well as the work, and the new things that crop up and which I must tackle with a will if I want to hold my own in the bitter struggle. Taking things lying down is what I did in years gone by, taking action and being alert is what I do now, having found my work and my vocation.

So I consider your letter in the main quite mistaken, but perhaps that is because you haven't thought things through, and I credit you with being better than that particular letter this morning suggests.

You mention something that happened to you. I think I am able to recall something about it very faintly in the dim and distant past. If I remember rightly, you were acquainted with a girl from a lower class and … were fond of her and slept with her. Now I don't know who the person was, but I do know that you consulted Father about it and also spoke to me about it. And that Father then made you promise something about getting married, I don't know exactly what - but perhaps it was that while you remained a minor you would not do it without his consent. (The rest - what happened to the woman - I don't know.) Since you were a minor, Father had every right to step between the two of you and I can understand why he did it.

Now the difference between your case and mine is that in the first place you and she were considerably younger than Xtien and I, and secondly, your future and mine are different, that is, I for my part ply a humble trade and you hold a position which of necessity requires you to keep up a certain style.

This is all clear enough, it seems to me, and also that being a minor you were right to obey, while I for my part, being of age, am at liberty to say to Father: this is a matter in which you cannot and must not press me.

Now, you say that what has happened between Xtien and me does not mean I have to marry her. This is what Xtien and I think about it: we both want a very domesticated life, close together, *need each other every day for our work and like to be together every day*. We want there to be nothing false in our position and consider marriage the only radical means of stopping the world talking and of seeing to it that we are not … reproached with an illicit relationship. If we do not get married, they could indeed say that something or other is wrong - if we do get married we shall be very poor and give up any social pretenses, but our action will be right and honourable. You will understand this, I think.

But if you should now say, `Vincent, you're going to have a dreadful time and terrible worries,' then what I shall reply is, yes. Brother, I'm well aware of that, you are right, but, my dear fellow, what I would find even worse would be the feeling deep down inside of: `You have treacherously abandoned that woman whom you met in the winter, pregnant and sick, and have thrown her back on to the cruel cobblestones once more.' That is not going to be said about me, and you will realize by now that it isn't `obstinacy' on my part or `wantonly having it my own way,' but that I must stand by Xtien, that I have pledged her my troth and that I shall keep my pledge.

Once again, if my staying in The Hague should bother anyone, please say so frankly, I am only too happy to yield on all matters concerning a home or the like. I need a studio, a living room and a bedroom, and though I am not indifferent as to whether that will be in The Hague or elsewhere, I shall be happy to show willing. However it must all be discussed quite differently from, for example, the way Father did on the Gheel occasion. That was scandalous.

Should it be possible for me to have, say, 50 frs. a month this year (although my work still isn't saleable yet, it is the foundation on which I shall be able to build later on) - then I shall get down to business with a will and in good heart, because I shall at least know then that I shan't be lacking the barest necessities I require for my work - my daily bread, a home, drawing materials - *I shall be able* to work then.

Were I to be told for certain that you are withdrawing your support, I should be rendered powerless. With the best will in the world my hand would become paralysed - everything would indeed be dreadful then, yes, everything would be terrible. What satisfaction would that give you or anyone else? I should become downhearted and it would go hard with Christien and the child. You may think it's going too far to suppose you capable of doing anything like that, but `*such things can happen.*' If this dreadful fate has to befall me - so be it. Though it hangs over my head, I can say nothing other than: I have pledged Xtien my troth and she has pledged me hers, and we do not have it in us to break this pledge.

And yet - confound it - what's happening? - and what sort of times do we live in? - wake up, Theo! Don't let them confuse you or sway you with their Jesuitisms. Do I deserve being left in the lurch by you because I have helped a pregnant woman and will not send her back on to the streets? Is that a capital offence???

Goodbye, my dear fellow, but before you strike at me and chop off my head, *and Xtien `s and the child's as well* - sleep on it once more. But again, if it has to be, then in God's name `off with my head,' though preferably not, I still need it for drawing.

Ever yours, Vincent

P. S. Xtien and the child won't be able to pose *headless* either.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 14 May 1882

Dear Theo,
If I am to succeed in giving you further insight into what I've already written you about, you must understand the root of it. And I must not put my visit to Amsterdam in a better light than it really was. But I begin by begging you not to think me impertinent when I contradict you. And before all this, I must thank you most kindly for the enclosed 50 fr.

It will be no use if I don't put it strongly. I would remain silent if you wanted me to give in to you, but I don't think you do, and perhaps you yourself will not think it unnatural that some things in life are less developed in you than your business sense, which I fully consider twice as good as mine, and I shall not readily risk telling you this or that is not so. On the contrary, especially when you explain things to me, I often feel you know better than I. But on the other hand, when it comes to love, I am often astonished at the way you think.

For your last letter has given me more food for thought than perhaps you realize. I think my mistake and the real reason for my being refused is this: when one is without money, of course one is of no account, so it was a mistake and shortsightedness on my part to take what Mauve said literally, or to suppose for a moment that Tersteeg would remember that I have had so much trouble already.

At present money is what the right of the strongest used to be. To contradict a person is fatal, and if one does, the reaction is not that the other party is made to reflect, but that one gets a blow with the fist. That is to say, in the form of, “I will not buy from him again,” or, “I will not help him again.”

This being so, I risk my head when I contradict you, but, Theo, I don't know how I could do otherwise; if my head must be cut off, here is my neck. You know the circumstances and know that my life or death depends on your help. But I am between two fires. If I reply to your letter: Yes, Theo, you are right, I will give up Christine, then first I tell a lie in agreeing with you and second, I commit myself to doing a vile thing. If I contradict you and you act like T. and M., it will cost me my head, so to speak.

Well, for heaven's sake, off with my head, if that's the way it has to be. The other thing is even worse.

So here is a short memorandum, clearly explaining a few things which I think may possibly cause you to withdraw your help. But to conceal them so as not to lose your help seems to me an underhanded thing to do, and I would rather risk the worst. If I succeed in making you understand what I think you don't yet understand, then Christine, her child and myself will be safe. And in order to accomplish this, I must risk saying what I am going to say.

To express my feelings for Kee, I said resolutely, “She, and no other.” And her “no, never never” was not strong enough to make me give her up. I still had hope, and my love remained, notwithstanding this refusal, which I thought was like a piece of ice that would melt. But I could find no rest. The strain became unbearable because she was always silent and I never received a word in answer.

Then I went to Amsterdam. There they told me, “When you are in the house, Kee leaves it. She answers, `Certainly not him,' to your `she, and no other'; your persistence is *disgusting*.”

I put my hand in the flame of the lamp and said, “Let me see her for as long as I can keep my hand in the flame” - no wonder that later H. G. T. may have looked at my hand.

But they blew out the lamp, I believe, and said, “*You shall not see her*.”

And thereafter I also had a discussion with her brother who said - officially or unofficially - that only money would be able to achieve something here. Officially or unofficially - I find it mean in both cases, and when I left Amsterdam, I had a feeling as if I had been on a slave market.

Well, it was too much for me, especially when they spoke of my wanting to coerce her, and I felt that the crushing things they said to me were unanswerable, and that my “she, and no other” had been killed.

Then, not at once, but very soon, I felt that love die within me; a void, an infinite void came in its stead. You know I believe in God, I did not doubt the power of love, but then I felt something like, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me,” and everything became a blank. I thought, Have I been deceiving myself?…”O God, there is no God!”

That cold terrible reception in Amsterdam was too much for me, my eyes were opened at last.

Enough. Then Mauve diverted and encouraged me; I threw myself into my work with all my strength. Then toward the end of January, after I had been thrown over by Mauve and had been ill for a few days, I met Christine.

Theo, you say that if I had really loved Kee, I shouldn't have done this. But do you understand better now that I couldn't go any further after what happened in Amsterdam - should I have despaired then? Why should an honest man despair - I am no criminal - I don't deserve to be treated in such an inhuman way. Well, what can they do this time? It's true they got the best of me, they thwarted me there in Amsterdam. But I'm not asking their advice any more now, and being of age, I ask you, Am I free to marry - yes or no? Am I free to put on a workman's clothes and live like a workman - yes or no? Whom am I responsible to, who will try to force me?

To hell with anyone who wants to hinder me.

You see, Theo, I've had enough of it all; think it over and you will understand. Is my path less straight because somebody says, “You have gone astray”? C. M. always talks about the right path too, just like Tersteeg and the clergymen. But C. M. also calls De Groux a bad character, so in the future I shall let him talk, my ears are tired of it. To forget, I lie down in the sand by an old tree trunk and make a drawing of it. In a linen smock, smoking a pipe and looking at the deep blue sky - or at the moss or the grass. This soothes me. And I feel just as calm, for instance, when Christien or her mother is posing, and I estimate the proportions, and try to suggest the body with its long undulating lines under the folds of a black dress. Then I am a thousand miles away from C. M., J. P. S., and H. G. T., and much happier. But - alas, then the worries come and I must either talk or write about money, and then it all begins anew. Then I think T. and C. M. would do so much better if they didn't bother about my “path,” but encouraged my drawing.

You will say C. M. does, but listen to why his order has not been filled as yet.

Mauve said to me, That uncle of yours has only given this order because he was at your studio once; but you must understand that it doesn't mean anything and will be the first and last, and then nobody will take an interest in you. You must know, Theo, *that I cannot stand such things*; if such things are said, my hand drops as if paralyzed. Especially as C. M. has already said something about conventions, I believe. I have done twelve drawings for C. M. for 30 guilders, that is 2.50 guilders apiece; it was a difficult job, there was more than 30 guilders' worth of work in it, and I don't deserve having to consider it charity, or something like it.

I had already put a lot of effort into the six others. I had made the studies for them - and there it stopped. *The effort over the new ones has already been made*, so it is not laziness; but I am paralyzed.

I reason with myself, I won't pay any attention to it. But I'm nervous and such a thing does not go away, but comes back when I try my hand at them again; so then I must steer another course and begin another work.

I don't understand Mauve - it would have been kinder of him never to have meddled with me. *What do you advise me to do - make the drawings for* C. M. or not? I really don't know what to do.

There used to be better feeling among painters; now they try to devour each other, and are big personages who have villas and scheme to get ahead. I would rather be on the Geest, or in any grey, muddy and gloomy alley - there I am never bored, so I say, That's no place for me, I won't go there any more.

Thank God I have my work; but instead of earning money by it, I need money to be able to work, so that is the difficulty. When in a year - or I don't know how long - I shall be able to draw that Geest or any other street as I see it, with those figures of old women, workmen, girls, then Tersteeg, etc., will be very kind. But then they will hear me thunder, “Go to hell”; and I shall say, You deserted me when I was in trouble, friend, I don't know you, go away, you're standing in my light.

Dear me, why should I be afraid, what do I care about Tersteeg's “unsaleable” or “without charm”? Whenever I feel depressed, I look at “The Diggers” by Millet and “Le Blanc des Pauvres” by De Groux, and then Tersteeg becomes so small, so insignificant, and all that drivel of his becomes so foolish, that my spirits rise, and I light my pipe and start drawing again. But if ever a “civilized” person should cross my path at such a moment, he might hear things which would sober him up.

You will ask me, Theo, if these things are also applicable to you. My answer is, “Theo, who has given me bread and helped me? I think you did, so it certainly is not applicable to you.” But sometimes the thought occurs to me, Why isn't Theo a painter? Will that “civilization” ever begin to bore him? Won't he later regret that he has not left “civilization” for what it is worth, and has not learned a handicraft, taken a wife and put on the painter's smock? But there may be reasons for it which I cannot appreciate. I don't know whether you have yet learned the ABC of love. Do you think that pretentious of me? What I mean is, one feels best what love is when sitting by a sickbed, sometimes without any money in one's pocket. It is no gathering of strawberries in spring - that lasts only a few days, and most of the months are grey and gloomy. But in that gloom one learns something new; sometimes I think you know it and sometimes I think, He does not.

I want to go through the joys and sorrows of domestic life in order to paint it from my own experience. When I came back from Amsterdam, I felt that my love - so true, so honest and strong - had literally been *killed*. But after death there is resurrection. Resurgam.

Then I found Christine. There was no time to hesitate or to defer. I had to act. If I do not marry her, it would have been kinder of me to have left her alone. But a chasm will be opened by this step; I decidedly “lower” myself, as they say. But it isn't forbidden, it isn't wrong, though the world says so. I live as a labourer, it suits me; I wanted to before, but couldn't carry it out then. I hope that you will continue to stretch your hand across the chasm to me.

I mentioned 150 fr. a month, you said that I should need more. Wait a minute, my average expenses have never exceeded 100 fr. a month since I left Goupil except when I had to travel. And at first I had 30 guilders at Goupil's and later 100 fr. a month.

It's true that during these last months my expenses have been higher, but I had to set up housekeeping; and I ask you, were these expenses unreasonable or extravagant? Especially if you know what those expenses included. And how often in those long years did I have much less than 100 fr. And if I sometimes had travelling expenses, haven't I learned languages and developed my mind - is that money thrown away?

Now I want to lay a straight path for my feet. If I postpone marriage, there is something crooked in my position which is repulsive to me. She and I will skimp and be as frugal as possible if only we can marry. I am thirty years old and she is thirty-two, so we are no longer children. As to her mother and her child, the latter takes away all stain from her; I respect a woman who is a mother, and I don't ask about her past. I am glad that she has a child - it gives her exactly the experience she needs.

Her mother is very energetic and deserves a medal because she has supported a family of eight children for years. She doesn't want to be dependent, she makes her living as a charwoman.

I am writing you late at night. Christine is not well, and the time for her to go to Leyden is at hand. You must excuse me if this letter is written badly, as I am very tired.

But after receiving your letter, I wanted to write at once.

The refusal in Amsterdam was so decisive, I was dismissed so cavalierly, that it would have been foolish to go on any longer.

But ought I to have despaired then, jumped into the water or something? God forbid - I should have if I had been a wicked man. I have started a new life, not purposely, but because I had a chance to begin anew and did not refuse it.

But now it's different, and Christine and I understand each other better. We don't have to pay attention to what people say; of course we don't pretend to maintain any social standing. Familiar as I am with the prejudices of the world, I know that what I have to do is retire from the sphere of my own class, which cast me out long ago anyhow. But that's all they can do, and they can't go any further. Maybe I will wait awhile before we set up housekeeping together anyway, because the circumstances are too difficult; but if I marry, I will do it quietly, without giving notice to anyone; if any remarks are made, I shall not pay attention to them. As she is a Roman Catholic, the wedding will be even simpler, for then of course the church is out of the question; neither she nor I want to have anything to do with it.

You will say this is putting it bluntly - que soit.

I only know one thing - drawing; and she has only one regular job - posing.

I wish it were possible to take the house next to this; it is exactly the right size because the attic can be made into a bedroom and the studio is large and light - much better than the one here. But will it be possible? Even if I had only a hole to live in, I would rather have a crust of bread in my own home, however poor it might be, than live without marrying her.

She knows what poverty is, so do I. Poverty has advantages and disadvantages, yet we shall risk it in spite of poverty. Fishermen know that the sea is dangerous and the storm terrible, but they have never found these dangers sufficient to keep them ashore. They leave that philosophy to those who like it. Let the storm rise, the night descend - which is worse, danger or the fear of danger? Personally, I prefer reality, the danger itself.

Adieu, Theo, it is late; don't be angry because of my letter; I am tired and yet I wanted to write. I wish you could understand it all and that I could express myself in a clearer and gentler way, but don't be offended by it, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

I believe, or rather it begins to dawn on me, that there might be a shadow of a chance that the thought, “Theo will withdraw his help if I contradict him,” is perhaps quite unnecessary. But, Theo, I have seen such things happen so often that I shouldn't think less of you and shouldn't be angry with you if you did, because I would think, He doesn't know any better; they all act like that - from thoughtlessness, not malice.

If I may keep your help, it would be something quite unexpected, good luck which I had not counted on, for I have lived with this terrible thought a long time, and Christine too, because I always told her, “Lass, I fear there will come a time when I shall be left quite without means.” But I did not tell it to you before the right moment had arrived. If you let me keep your help, that would be a relief, a blessing so unexpected, so unhoped for, that it would quite upset me with joy; even now I dare not think of it, and I put away the thought with all my strength, even while I write you about it with a steady hand, not to show my weakness. What I experienced last winter at Mauve's hands has been a lesson to me; it has kept me prepared for the worst - a death sentence from you - namely that you stop your help.

You will say, But the help hasn't stopped - but I always receive it with certain reservations, thinking, He doesn't know yet what he will know one day; and I shall have no rest until the crisis comes, and I am prepared for the worst.

Now the crisis has come and I cannot decide, I dare not hope yet. I said to Christine, I shall be able to help you until you go to Leyden. I don't know how you will find me, with or without bread, when you come back from Leyden, but I will share what I have with you and the child. Christine does not know any details, nor does she ask for them, but she knows I shall be frank with her, and she wants to stay with me quand bien même.

Until now I have always thought it probable that you would drop me as soon as you knew everything. So I have lived from day to day with a dark fear of the worst, which I don't dare think myself free of yet. I have also worked from day to day, not daring to order more drawing or painting materials than I could pay for, not daring to undertake any painting, not daring to push on as I would have if I could have counted on Mauve's and Tersteeg's sympathy. I thought that though their kindness was superficial, their unkindness was more deeply rooted; in short, I took Mauve's words “that's all over” seriously - not when he said them (for then my face showed nothing and I braved it, like the Indians who say, “It doesn't hurt,” when they are being tortured). But since I threw the plaster casts into the coalbin, he wrote me, “I won't have anything to do with you for two months.” Well, personally I always thought, I can't expect anything from Mauve or Tersteeg, and I shall thank God if Theo will continue to send me what's necessary until I can bring Christine safely to Leyden. Then I shall explain it to him and say, Stop, this is what I have done. Do you understand it - ?

I am prepared for the worst - what's it to be? Speak plainly.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 16 May 1882

Dear Theo,

Because Christine suffered from cramps, etc., I thought it would be a good thing for her to go to Leyden once more to find out exactly how things are. She has been there and has come back already; thank God she is all right, but, as you know, in March she had an operation, and has now been examined again. She needs care and must continue to eat strengthening food and also have some more baths if possible; but there are no complications, and there is every chance she will pull through.

In March the professor could not tell exactly when she would be confined, but he thought it would be the end of May or the beginning of June. Now he says it will probably be late in June. This time he asked her many questions about whom she was living with, and from what he said about it, I now know for sure what I had guessed - that she would die if she had to walk the streets again, and when I met her this winter it was only just in time to give her the help she needed.

So, as I wrote you, I wouldn't think of leaving her - under the circumstances it would be a mean trick.

The doctor found her better than in March; the child is alive and he has given her some instructions about food, etc., so that I do not have to act in the dark.

The baby's clothes are also ready, of course the very simplest. I am not living in a castle in the air or in a dream, but in plain reality, where one must act with firmness.

Under the circumstances I know no better way for either of us than marrying her. As I wrote you, the kind tone of your letter of May 13 was more than I expected. I had no illusions, and expected that you would quite disapprove of my behaviour and would withdraw your help. And even now I hardly dare hope that your help will continue, because I know that in the eyes of most people in your position such an act is a capital crime punishable by a sort of banishment. So I am longing very much for your next letter, also to hear if you have received the drawings. But I have no illusions about it. Only I would not be sincere if I said anything to you other than that it is my decided intention to marry her as soon as possible. The reasons you give are not strong enough to make me give it up, though there is a great deal of truth in some of your remarks, especially when considered by themselves.

And now, to tell you the truth, I really need some more money this month, though I paid for the bread up to the first of June and laid in some provisions like coffee, *etc.*

Of course, since you tell me nothing's wrong as I imagined, I will certainly finish the order for C. M.; I have already made the studies. However, it will take me about three weeks to get those six drawings, for in order to get six good ones, I shall have to make more than six in addition to the work I have already done. I do not know how much I shall get for them, but I shall do my best, so I hope I shall get the money in June.

If there is some good in my behaviour toward Christine after all, it is more to *your* credit than to *mine*, as I was and am only the instrument - without your help I should have been powerless.

The money you sent has helped me on with my drawing, and moreover, up to now it has saved Christine's and the child's lives. But in a sense it would be my fault if you took it as a breach of confidence; I hope you won't.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 23 May 1882

Dear Theo,

Just a word in haste. Did you receive the drawings and my last letter? I mean the portfolio containing the large “Sorrow” and “The Roots,” *etc.*

I hear that Uncle Vincent is in Paris; I hope you did not speak to him about the matter in question. Of course they would consider it “immoral” or even worse. All right, they can chatter about it as much as they like as long as I don't have to listen to it or be present.

Yesterday I received a kind letter from Father and Mother, which would please me very much if only I could believe that this feeling would continue. But when I speak to them about the affair with Christine (which I shall certainly do in three weeks, when she has gone to Leyden and I have the time to spare, but not before), then, I repeat, will they still speak kindly when they know all this???

But my marriage does not depend on them, and you know well enough what I think in this matter, and that as I do nothing unlawful, and as I doubt their competence to judge moral affairs, their refusal would certainly grieve me, but it would not stop me or give me pause.

I am again busy with the drawings for C. M. but will they please him? Perhaps not. I can conceive such drawings only as studies in perspective, and I am doing them especially for practice.

Even if he does not take them, I shall not be sorry for the trouble they gave me, because I should like to keep them myself, and because I practiced the elements which so much depends on: perspective and proportion.

During the last fortnight I have been weak, not feeling well at all; I haven't given in to it and have gone on with my work. But, for instance, I have not been able to sleep for several nights, and have been feverish and nervous. But I force myself to keep going and working, for this is no time to get sick. I must go on.

Christine and her mother moved to a smaller house because when Christine returns from Leyden she will come to live with me, wherever I may be, either in better or in worse circumstances. It is a little house with a courtyard; I hope to make a drawing of it this week.

Every day I see more clearly that the step I am taking opens an interesting field for drawing and getting models. This must also be taken into account when judging me. My profession allows me to undertake this marriage - I could not do it if I had another position.

I am longing for your letter, and hope you will soon find time to write. I think, knowing how things are, you could do much to straighten matters out (and if you want more information, I will give it to you gladly and honestly); I repeat, knowing how things are, you will be able to moderate and change the opinions of those who have only a very imperfect notion of the matter, and so disagreements will be avoided. For you understand that I want to avoid all disagreement, gossip and quarrels as much as possible; I spoke to no one but you about it, for the sake of peace, and I shall not do it more than is absolutely necessary - as, for instance, to Father when the time has come for Christine to go to Leyden.

This is nothing I have sought, but it has come across my path and I have tackled it, and I am glad that it is something which demands action without hesitation or reflection. And I showed you the darkest side of it first, in the hope that later on you won't think it's so bad.

But I wish I knew what to do about the studio I wrote you about. I would be content with a smaller house, but I do not know of one more suitable. And I am afraid that a less suitable one would not be cheaper because then my work would suffer, though I should save a few guilders a month by paying less rent. And perhaps I should say later, Why did I let that studio go? Why didn't I try harder to get it?

I long for your coming even more than for your letter, but I understand that perhaps I shall have to wait some time still. I am not in a mood for writing, but one must do it sometimes. It would be good if you could send me something, for I am rather hard up. Well, at all events write soon. I should especially like to know your opinion about the studio. It may be gone any day. Adieu, I repeat, don't deprive yourself, but if possible send me something.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

And let me know if you have received the drawings.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 27 May 1882

Dear Theo,
Today, Saturday, I had a visit from Rappard, and I am glad he has been here. He asked after you many times. Among other things he saw the drawings I am doing for C. M., and they seemed to please him, especially a large one of the court or yard where Sien's mother lives. I wish you could see that one too, as well as another of a carpenter's shop and yard where little figures are busy. It is a great deal more complicated as to the perspective than the “Laan van Meerdervoort” I sent you, and it has given me trouble enough. You should know that at present I am working out-of-doors as early as four o'clock in the morning - in the daytime it is too difficult to work in the street because of the passers-by and the street urchins; this is also the finest moment to see the main outlines, when everything is in tone.

But, brother, it has been a hard fortnight for me. When I wrote you about the middle of May, I had only 3 or 3.50 guilders left after I had paid the baker; and I have had hardly anything to eat but dry black bread with some coffee, and Sien too. Because we had bought some things for the baby and she had been to Leyden, *etc.*

Now I have to pay the house rent on the first of June, and I have nothing, literally nothing. I hope you will send something.

A week ago I felt very faint from continuous sleeplessness. Now that I have had some luck with a few drawings and the order for C. M. is almost finished, I have new courage and am a little calmer.

But, brother, do write to me soon and deliver me from the landlord, for you know he won't be put off.

Rappard's visit has cheered me up; he seems to work very hard.

I have received 2.50 guilders from him because he saw a tear in one of the drawings and said, You must have that repaired.

That's true, I said, but I haven't the money, and the drawing must be sent off.

Then he readily said that he would be pleased to give me it; he would have given even more, but I wouldn't take it, and gave him a whole lot of wood engravings and a drawing in exchange. It was one for C. M., and as it was the best of them all, the money to have it repaired was very welcome. That same drawing will perhaps be sold afterward for 50 guilders or so, and I didn't have the money to have a tear in it repaired.

Well, I do hope, brother, that you do not think evil of Sien and me; she has learned to put up with my disagreeable side, and in many ways she understands me better than others. She is so willing to help me in everything - I can't tell you how useful she is to me. If I go into a rage once in a while either about the posing or something else, she knows how to take it, and has seen that it soon passes. Similarly, when I worry or grumble about something that does not succeed, she often knows how to quiet me, and that is something I am not able to do for myself.

And she is very thrifty, and contents herself with a piece of black bread without getting disheartened. And I do the same, if only we can make both ends meet.

I hope you have received the drawings I sent I think about May 10. There were twenty-five of them in a portfolio; I have not heard from you about them.

I do wish there were a few other people for whom I could do something on the same conditions as C. M.'s. *And especially that C. M. continues to order*, for these drawings are much better than the first, and by and by I shall do them even better. And at that price he certainly isn't getting a bad bargain.

You know how it is: if you do not forsake me because of Sien, then I shall be full of courage. And at four in the morning I am already at my work, so I shall get through with a little sympathy from those who know me. I am longing for your letter, a handshake in thought, but do write soon and deliver me from the landlord.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 28 May 1882

138 Schenkweg, The Hague

Amice Rappard,

Thanks. I have just now put my drawings into the package for Amsterdam. There are seven in all. The big one of the two "charity courts" has become quite flat, because I used Bristol board, and the lines have greatly gained in quickness. Then there is the "Florist's Garden"; this I changed the way you suggested, *i.e.* I studied the side of the ditch more carefully, as well as the water in the foreground, and only now it shows to it's full advantage, I think, and expresses "Spring" and a gentle silence.

And then the "Carpenter's Shed" [F 939, JH 150] - taken from the window of my studio - by working on it with pen and ink I have brought a new kind of black into it, and now "the sun is shining," because the lights show up more strongly. Today I was at it quite early, for I wanted to make another one like it, and went to the dunes to draw a fish-drying barn, also seen from a height like the carpenter's shed [F 938, JH 152], and now it is nearly one o'clock in the night, but, thank God, everything is finished, and I can look my redoubtable landlord in the face without fear. And so "ça ira encore" - -

I am so glad to have seen you again, and what you told me of your work interested me very much indeed, I assure you. I should so much like to take a few walks with you in this neighbourhood some time. For undoubtedly you would find a lot of subject matter in those fish-drying barns at Scheveningen for instance. They are enormously Ruysdael-like (I mean that picture of the bleaching fields at Overveen). But perhaps you know The Hague and Scheveningen better than I do. But in case you do not know the "Geest," the "Mud's End," etc., that is to say the Whitechapel of The Hague with all its alleys and courts, I offer to accompany you there, whenever you come to The Hague again.

I have found two more wood engravings for you, one by Mrs. Edwards and the other by Green. The latter one is especially beautiful, an artist painting a signboard with people looking on; time: Louis XVI. And I think I also have an extra copy of a fine Rochussen.

It seems to me that, if you wanted to, you could have a much finer collection than I have, but perhaps you have it already. I have never seen your complete collection, only the small Dürers and Holbeins and Du Mauriers and some others. If you should find something interesting in this line, please let me know.

Do you know "The Wayfarers" by Fred Walker? It is a large etching of a blind old man led by a boy along a frozen gravel road, with the ditch along witch there is copse-wood covered with glazed frost, on a winter evening. It certainly is one of the most sublime creations in this style, with a very peculiar, modern sentiment, perhaps less powerful than Dürer in his "Knight, Death and Devil," but perhaps even more intimate, and certainly as original and sincere.

It is a pity that the artists here know so little of their English colleagues. Mauve, for instance, was quite thrilled when he saw Millais' landscape "Chill October," but for all that they don't believe in English art, and they look upon it in too superficial a manner, I think. Over and over again Mauve says, "This is literary art," but all the while he forgets that English writers like Dickens and Eliot and Currer Bell, and of the French, for instance, Balzac, are so astonishingly "*plastic*," if I may use the expression, that their work is just as powerful as, for instance, a drawing by Herkomer or Fildes or Israëls.

Speaking for myself, I hate skepticism just as much as sentimentality; I do not want to suggest that the artists here are skeptics or cynics, but sometimes they seem to be, and take on a certain air of it, whereas confronted with nature they are as serious and devout as can be. However, I often catch myself making the same mistake, after which I lapse into sentimentality on the rebound, more than I ever intend to, so that I have hardly a right to criticize them.

How much that is beautiful - in the sense of picturesque - is disappearing these days! The other day I read something by the son of Charles Dickens; he said, "If my father were to come back, he would find little of the London he described, the 'old' London is disappearing - is being 'sanified.'" And in our country it is just the same - those nice little courts - they are being replaced by rows of houses, in the highest degree *un*picturesque, unless they are still being built, for then they are, what with the sheds and scaffolding and workmen, very pleasant to look at. For instance, there is a quarter behind Bazar Street and Laan [Avenue] van Meerdervoort where I have seen beautiful things: building plots being dug up or levelled, sheds, wooden huts, hoardings, etc., etc., whatever you like.

Rather interesting too are the public soup kitchens and under all circumstances the third-class waiting rooms. If I did not have to make city views for a living, I would do nothing but figure drawings these days, but I have not found anybody who would buy them, and regularly I have to pay for models, though now and then I can get people to pose for nothing.

I am very much pleased with the model I have; I mean that woman who was in my studio when you were here, for she is learning more every day, and understands me. For instance, when something goes wrong and I fly into a rage and get up and say, “Damn it, it's all wrong!” or something even worse than that, she does not take it as a personal affront, as of course most others would, but lets me calm down and start all over again. And she undergoes the tedious work of finding the right light and the right pose patiently. So I think her a honey. If I want to ascertain the height of a figure out-of-doors or to fix the right position of a little figure on a drawing I am working on in the open air, as, for instance, the way a figure stands out against the background of a fishing boat on the beach, and where the light touches it, I have only to say, “Be there at such and such a time,” and she is there.

Oh, there is gossip enough, because I am always in her company, but why should that bother me? - I never had such a good assistant as this ugly (???), faded woman. In my eyes she is beautiful, and I find in her exactly what I want; her life has been rough, and sorrow and adversity have put their marks upon her - now I can do something with her.

When the earth is not ploughed, you can get no harvest from it. She has been ploughed - and so I find more in her than in a crowd of unploughed ones.

I hope you will write me soon again, and if you agree, I should like to correspond regularly, as far as our respective tasks permit, provided we warn each other as soon as our “practical talk” lapses into unpracticality, and without getting angry at such a warning, as was the case with Mr. Tersteeg, as I told you.

Tomorrow I hope to go into the dunes, to the same fish-drying barns. The other day I read that big book about Millet, written by his friend Sensier; it is very interesting, and if you have not read it, I strongly recommend it. There is much in it that only Sensier could know, because he was Millet's intimate friend; one finds absolutely new things in it, at least it was this way with me, though I have read quite a number of things about Millet.

Well, goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 30 May 1882

[Reproduction of the postcard.]
[Postcard, written in English]

My dear brother,

Today or tomorrow being the 1st of June, I promised to pay my landlord 5 guilders rent of studio for the month of April + 7.50 guilders for last month, makes 12.50 guilders.

But not having up to now received any letter of yours since that of May 12th, I have nothing to pay him his twelve guilders and 50 c. with. The man will surely not give me any longer delay, but they can immediately sell my furniture publicly. Whatever may be your opinion concerning the things I told you do not let it come to this scandal, my drawings for C. M. are ready, but I shall not be able to get that money early enough. I say again, let us at all events avoid irregularity and public scandal, and talk and write calmly on the subject, till we know what ought to be done. Therefore I hope you will send me what I so greatly want, and will write. I work day and night, and have a small drawing ready for you, which I will send by and by. I have no money for a stamp, excuse the postcard, and believe me,

Yours truly, Vincent

Letter from Reverend Van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Amsterdam/Nuenen, 1882

Reverend Van Gogh to Theo, on visiting Vincent in hospital.

14 June 1882

Vincent was somewhat surprised to see me, he was a little irritated, but I succeeded in bringing him back to a more normal mood, and promised to come back the next day. He does not look bad, his pulse is calm, and he is quite normal. He nurses grievances against Uncle Cor because he has not been very enthusiastic about his drawings. Van Rappard, who had seen them, had called them good. This Van Rappard remains faithful to him; he has written Vincent again to encourage him.

[…] I hope that there could not be any danger in that so-called model, could there?

[…] He always remains strange, and my expectations are not great; if only he does not go down more and more, and if only he does not throw himself away on an unworthy creature…Don't say I am too suspicious; I say these things to no one but you, and you will understand only too well what I fear. He has always had a pechant for people of lower classes, and out of sheer cussedness and a feeling of loneliness a man might get entangled in the wrong sort of ties.

Reverend Van Gogh to Theo.

28 November 1882

Cor is enjoying much friendship from the Carp family in Helmond, one of the most distinguished families in that town. Therefore on St. Nicholas Day Cor should give a present to Naud Carp who is at the H. B. [Hogere Burgerschool] with him.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 1-2 June 1882

Dear Theo,
Your letter and its enclosure came and I paid the landlord straight away. Since there is a mortgage on the house, the rent is collected by someone else who turned the people downstairs out last month and gave them short shrift. What you say about dividing the month into 3, so that I would get the money on the 1st, 10th and 20th, is extremely welcome news. That will make things much easier for me.

I need not tell you what a relief your letter was.

Did you receive the drawing, “The Fish Drying Barn”? I am busy doing a few more of them, so that you will have 2 or 3 done in the same way. C. M. has also got some done like this but I haven't heard from him yet.

I want to tell you something about what you seem to be afraid of, namely the possibility that the family may want to take steps to place me under legal guardianship. If you really think “*a few witnesses (and even then false ones) are all that would be needed to testify that you cannot manage your financial affairs and that would be enough* to entitle Father to deprive you of your civil rights and place you under guardianship,” if, I say, you really think that this sort of thing is so easy to do these days, then I take the liberty of questioning it.

The legal procedure of guardianship, which has been disgracefully abused so often in order to get rid of individuals considered “troublesome” or “unpleasant” (mauvais coucheur [awkward customer]), can no longer be applied quite so easily these days. And the law gives the accused the right to appeal and many another remedy.

But you might say: a clever lawyer can twist the law, etc., *etc.* Que soit, I tell you that it isn't quite so quick and easy to place somebody under guardianship nowadays…I know of a case in which even the Jesuits failed to have a guardianship order placed on someone they wanted out of the way, for the simple reason that the man said, “I am positively the last person for whom a guardianship order is even slightly appropriate,” and refused to give in.

Again, there was the case of someone who, placed under supervision somewhere against his will so that he couldn't go where he chose, warned the person under whose supervision he had been placed that he had no right to deprive him of his liberty and that he would have to let him go … warned him a few times coolly and quite calmly, but was rebuffed. Then bashed his guardian's brains in with a poker and stood there quite calmly and gave himself up. The case was investigated and the result was a complete acquittal, since in certain extreme cases there exists a “right of self-defence,” and when the murder question came up the original case was re-examined and it turned out that the accused was not someone who merited guardianship.

In short, it is far from easy nowadays to place under guardianship someone who protests in a calm, manly and open manner. I really do not believe that the family would do anything like that … but, you may say, they already tried to do it on the Gheel occasion. Alas, yes, Father is capable of doing it, but I must tell you that if he dares to try anything of the sort again, I shall resist him for all I'm worth. He had best think twice before he starts attacking me, but once again, I doubt they would dare do such a thing. If they do have the will and the temerity, I am not going to say, “Oh, please don't do that,” but on the contrary will have no hesitation in letting them get on with it so that they incur public disgrace and are saddled with the costs of the case.

Let me tell you, I know of a case where a noble and very rich family tried to place somebody under guardianship and enlisted the services of lawyers and Jesuits - and yet failed with the person in question - although there were *two* complaints raised against him, in the first place his incompetence in financial affairs and in the second place his being of unsound mind. He protested and the judge let the family know unofficially that they would do well to drop the case. The family had to give up even before the legal proceedings actually started.

Now I would just like to add this - since you are aware that I would always protest against anything of the kind, if at some time or other they should try to take advantage of my being ill or indisposed, by, for instance, “taking action against me,” you will know that it is without my consent. In the event of my being ill, I hope you would object if anyone tried to profit from my helplessness. When my health is good I can take care of myself and am afraid of nothing of that sort. And I simply cannot imagine anyone really taking such a step - but should you ever hear that such moves are afoot, please let me know.

I don't mean if they are *talking* about it or *saying* something about it, of course, I take no notice of tittle-tattle, but I do take notice when it is translated into action. If they should *do* something, then I hope you will warn me. I know the law on guardianship, and *I do not believe they can do anything to me*.

Once before in my life, though many years ago, I received a letter written in the same vein as your last one. And that was from H. G. T., whom I had consulted about something, and I have regretted ever since that I broached the matter with him. I well remember that I was seized by a kind of panic at the time and that I was frightened of my family. Now, some 10 or 12 years later, I have learned to think differently of my obligations towards and relations with my family.

Father keeps going on about the “respect and obedience” I am supposed to owe him. I shall not claim that a child does not owe his parents respect and obedience, all I want is to point out that Father has taken undue advantage of it more than once, for instance by immediately labelling as disrespectful any difference of opinion one may have with him. It would be a pretty kettle of fish if I ordered my life the way Father would like me to. My drawing would most certainly come to an end, for I should be unable to do any more. I might be able to come to terms with Father's way of thinking and talk things over with him if he acquired some understanding of art, but that will never happen. Clergymen often introduce “things of beauty” into a sermon, but it's dismal stuff and dreadfully stodgy.

Now I am glad that you have given me your frank opinion of Sien, namely that she tricked me and that I allowed myself be taken in, and I can understand why you should think that, because such things do happen. However, I remember once when a girl did try something like that, I shut the door in her face so hard that I rather doubt I am likely to be taken in by such sharp practices.

The way matters stand with Sien is that I am genuinely attached to her and she to me - that she is my loyal helpmate, who goes everywhere with me - and who is becoming more indispensable to me by the day. I feel less passion for her than I did for Kee Vos last year. But the kind of love I have for Sien is the only one I am still capable of after the disappointment of that first passion. She and I are two unhappy people who keep each other company and share a burden, and that is precisely why unhappiness is making way for happiness, and the unbearable is becoming bearable.

Her mother is a little old woman just like the ones Frère paints.

Now you will understand that, given that I remain faithful to her, I should set little store by the formality of marriage were it not that the family does. Father, for one, and I know this for certain, attaches great importance to it, and although he won't approve of my marrying her, he would consider it even worse if I lived with her without being married. His advice would be to leave her, and he would give that advice in this form: *wait*, which is cold comfort and quite inappropriate. That is typical of Father…he puts things off that are urgent and pressing, and this can be absolutely infuriating. So Father had best keep his “waiting” to himself, for if he came out with it, I should not be able to contain myself.

I am a man of 30 with wrinkles on my forehead and lines on my face that make me look 40 and my hands are full of furrows - yet when Father looks at me through his spectacles he sees me as a little boy (1½ years ago Father wrote to me, “You are in your first youth”). And that is said with the tuppence-worth of profundity I have heard so often before.

Do you know what I think Father and Uncle Stricker are like? Like `Les deux augures' by Gérôme. But I am a “mauvais coucheur” - que soit.

Now you will say, Vincent, you had far better lose yourself in perspective and the Fish Drying Sheds. And then I shall say, you are quite right, brother, and that is why I am getting down to work on the two drawings that go with that first one, and which you will soon be receiving as proof that I like nothing better than losing myself in nature and drawing and not losing myself in such things as being placed under guardianship which seem to me utterly ridiculous. Regards, with my heartfelt thanks for your loyal help,

Ever yours, Vincent

I kept this letter back because I wanted to send you the small drawings at the same time, but they still need more work. One is finished, though, namely another fish drying shed. Sien and I have been camping in the dunes from morning till night for days on end, like real Bohemians. We took bread along and a small bag of coffee and fetched hot water from a hot-water-&-coals woman in Scheveningen.

That hot-water-&-coals woman and her surroundings are marvellous, charming beyond words, I've called at her little shop as early as 5 o'clock in the morning when the street-sweepers go there for their coffee. My dear fellow, that would really be something to draw!!! Just getting the people I want to pose would cost a pretty penny, but I've a good mind to do it.

Write to me when you get a chance, particularly what you think of these last three drawings. And also if it is really your view that I ought to be more afraid than I am of being placed under guardianship, to my mind an impossible eventuality. Because I should not remain indifferent if steps were actually being taken, that goes without saying. Having to go to Etten would be most inconvenient for me right now, in the first place because I'm so busy, and 2nd because the trip would cost more than I feel I can afford and I would sooner spend it on Sien.

I think it a delightful prospect that you are coming, I am longing to know what impression Sien will make on you. There is nothing special about her, she is just an ordinary woman of the people who has something of the sublime for me. Whoever loves a plain, ordinary person and has endeared himself to her is happy - despite the dark side of life. Had she not needed help last winter then the bond between her and me would not have been forged in the circumstances, that is after my disappointment and spurned love. As it was, however, it was precisely the feeling of being able to do something useful après tout [after all], despite that disappointment, that brought me to myself again and revived me. Not that I went out looking for it, but I found it, and now there is a warm affection between her and me and it would be quite wrong to give that up.

I might easily have grown disenchanted and sceptical if I had not met Sien - but she and my work now keep me going. And I should like to add this: because Sien has taken to all the toil and moil of a painter's life and is so willing to pose, I think I shall become a better artist with her than if I had ended up with Kee Vos. For though Sien is not as graceful, and her manners are perhaps, or rather certainly, quite different, she is so full of goodwill and dévouement [devotion] that I am moved by it.

Heyerdahl has seen Sorrow now, but I should be glad if a draughtsman, for instance Henri Pille, could have a look at the last three drawings. I'm sure H. Pille no longer remembers me - though I have been in his company and know that he is someone who can behave very oddly at times - and I don't know whether he would say anything. But all I should want to know is whether the drawings make any impression on him and if they appeal to him. I say this in case you run into Henri Pille from time to time, for it would have to be as if by chance that you let him see them.

I must also repeat that I am getting on very well with my collection of woodcuts, which I regard as belonging to you, with me holding a life-interest in them. I now have a good thousand sheets of English (mainly Swains), American and French. And Rappard, for instance, who is also collecting them these days, was greatly taken with them. So that is something which belongs to you though you haven't seen it yet. I only regret that I was unable to buy Doré's London recently, for which the Jew asked 7.50 guilders, which I couldn't afford. And also a Boetzel Album. Anyway, when you come here, you shall have a look at them and, I hope, like them, and perhaps through them become acquainted with some artists of whom you knew little or nothing until now.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 2-3 June 1882

Dear Theo,
What I feel obliged to tell you once more is this. You know very well that up to this very day there has been nothing in my life of a criminal nature, and that I am in full possession of my civil rights as a Netherlander. Further, that I shall take good care to avoid all things prohibited by the laws of this country, but consequently that I shall not suffer myself to be molested or to be put under guardianship or anything of the sort. I know quite well that in our family very ugly things have been said about me repeatedly and in various ways, although I do not know the source from which they originated. But I very much doubt whether those who said them would have the courage to swear to them before a judge or something like that. I do not know if you have the Dutch constitution and the other laws in your possession. Personally, I have consulted them repeatedly on questions in which I myself was concerned when I was in doubt whether this or that was legally justified. And not just the Dutch laws; at times I even took the trouble to compare the Dutch regulations with the French or English constitutions. It wasn't just recently necessary for me to look up the law; I had to in the past, when I was studying some points in history.

Therefore I can tell you in all tranquillity that I am waiting for things to take their course; I only hope that nothing of the sort will happen and that, on the contrary, the family will prove disposed to arrange things reasonably and peacefully, should the necessity arise.

I must tell you, Theo, that sometimes I perceived that Father, for instance, does *not* always take the trouble to look things up, or that he bases and maintains a judgement on such shaky premises and such superficial impressions, information or gossip that it doesn't cut any ice. Besides one should not consider a clause separately, without relation to other laws, but rather relate it to the modifications and clarifications of the pertinent clauses which appear with it.

When the law says, for instance, “A child owes respect to its parents,” which is the introduction to the law on paternal rights, it is not enough to fly into a rage and say, “You don't show enough respect for your parents” - one ought to think it over and try to find out if there really is something illegal in the child's behaviour before one starts shouting about the law.

But this is what happens so often in our family - there is some gossip, it is inflated, it is exaggerated to the limit; and then they form an opinion or a resolution about someone, sometimes wholly without the particular person's knowledge or without having talked it over with him, only taking notice of impressions, hearsay, communications (the devil take them, particularly the last!). Our venerable Uncle Cent also has a way of gathering “information” which I consider anything but fair. As for me, when I saw such things happen at home, I told Father often enough, You will find no blessing in it.

Just think, Theo, how different things might have been at home, for instance, if Father could have been less distrustful of me, a bit less suspicious; if, instead of considering me a person who could only do wrong, he had shown more patience and good will in order to understand my real intentions - in which he has always been sorely mistaken. In the first place, he would have felt less grief on my account, and would have been easier in his mind about me; and in the second place, he would have spared me much sorrow. For it is a great sorrow to think, This is worse than having no home at all, no father, no mother, no relations - and I have often thought so, as I do now.

But one thing is certain, it is wrong to act and leave the person concerned out of things; I do not even believe in a family council taking resolutions about a person unless the accused, or rather the person over whom the family council was gathered, is present. But what is a family council? In most cases nothing more than an intrigue, and occasionally a vindication of family pride - beaucoup de bruit pour peu de besogne [much ado about nothing].

But often something is decided upon which proves that the persons who were present did not take the law into account, and the resolution would not cut any ice if it were actually laid before a judge.

If I really were bad or vicious or a mischief-maker or a low schemer or an incompetent, I should really be afraid. However, being what I am, I firmly believe I need not be afraid of anything the family or some members of the family may attempt to do.

It is my sincere wish that nothing will be attempted, not because I am afraid of anything, but because I prefer peace to bickering.

I do wish you knew Sien, but you are so far away, and it is impossible for me to describe a person in such a way that you would know her well just from that description. However, I can try.

Do you remember our old nurse at Zundert, Leen Veerman? If my memory does not deceive me, Sien is that kind of person. Her type of profile resembles “L'Ange de la Passion” by Landelle, you know the one I mean, a kneeling figure; the print is published by Goupil. But of course she is not exactly like this, I say it only to give you an idea of the lines of her face. She is slightly pock-marked, so she is no longer beautiful, but the lines of her figure are simple and not ungraceful.

What I appreciate in her is that she is not coquettish with me, goes her way quietly, is thrifty, is quite willing to adapt herself to the circumstances and to learn, so that she will be able to help me with my work in a thousand ways. And she is useful to me just because she is no longer handsome, no longer young, no longer coquettish, no longer foolish. Her health has been very bad, and last winter she was very weak. Now, by eating simple food, by walking in the open air a lot, and by taking baths, she has become much healthier and stronger. But pregnancy is a difficult time. However, her speech is ugly and she often says things and uses expressions which, for instance, our sister Willemien, who has been brought up differently, would never use. But this is something that I don't mind in the least. I would rather have her speak coarsely and be good than be refined in speech and heartless. But that is just it - she has a good heart, has endurance, patience and good will, puts herself out to help me. She comes every week to clean the studio to save the money I should have to pay a cleaning woman. Well, we shall be poor at times, but as long as she has enough to eat, she is not sickly in the sense of having some ailment, but she has suffered a great deal, for instance, she had smallpox and later throat trouble. But there is no reason why she cannot live long and get quite well again.

I must put a question to you confidentially. Do you think Father is afraid that I shall ask him for money on this occasion? I certainly wouldn't. Father has often told me that my education, etc., has cost more than that of the others, therefore in case of my marriage I would not ask Father for anything, not even for an old cup and saucer. Sien and I have what's strictly necessary. The only thing we cannot do without, as long as I do not sell my work, is the 150 fr. from you, for rent, bread, shoes, drawing materials - in short, for daily expenses.

I ask nothing, not even an old cup and saucer. *I ask but one single thing: to let me love and care for my poor, weak, ill-used little wife as well as my poverty permits, without their trying to separate, worry or hurt us.*

Nobody cared for her or wanted her, she was alone and forsaken like a worthless rag, and I have taken her up and have given her all the love, all the tenderness, all the care that was in me; she has felt this and she has revived, or rather, she is reviving.

You know the old fable or parable: There was a poor man in a town who had but one single little ewe lamb which he had bought and fed, and it had been raised in his house - it ate his bread and drank from his cup and slept in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. There was also a rich man in that town who possessed many herds of sheep and oxen, but he took that one ewe lamb from the poor man and killed it.

You see, if Tersteeg, for instance, could do what he liked, he would separate Sien from me, force her back into her former damned life which she has always hated - and why?

Know it well, the life of the woman, of the children, of me, depends on that little thread of 150 fr. a month until my work begins to sell. If that little thread breaks before that time, then “morituri te salutant.” It is the least we can manage on, and only with the greatest economy at that. But we are happy this way because love binds us so closely.

Whether Father and Mother take it quietly or not will three-fourths depend on what you tell them. If you oppose me, then the trouble starts. If you say something like, Keep calm, don't meddle, or if you try to reassure them in some way, they will keep quiet. You need not compromise yourself, however, or take any responsibility. In no way, for that responsibility rests with me, but if you remain to me what you have been until now, you can reassure then in two ways as to the financial side. First, that I have your monthly allowance for the necessary expenses, secondly, that I shall not ask anything from them, not a penny, not even an old cup and saucer. Finally, that I already have what's strictly necessary - furniture, bedding, child's clothes, cradle, *etc.*

Well, brother, I hope all “dramatic” scenes will be avoided, and that we may all keep calm; that is what I hope and strive for.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3 June 1882

Dear Theo,

Today, Saturday, I am sending you those two drawings, “Fish Drying Barn” in the dunes at Scheveningen, and “Carpenter's Workshop and a Laundry” (seen from my studio window).

I have been thinking of you very often lately, and also of that time long ago when, as you remember, you visited me once at The Hague, and we walked together along the Rijswijk road and drank milk at that mill. It may be this has influenced me somehow when doing these drawings; I have tried to draw the things as naively as possible, exactly as I saw them before me. Looking back on those days of the mill, how sympathetic that time always seems to me; however, it would have been impossible for me to put what I saw and felt on paper. So I say that the changes time brings do not alter my basic feelings; I think they are just developed in another form. My life, and perhaps after all yours, too, is not as sunny now as it was then; but I would not go back, because through that very trouble and adversity I have seen some good arise, namely the ability to express that feeling.

Rappard was greatly pleased with a drawing similar to one which C. M. has, and also with all the others I drew for C. M., especially the large one of the little yard. And he is a man who understands my intentions, and who appreciates all the difficulties. I think you would find Rappard greatly changed since his first visit to Paris, when you knew him.

In front of me is a book, an illustrated Household edition of Dickens. Those illustrations are splendid, they are drawn by Barnard and Fildes.

There are some parts of old London in it which, on account of the peculiar wood engraving, have quite a different aspect from, for instance, the “Carpenter's Shop.” But I believe that the way to acquire that strength and power is quietly to continue observing faithfully. As you see, there are already several planes in this drawing, and one can look around it and through it, in every nook and cranny. It still lacks vigour - at least it is far from having as much of that quality as those illustrations, but it will come by and by.

I have had news from C. M. in the form of a postal order for 20 guilders but without one written word. So I do not know as yet whether he will give me a new order, or whether the drawings are to his liking. But in comparison with the price paid for the first one, 30 guilders, and taking into consideration that this last parcel (the first contained 12 little ones, this one contained one small one; 4 like those I am now sending you; 2 large ones; so 7 pieces in all) was more important than the first, it seems to me that C. M. was not in a good mood when he received them, or that for some reason or other they did not please him. I will readily admit that to an eye that is accustomed to watercolours exclusively, there might be something crude in drawings in which one has scratched with a pen and lights have been rubbed out or put in again with body-colour. But there are people who are not afraid of that crudeness, just as there are people who think it sometimes pleasant and invigorating for a healthy man to take a walk during a storm.

Weissenbruch, for instance, would not think these drawings unpleasant or uninteresting.

As things are, I should like to know whether C. M. would care to order new ones. Of course I will not or cannot force them on him, but I hope that when you come here, you will find out how things stand.

Of course I am content with 20 guilders, particularly because I left it to him to fix the price; but I had thought that he would not give me 10 guilders less for these than for the previous lot. If he approves of my beginning another 6 or 12 drawings for him, I shall certainly do so, because I shall not let any opportunity to sell something pass.

I shall try my best to please him, for if it only pays my rent and makes things somewhat easier for me, it is worth while. But he himself had spoken of paying more rather than less for more elaborate drawings. And if I mention it, it is after all because I want to know what to do in case of a possible new order or no order at all. It may also be that he will write about it himself later on.

One of these days when I have time, I shall send you a little list of my collection of wood engravings. I am sure you will like them.

If it is true that last winter I have spent less for paint than other artists, I have spent *more* on making an instrument for studying proportion and perspective, the description of which can be found in a book by Albrecht Dürer, and which the old Dutch masters also used. It makes it possible to compare the proportion of objects near by with those on a more distant plane, in cases where construction according to the rules of perspective is not possible. And when one tries to do it *with the eye alone* - unless one is an expert and very far advanced - it is always hopelessly wrong.

I did not succeed in making the instrument at once, but I managed it at last, after many efforts, with the help of the carpenter and the smithy. And after more efforts, I see a chance to get even better results.

I should be very pleased if you perhaps had in your wardrobe a discarded coat and pair of trousers fit for me. For when I buy something, I do my best to get things which are as practical as possible for working in the dunes or at home, but my street clothes are getting very shabby. And though I am not ashamed to wear common clothes when I go out to work, I am ashamed indeed of gentlemen's clothes that have a shabby genteel air. But my work clothes are not untidy at all, just because I have Sien to take care of them and make the necessary small repairs.

I close this letter by repeating that I hope so much the family will not regard my relation with Sien as an intrigue, which it isn't at all. This would disgust me beyond words, and raise the barrier between us still higher. What I hope is that people with a certain untimely wisdom will not meddle in order to prevent my living with her. You speculated about an inheritance, but that is quite out of the question; there is nothing for me to inherit that I know of. There cannot be anything I think, for there *is* nothing; in my opinion they have literally *no* money at home. The only person from whom I might have inherited in quite different circumstances, because I am named after him - Uncle Vincent - is someone whom I have been on decidedly bad terms with for years, for various reasons; and things cannot be redressed as though I were his protégé. Certainly I wouldn't wish it, and of course such a thing wouldn't occur to him, though I hope that if we meet by chance, like we did last year, we shall not have a public quarrel. And now, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 4 or 5 June 1882

Amice Rappard,

Herewith I am returning the 2.50 guilders you were so kind as to lend me. I got a letter about my drawings, but received even less than I expected, although I did not expect more than 30 guilders for the seven sheets. I received 20 guilders with a scolding in the bargain: did I happen to think that such drawings had the slightest commercial value?

I think you will admit that times are not easy, and such experiences (and there are so many worse things - compared with other kinds of treatment, this may be called generous) - and such experiences, I say, are not exactly very encouraging.

Art is jealous, and demands our whole strength; and then, when one devotes all one's powers to it, to be looked upon as a kind of unpractical fellow and all kinds of other things - yes, that leaves a bitter taste in one's mouth.

Oh well, we must try to carry on.

I answered him that I did not pretend to be acquainted with the commercial value of things - that since he as a merchant told me there was no commercial value in them, I did not want to contradict him or to deny it - that I personally attached more importance to the artistic value, and preferred to interest myself in nature instead of calculating prices and fixing commercial values - that if, after all, I spoke to him about the price, and could not give my things gratis for nothing, this was because, like all other human beings, I have my human needs, wanting food and a roof over my head, and so on, and that I considered it my duty to adjust these relatively insignificant matters. But I told him that I did not want to impose my work upon him against his wishes, and that I was willing to send him new drawings, but that I was equally willing to reconcile myself to losing his custom. But I am practically sure that what will happen is that this behaviour of mine will be considered ungrateful, rude and impertinent. And that as soon as the subject is raised, I shall be reproached in this way “Your uncle in Amsterdam, who meant so well by you, and was so kind to you, and gave you such help ... in consequence of your pretentiousness and obstinacy... you treated him so ungratefully that it is your own fault, etc., etc.”

My friend Rappard, in point of fact I don't know whether I ought to laugh or cry over such an incident. I think it so characteristic. Of course - those rich merchants are the decent, honest, righteous, loyal, sensitive fellows, and we, poor devils, who sit and draw, in the country, or in the street, or in the studio, at times very early in the morning, at other times in the dead of night, at times in the blazing sun, at other times in the snow, *we* are the fellows without finer feelings, without practical minds, and above all, without "distinguished manners." All right, so be it!

This uncle of mine in Amsterdam also told me with great aplomb that De Groux was really "a bad man." You will understand how much this altered my opinion of father De Groux. The only thing I said - and to which he has not made an answer up till now, this noble merchant - was this: "Cependant il me semble qu'il s'agit bien moins de *gagner* que de *mériter*." [And yet it seems to me that it is much less a question of *earning* than of *deserving*.]

Oh well - I only mention it to open the safety valve of the engine a bit, so to speak. Otherwise I might go on bearing a grudge because of the whole affair, whereas there is nothing I wish more than to stop thinking about it and to forget it altogether - but these fellows always begin by being so nice; at first they are so charming that, when it comes to the point, one is all the more flabbergasted.

Adieu; once more: many thanks, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 8 or 9 June 1882

Municipal Hospital (4 class ward No. 9)
Dear Theo,

If you come here towards the end of June, you will find me at work again, I hope; for the time being I am in the hospital, where I shall stay only a fortnight, however. For three weeks I have been suffering from insomnia and low fever, and passing water was painful. And now it seems that I really have what they call the "clap," but only a mild case.

So now I have to stay quietly in bed here, swallow many quinine pills, and also have injections now and then, either of pure water or of alum water, so it is as harmless as can be. Therefore you need not worry at all about it. But you know, one must not neglect such things, and should have them attended to at once, because neglect only aggravates it. Witness Breitner, who is still here, though in another ward, and perhaps he will leave soon; he doesn't know I'm here. You will do me a favour by not talking about it, for people sometimes exaggerate so, and gossip makes things seem worse. You're the only one I'm telling exactly what it is; you needn't keep it a secret if anyone should ask you directly, and at all events you needn't get alarmed about it.

Of course I had to pay a fortnight in advance, 10.50 guilders for all expenses. There is no difference as to food or treatment between the persons who are free patients and those who pay 10.50 guilders; there are ten patients in a ward, and I can only say that the treatment is very good in all respects. I do not feel bored at all, and the rest and the thoroughly practical, intensive medical treatment do me good.

If it is convenient, be so kind as to send 50 fr. about June 20 to the above-mentioned address, but *not* by registered mail. You know that I received 100 fr. on June 1. So then I shall be safe no matter what happens. If I have to stay longer, I will pay extra and stay on, and if not, I shall have the money to start work again. Of course I should prefer to start working in a fortnight, and within a fortnight I shall certainly be longing for a walk in the dunes.

Sien comes to see me on visiting days and keeps an eye on the studio.

Now you should know that the day before I came here, I received a letter from C. M. in which he wrote a whole lot about the "interest" he has in me, and which he says Mr. Tersteeg has also shown me, but he did not approve of my having been so ungrateful to Tersteeg for his marks of sympathy. It may be so. I am lying here calmly and quietly enough, but I can tell you, Theo, that I should certainly lose my temper if some person or other came to see me again with the kind of interest Tersteeg has shown me on certain occasions. And when I think how he pushed his interest so far as to have the nerve to compare me with an opium smoker, then I am still astonished that for my part I did not show him my interest in the form of a “go to hell.”

Speaking of smoking opium - the comfort and the luxury, the kind of glory in which H. G. T. moves, and a reasonably strong dose of flattery people in general administer to him, these are the things which drug his Honour more than he himself is conscious of.

In short, notwithstanding the superficial elegance of his behaviour, notwithstanding his superficially refined manners, his nice clothes, etc., etc., when thinking them over, and also recalling them to my mind, I find something “*false*” in his Honour's character. I wish it were otherwise, but I cannot speak differently.

Without doubting for a moment that his Honour is a clever man, another question is important to my respecting him. Is he a good man? That is to say, a man who does not nurture hatred, grudges, chicanery, sarcasm in his mind merely on principle. That is the question.

I did not answer C. M.'s last letter, nor shall I. However, I appreciate his saying that sometime he will buy from me again out of interest, especially if he means it, which remains to be seen.

Of course a letter from you would make me very happy these days. Sien is getting ready to go to Leyden. I often think of her - I am expecting her now - I hope she will pull through safely.

I have fought against being ill as long as I could, and continued working, but at last I felt it was urgent to consult a doctor.

But this morning he again told me that I would soon be better.

I am the less sorry to be lying quietly here for a few days, seeing that in case I should need to, I should be able to get an official statement from the doctor here to the effect that I am not the person to be sent to Gheel or to be put under guardianship.

And if this should not be enough, another one, if I were to take the trouble, from the Medical Director of the Lying-in Hospital at Leyden, a professor.

But perhaps those people who might possibly feel the urge to declare that it would be such a great advantage to *society* or to the *family* if someone like me were declared insane or put under guardianship are such awfully big bugs that they know much more about those things than, for instance, the doctor here.

Enfin.

Did you receive the two little drawings?

Adieu, a handshake, and wishing you as much prosperity as a man can stand,

Yours, Vincent

I feel obliged to tell you again that in case they want to attempt something like putting me under guardianship on *physical* grounds, the precedent of the Gheel affair would make it awkward for the family suddenly to take a different stand, and base their action no longer on *physical* but on *financial* grounds.

Such things don't cut any ice. But I repeat, I hope things will not be pushed as far as that.

But please write soon, for I am anxiously looking forward to a letter from you. You understand, Theo, that I don't talk about family matters with either the physician here or the professor at Leyden - only seeing that I am being treated by the former and Sien, by the latter, if I needed it, one word would get me a statement from these gentlemen, contradicting a possible differing statement by some persons you spoke of.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 10 June 1882

Dear Theo,

Few things have given me so much pleasure recently as hearing things from home which to a certain extent set my mind at ease about their feelings toward me. Sien came to tell me that a parcel had been delivered to the studio, and I told her to go and open it and see what was in it, and in case there was a letter, to bring it with her; so I learned that they had sent a whole package of things, underwear and outer clothing and cigars, and there was also 10 guilders enclosed in the letter. I cannot tell you how it touched me, it is much more than I expected; but they do not know everything yet.

I am just weak and feeble, Theo, and I need absolute, absolute rest to recover, so everything that makes for peace is welcome. But I felt much worse than now before I was lying here, and please bear in mind that it is not at all serious, and only a short period of treatment will make me well again. I wanted to tell you the news about Father and Mother immediately, because I thought it would please you, too.

Sien will probably go next Monday, for I think she is better off in the hospital now; she will be admitted about the middle of June. She wanted to stay here for me, but I wouldn't allow it.

I have my books on perspective here, and a few volumes of Dickens, including Edwin Drood*;* there is perspective in Dickens, too. Good God, what an artist! There's no one like him.

I hope my having to take a rest will have a good effect on my drawings; sometimes one gets a better view of things when one does not work on them for a while - then when one sees them again, they seem fresh and new.

The view from the window of the ward is splendid: yards on the canal, with the barges loaded with potatoes, rear view of houses that are being pulled down by workmen, part of a garden; and on the next, more distant, plane the Quay with its rows of trees and street lamps, a very complicated little almshouse with little gardens connected to it; and finally, all the roofs. The whole is a bird's-eye view which, especially in the evenings and in the mornings, is mysterious because of the light's effect, for instance, like a Ruysdael or Van der Meer. But I may not and cannot draw it as long as I am so weak. But though I'm forbidden to get out of bed, I cannot refrain from getting up to look at it every evening.

Write me soon; wasn't that parcel from home a surprise? - and especially coming at a time like this, it made me more than happy.

The rest cure does me good and makes me so much calmer, and takes away that nervousness which has troubled me so much recently. And the ward here is no less interesting to me than the third-class waiting room. But I may not and cannot draw yet. Adieu, I hope you will find time to write to me, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I thought it so nice that this came from home, I wanted to let you know at once. Of course I do not need any more clothes now. I wrote home to thank them, and to tell them I was here. You know the address is-City Hospital-4 Class-Ward 6-No. 9. Brouwersgracht.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 22 June 1882

Dear Theo,

I received your letter of June 12 with enclosed 50 fr., and thank you most kindly. I did not answer you before because I did not know what turn my illness would take, as I did not recover as quickly as the doctor had expected. I have already been here more than two weeks, and I have had to pay for the next two weeks in advance, though perhaps, if everything goes well, I can leave in eight or ten days; but in that case I shall get part of my money back. Now this morning I spoke to the doctor and asked him if there has been some complication that would make things worse. He said, No - but rest and a prolonged stay in the hospital were necessary. But I can assure you that I am longing dreadfully for the sight of something green and for some fresh air; an experience like this makes one feel very weak and faint. I have to lie still almost all the time. I cannot draw, though I tried several times - it makes me too feverish. I can read, but I haven't any more books. Well, there will come an end to this sooner or later, so I must have patience.

Sien is at Leyden, but I cannot hear from her until she is confined. What are the sufferings of us men compared to that terrible pain which women have to bear during childbirth. They are better than we are at patient suffering, but on the other hand we are superior in some other things. She came to visit me regularly until the last day, and brought me some smoked beef and sugar or bread, which I have to do without now, and it makes me feel very faint. But now I am so sorry that I in turn cannot go to Leyden to bring her some extras that she might need, for the food one gets there is not particularly good. It gives me such a strange feeling not to be able to do anything, and see the days pass by so idly. Sometimes I think I shall be able to do this or that, but then weakness gets the better of me.

I am very glad you were interested in the drawings I sent you. I worked so hard on them, and on the ones for C. M. also, those last days when I suffered much more pain and was much more depressed than since I have been here. For I felt worse before I went to the hospital, long before.

Now I want to tell you that I've had a letter from Rappard. Of course I had sent him back the 2.50 guilders at once, and then he answered me and repeated what he had already said about my drawings in the studio, namely that he liked them and felt sympathy for them because of their style and sentiment and character. He suggested that if I had some more like them, I should send them to him, as he thought he might be able to find a buyer. You can imagine that this is what I like best; it does me so much good when people find some sympathy for my work. For it is so discouraging and dispiriting, and acts like a damper, when one never hears, This or that is right, and full of sentiment and character. It is so cheering to realize that others feel something of what one has tried to express. Van Rappard also liked a few of the nude studies.

For the first time in several days I am sitting up again, and I feel something revive in me while I write. If I were only well again! If I could only work here, how I should love to make some studies of the wards. I am now lying in another ward, without curtains around the beds or cots, and there are peculiar light effects, especially in the evening or in the night. The doctor is exactly as I should wish: he looks like some heads by Rembrandt, a splendid forehead and a very sympathetic expression. I hope to have learned this much from him, that in the future I shall try to handle my models the way he does his patients, namely by getting a firm hold on them and putting them straightway into the required position. It is astonishing how much patience he has, massaging the patients himself, rubbing them with ointment, and handling them in different ways, infinitely better than a male nurse does, and how well he knows how to banish their scruples and to make them do exactly as he wishes. There is one old man who would have been a superb St. Jerome - a thin, long sinewy, brown wrinkled body with such very distinct and expressive joints that it makes one melancholy not to be able to have him for a model.

I can imagine that Heyerdahl is pleased with such a reward.

I still have to tell you that Father came to visit me during my first days here, though it was only a short and very hurried visit, and I was not able to speak about anything that mattered. I would have preferred his visiting me another time, when on both sides we could have enjoyed it more. This way it was very strange to me, and seemed more or less like a dream, as does this whole business of lying here ill.

Except for Sien, her mother, and for Father, I have not seen anybody, which is indeed for the best, though the days are rather lonesome and melancholy. Involountarily I often think how much more gloomy and lonesome things are now than, for instance, when I went to Mauve for the first time this winter. It stabs me to the heart and depresses me whenever I think of it, though I try to throw the whole thought overboard like useless ballast.

I heard from one of the attendants that Breitner left the hospital recently.

I believe that the doctor in this ward is a little more abrupt than in the more expensive wards; so much the better. Perhaps they are less afraid to hurt the patients a little here than in the more expensive wards, and, for instance, they often put a catheter into the bladder quickly, without “ceremony” or fuss. Well, so much the better, I think, and I repeat, I find it just as interesting here as in a third-class waiting room. If only I could work! But I must submit. I have a book by Dickens and my books on perspective with me.

I hope you will write again, you know the address is City Hospital, Brouwersgracht - 4 Class - 6 Ward - No 9.

Adieu, with a handshake in thought and once again many thanks for your faithful letter and what was enclosed. Have a good time and believe me, sincerely

Yours, Vincent

I think that I was too nervous when Sien had to leave, and that it caused a relapse; but there are moments when one cannot always keep calm. She is so alone there, and I should like so much to go and see her, for the days must be frightful for her.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 28 June 1882

Amice Rappard,

Herewith I want to thank you for your last letter, which I certainly should have done sooner if I had not been upset recently. The fact is, you know, that I did not receive your letter in my studio but in the hospital, where I have been for three weeks now. Therefore your letter was doubly welcome to me during those days, and what you said about the drawings, which do not seem to have been very much to my worthy uncle's liking, pleased me doubly too.

Later on I heard from somebody else that they were not so bad after all, and that he had not meant to speak so harshly. Whatever the truth may be, the fact is that, while doing those drawings and later making some similar ones of the fish-drying barns on the dunes, I caught a cold, complicated with fever and nerves, all of which seems to have affected my bladder, so that I could not urinate, which finally distressed me so much and was so painful that I came here. Then they messed about in my bladder with a catheter, and so on, so that I am now returning to a more normal condition, of which I am very glad. For all that, I am not cured yet, and I don't know if I shall be able to go home soon or not. I hope it will be over in a week, but of course such things take their own time.

It is very pleasant here in this hospital; I am lying in a ward with ten beds, but, as I had to keep quiet, I have not been able to draw until today, and even now it is only a very faint and feeble start; I cannot do what I want and penetrate to the core of things.

But now I am allowed to go into the garden for an hour every day, and yesterday I started scribbling a little. And at least I am beginning to look at things again, though at first I felt too rotten even to use my eyes.

When I leave here, I shall have to go about my business very quietly for a while. Well, we shall see....

What I especially want to praise here is the treatment. If I ever happen to fall ill again, I should as little hesitate to go to a hospital as I did this time. In my opinion it is infinitely more practical than being ill at home, at least under circumstances such as mine.

Going by the way I feel, I am almost completely recovered, but the difficulty is that by moving about too much, taking long walks, etc., I may immediately have a relapse, which happened to me last week, and but for that I should be further ahead now.

As soon as I have a number of drawings again, as for instance the ones of the fish-drying barns or a charity court, I shall be most happy to send you some, which you may be able to sell. However, I shall not hurry, but rather wait until one of them turns out better than usual, for in that case I prefer sending it to you rather than to Amsterdam. Although I hope Amsterdam will come around again.

And let us agree that, if you do not succeed in selling it, you need not feel ashamed to return it to me, and you need not think it would discourage me, for such things do not succeed all at once. So whether it be the fault of my drawing or the fault of a possible buyer, let us agree on both sides that the miscarriage of our attempt (if it should fail) will not discourage us immediately.

As soon as I am at work again, I shall write you at an early date. Once more thanks for your letter, which I did not want to postpone answering any longer.

Meanwhile believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 1 July 1882

Dear Theo,

I have just got back to my studio and am writing you at once. I cannot tell you how delightful it is to be better again, nor can I tell you how beautiful all things appeared to me on the way from the hospital; and how the light seemed clearer and the spaces more infinite, and every object and figure more important. But there is still one drawback, for next Thursday I must go to see the doctor again and tell him how I feel; he has warned me that I may have to go to the hospital clinic for another fortnight, or a shorter or longer period, depending on what's necessary, or even be readmitted. At all events, it would be a piece of good luck if I did not have to go back.

I must go there as soon as I feel some trouble, and even if I don't feel anything in particular, I must go next Tuesday to be examined. The channel by which the urine is excreted has to be widened little by little, but this cannot be done violently or hurriedly. Gradually the bougies they use get bigger, and every time one is introduced, things are stretched a little more; this is not only very painful but also extremely nauseating, as the thing is left inside for some time. There is bleeding when the bougie is taken out; afterwards one feels relatively free for some days, and the soreness it caused gradually disappears. And I am now here during one of those intervals. In the meantime I can urinate pretty easily, consequently I feel swell, as if this were something highly extraordinary. Only it will have to get quite normal again, which will take time. The feeling of recovery makes one forget all possible catheters, bougies and syringes. But one sees the doctor arriving with them after all, and that is not a pleasant moment.

Well, those are the little miseries of human life.

But pregnancy and confinement is something we call a “grande misère.” Sien's last letter was very melancholy; she has not been delivered yet, but awaited it every hour. Now that the waiting has lasted for days, I am very anxious about it, and it was especially to visit her that I asked the doctor if there were any possibility of his giving me a short leave instead of walks in the garden. So tomorrow morning I am going to see her with her mother and her child, Sunday being the only day for visitors. The last letter from her was not written by her but by the nurse, who asked if we could not come sometime. But maybe we shall not be allowed to see her after all. Poor girl; she is plucky enough though, and not easily frightened. No, according to that last letter there was no real danger, but she was very weak. I cannot tell you how I long for her now, and there have been moments when I was not sorry I had to suffer a little too, rather than stand there in perfect good health, for then it would have been too unjustly divided.

If everything goes well, however, Sien will be back this month; may it be so. But the proverb goes, “Mal de mère dure longtemps.” This still throws a gloomy shadow over the delightful feeling of recovery. I long for tomorrow and dread it at the same time.

The first person I met here in the Schenkweg was my friend the carpenter, who has already helped me many a time with some little jobs, and by making the perspective instrument, and who is at the same time foreman for the owner of the studio about which I wrote you. His boss happened to be in the yard (of which you have the drawing, the one with the meadows in the distance), and they coaxed me to go with them, and showed me they had left the room that would be my studio unpapered, awaiting my decision. I said I could not decide even now.

All right, said the man, but I could choose what I liked from different papers; then he would paper it, and I was not committed to anything.

And though I said I did not want this because I had to go back to the hospital, they have already started it, as they wanted to show me the finished job before Tuesday.

I must say the house is exceedingly comfortable, and looks very neat and well built. The enormous attic alone would be a beautiful studio, though the room on the north would have to be used as such. And the price is very low indeed; in town it would be twice as much. Three guilders a week for a large upper floor is very little, even compared to neighbourhoods like the Noordwal or the Buitensingels, and the location is excellent for a painter. The view from the attic window is enchanting. However, I did not want to make any decision because I am ill, as well as Sien. But as soon as we are better, I shall take it. There is air and space, delightful for working in and keeping healthy; light from the north, and in the other room, from the south. There is a little kitchen, which I hope to draw often, also with a little window looking out on the courtyard.

Then I must not forget to tell you that while in the hospital, I had an unexpected visit from Mr. Tersteeg, which in a way greatly pleased me, though we did not speak about anything in particular, as it was not necessary. But I was very glad to see him. And then a few days later Iterson also came, but I cared much less for that. And then Johan van Gogh came; I thought he was in Helvoirt, but it seems that at present he is living here in the Stationsweg.

In case you send me something at the beginning of this month, will you address the letter to the hospital? Then it will be all right, because the porter promised to keep the letters for me in case of absence (according to the rules of the hospital - as long as one has not left definitely and asks for it). On Tuesday I have to pay the hospital again, and the rent, too; I have the money left for it.

The most delightful thing about the whole recovery is that the love for drawing revives, and also the feeling for things around me which seemed almost extinct for a long time and had left a great void. I am again interested in everything I see. And then, I have not smoked a pipe for almost a month, and it's like renewing an old acquaintance. I cannot tell you how happy I am to sit here in the studio again after having been surrounded by chamber pots, etc., for so long, though the hospital is also beautiful, very beautiful, especially the garden with all those convalescent people - men, women and children. I made a few scratches, but as a patient one is not free to work as one should, nor is one fit for it. Well, adieu, write soon and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 2 July 1882

Sunday afternoon
My dear Theo,
As I told you in yesterday's letter, I have been to Leyden. Sien was confined last night; has had a very difficult delivery, but thank God has come out of it alive and with a particularly nice little boy as well.

Her mother and little girl and I went there together - you can imagine how very anxious we were, not knowing what we should hear when we asked the orderlies in the hospital about her. And how tremendously glad we were when we heard: “Confined last night…but you mustn't talk to her for long...” I shall not easily forget that “you mustn't talk to her for long”; for it meant “you can still talk to her,” when it could easily have been, “you will never talk to her again.” Theo, I was so happy to see her there, lying close to a window overlooking a garden full of sunshine and greenery, in a sort of drowsy state of exhaustion between sleeping and waking, and then she looked up and saw us all. Ah, my dear fellow, she looked up and was so happy to see us exactly 12 hours after it had happened, as luck would have it, even though there is only 1 hour a week when visits are allowed. And she perked up so, and in a moment she had got her wits about her and asked about everything.

But what I cannot marvel at enough is the child, because although it was delivered by forceps it is not injured in any way and just lay in its cradle with a sort of worldly-wise air. How clever these doctors are! But by all accounts it was a critical case. There were 5 professors standing by when it happened and they put her under with chloroform. Before that, she had suffered a tremendous amount because the child was stuck fast from 9 in the evening until half-past one. And she is still in a lot of pain now. But she forgot everything when she saw us and even managed to convey that we should soon be back drawing again, and I should not mind in the least if her prediction came true. There has been no rupture or anything, which can easily happen in such cases.

Heavens, how grateful I am! Still, the grim shadow goes on threatening, as master Albrecht Dürer realized only too well when he placed Death behind the young couple in that marvellous etching you know. But let us hope that the grim shadow will remain a passing shadow.

Well, Theo, I don't have to tell you that without your help, Sien would probably not be here any longer. One more thing, I had urged Sien to ask the professor to give her a thorough examination, because she often had something they call the whites. And he did that and told her what she must do to get well again. And he says that she had been very close to giving up the ghost more than once, especially when she had had quinsy, during an earlier miscarriage, and again this winter - that she was thoroughly enfeebled by years of worry and agitation, and that now, when she no longer has to lead that sort of life, she will get well by herself if nothing else happens, through rest, through restoratives, by being out in the fresh air a great deal and by not doing any heavy work.

With her earlier misfortune behind her, a completely new period of her life will start, and though she cannot regain her spring, which is past and was but barren, her *midsummer growth* will be all the greener for it. You will know how in the middle of the summer, when the greatest heat is over, the trees put out fresh young shoots, a new young layer of green over the old, weathered one.

I am writing to you at Sien's mother's, beside a window overlooking a sort of courtyard. I have drawn it twice, once on a large scale and once on a smaller one. C. M. has those two and they were the ones Rappard was pleased with, especially the large one. I should like you to have a look at them if you happen to be at C. M.'s, for I should like to know what you think, especially of the larger one. When are you coming? I look forward to seeing you very much.

Well, brother, you are to blame for my being so happy today that it made me cry. Thanks for everything, my dear fellow, and believe me, with a handshake in my thoughts,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 4 July 1882

Tuesday afternoon
Dear Theo,
Tidings from Sien that she is getting along well. If it continues like this, she will leave the hospital a fortnight after her confinement. This persuaded me to take the new house, so that she may find a warm nest when she returns after so much pain. So I made an arrangement with the owner. First, that he would help me move at once, namely that he would lend me a few men from the yard for an afternoon to carry my furniture over, because I myself am not allowed to lift many heavy things, indeed none at all. And second, that I shall not pay him any rent before I myself or Sien comes to live there definitely, for perhaps she will come back from the hospital before me. Meanwhile, I must make some arrangement with the old landlord about the current month (for as I was ill and did not know when I should recover, I could not give him notice). I hope I shall get off with paying just one or two weeks' rent; at least I do not intend to pay him the full month.

Perhaps you have sent something already, and then I shall find your letter with the hospital porter tomorrow morning. But if you haven't sent anything, I ask you kindly to do it soon, for I am short of cash and will have to pay 10 guilders in advance to enter the hospital again, so that my going back depends on receiving your letter. This morning the porter didn't yet have a letter for me.

Now most of the moving is done. Sien's mother is helping me; it is quite a job, for the whole house is full of plaster, and must be scrubbed. But the studio and the alcove are clean, and almost all the furniture has been moved. Just now we are sitting down for a bite of lunch.

I am feeling pretty good, at least much better than I have for a long time. Yesterday I met the superintendent of the hospital, Dr. van Tienhoven, on the street, and told him how I was getting on, and he said it was all right.

So I hope to be quite well soon.

If I had planned this new house myself with fitting it up as a studio in mind, I couldn't have done better than the way it is now. And no other house on this street is like this inside, though the exteriors all look alike. My being in it is really the fault of the storm which broke the window of the other studio; if it hadn't happened, I shouldn't have known anything about this house.

It was the carpenter who told me about it at the time, and said, Why don't you go and live next door?

Well, brother, in the midst of all the moving, I hammered off another drawing, and this time it was a watercolour.[Painting lost] It was a sketch which had remained unfinished because of my illness. So that now things are coming to life again. It represents fishing smacks on the beach, big hulls of boats lying on the hot sand, and the sea far away in a blue haze; it was a sunny day, but the sun was behind me, so one must feel it only in a few short-cast shadows and the vibration of the hot air above the sand. It is only an impression, but I think it is rather correct [F none, JH 159].

My fingers are itching to set to work again, and I need not tell you that I would rather go to Scheveningen than to the hospital. But what must be, must be. Now I am longing very much for your letter, and even more for your visit, if only I am not in the hospital then.

I wonder what you will say about the new house and also what you will think of Sien when you see her, and about the new little baby. I hope with all my heart that you will feel some sympathy for Sien, as she deserves it.

Another thing…do you think you could get some more of that Ingres paper as thick as the enclosed sample, but with a little more tone? If so, bring it along when you come, together with those of my sketches which you do not care to keep. Of course I hope that you will keep “Sorrow” and the best ones, especially the large “Sorrow,” for yourself.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 6 July 1882

Thursday
My dear Theo,
It is now the evening before I go back to hospital again, and I don't know what they are going to tell me there - perhaps I'll only be in for a short while, perhaps they'll bring out their probes again and I'll have to keep to my bed for days.
That's why I am writing once again from home. It is so quiet and peaceful here in the studio right now - it is already late - but it is stormy and rainy outside - and that makes the calm inside even greater.

How I wish you had been here with me during this quiet hour, brother - how much I should have shown you. The studio looks so much like the real thing, or so it seems to me, plain grey-brown wallpaper, scrubbed floorboards, muslin stretched on slats across the windows, everything bright. And, of course, the studies on the wall, an easel on either side and a large unpainted wooden work-table. The studio gives on to a sort of alcove, where the drawing boards, portfolios, boxes, sticks, *etc.* are kept, as well as all the prints. And in the corner a cupboard with all the pots and bottles and on top of that all my books.

Then the little living room with a table, a few kitchen chairs, an oil stove, a large wicker armchair for the woman in the corner by the window overlooking the yard and the meadows that you know from the drawing, and next to it a small iron cradle with a green cover.

This last piece of furniture is something I cannot look at without emotion - because a man is gripped by a strong and powerful emotion when he sits down next to the woman he loves with a baby in the cradle beside them. And although it was a hospital that she lay and I sat next to her - it is always that eternal poetry of Christmas night with the infant in the stable, as the old Dutch painters conceived it, and Millet and Breton - a light in the darkness, a brightness in the middle of a dark night. And so I hung the large etching after Rembrandt over it, the two women by the cradle, one of them reading from the Bible by candlelight, while the great shadows cast a deep chiaroscuro over the whole room.

I've hung a few other prints there, all of them very beautiful, the Christus Consolator by Scheffer, a photograph after Boughton, Le semeur and Les bêcheurs by Millet, Le buisson by Ruysdael, splendid large wood engravings by Herkomer and Frank Holl, and Le banc des pauvres by De Groux.

Now then, in the small kitchen I have only the barest necessities, but such that if the woman recovers before me she will find all the essentials and be able to get a meal ready in 10 minutes, in short, such as will show her, when she steps into a house which has flowers in the window where she will be sitting, that someone has been giving her a great deal of thought. And upstairs in the large attic, a big bedstead for the two of us and an old one for the child, with all the bedding in good order.

But please don't think I bought all this in one fell swoop. We had already started buying a few bits and pieces here and there during the winter, although at the time I didn't know how things would turn out and where we would finish up. And the result is now, thank God, that this little nest is ready for her after all her pain.

How her mother and I have been exerting ourselves these last few days, especially her. And the most difficult thing was the bedding, everything made or altered by ourselves - we bought straw, sea-grass, coarse linen, etc., and stuffed the mattresses ourselves in the attic. Otherwise it would have been too expensive.

And now, after having paid my old landlord, I still have 40 guilders left out of what you sent me. True, I have to pay 10 guilders of that tomorrow to the hospital, but for that I'll get food and medical treatment there for 14 days. So that this month, although it includes the full cost of moving and settling in and Sien's return after her confinement with all that entails, the cradle, etc., I shall be able to manage without your sending me more than the usual.

On est sûr de périr à part, on ne sauve qu'ensemble [United we stand, divided we fall] - I believe this saying to be the truth and I base my life on it, might that be a mistake or a miscalculation?

You see, brother, I think of you a very great deal these days, in the first place because everything, all that I have, is really yours, my lust for life and my energy, too, for I am able to get going now with your help and can feel my capacity to work flowing back.

But I think of you so often for another reason, too. I remember that only a short while ago I came back to a house that was not a real home - not full of warmth as it is now - where two great voids stared at me night and day. There was no woman, there was no child, and though I do not believe there was any the less grief, I do believe there was less love. And those two voids kept me company to left and right, in the street, at work, everywhere and always. There was no woman, there was no child.

Look, I don't know if you've ever had that feeling which sometimes forces a sort of sigh or groan from one when one is alone: oh God, where is my wife, oh

God, where is my child - is being alone really living? Thinking of you, I'm sure I'm not mistaken in supposing that some of this same melancholy is in you, too, perhaps less passionately and nerve-wrackingly than in me, but nevertheless to some extent and at certain moments. And I don't know whether you will approve of it or not, whether you will judge it right or wrong of me, when I tell you that now and then that is how I think of you.

This much, however, I believe about you, and this much I know about myself, notwithstanding my nervousness, that in both our characters there is a foundation of serenity - serenity quand bien même [despite everything], so that neither of us is unhappy, our serenity being based on the fact that we truly and sincerely love our trade and our work, and that art occupies a large part of our thoughts and makes life interesting. So I most certainly do not want to make you melancholy, but only to explain my conduct and philosophy of life by dint of something in your own temperament.

And that brings me to Father - do you think Father would go on being cold and finding fault - beside a cradle? You see, a cradle is not like anything else - there is no trickery about it. And no matter what Sien's past may have been, I know no other Sien than the one from last winter, than that mother in the hospital whose hand pressed mine as we looked with tears in our eyes at the baby for whom we had both been toiling all winter.

And look here - entre nous, soit dit [just between us] - without sermonizing - if there is no God, there is nevertheless one very close by somewhere, and one feels His presence at moments like this. Which is tantamount to saying something for which I would happily substitute the straightforward statement: I believe in a God, and that it is His will that man does not live alone but with a wife and child, if everything is to be normal.

And it is my hope that you will understand the way I have behaved and take it for what it is, namely natural, and that you will not think of it as tricking me or being tricked. And, my dear fellow, when you do come - and if you can, come soon to have a look - then please take Sien, just as I do, for a mother and an ordinary housewife and for nothing else. For that is what she really is and in my opinion all the better for having known le revers de la medaille [the other side of the coin].

The last thing I did was to get a few plates, forks, spoons and knives - for neither Sien nor I had any until now. I thought, 3 people, so 3 sets, but then I had another thought - an extra set for Theo or for Father when they come and have a look. So your little spot by the window and your place at our table are ready and waiting for you … So, I only want to say - you are definitely coming, aren't you…and Father as well?

I thought it sensible and tactful of you not to have spoken about it to Father and Mother as yet - now the confinement is over and the flowers are out again - and it was better for Father and Mother not to be mixed up in it before now. I mean, I thought it best to keep the thorns to myself and to let Father and Mother see nothing but the rose. Thus when the woman is back and I am better, I should like to talk about it in the way I told you, so should they ask you anything now, you could well drop a hint. Goodbye, good-night,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 6 July 1882

Dear brother,
I received your letter with enclosed 100 fr., and thank you most kindly for it. I want to write you at once because I think it is well to explain a few things to you and in all seriousness, because it is important that you *know* and *understand* them well. So I hope you will read this letter patiently and at your ease, for so much depends on it for me. Tomorrow morning I am going back to the hospital, and I shall be able to lay my head down peacefully if I know that you are informed about everything as explicitly and clearly as the distance allows. I wish you were here so much more; then I could show you everything and talk things over with you. But let us hope it will happen in August.

Before beginning to write about various other things, I want to tell you that the part of your letter describing Paris by night touched me very much. Because it brought back to me the memory of when I too saw “Paris tout gris,” and was struck by that very peculiar effect with the black figure and characteristic white horse which gave the full value to the delicacy of that unusual grey. That little dark note and that toneful white are the key to the harmony. But by chance, while I was in the hospital, I was greatly impressed by an artist who describes this “Paris tout gris” with a master hand. In Une Page d'Amour by Emile Zola I found some views of the city so superbly painted or drawn, quite in the same mood as the simple passage in your letter. And that little book prompts me to read everything by Zola; up to now I knew only a few short fragments of his works, for which I tried to make an illustration - Ce que je veux and another fragment which describes a little old peasant, exactly like a drawing by Millet.

There is something confoundedly artistic in you, brother; cultivate it, first let it take root, and then let it branch out. Don't give it to everybody, but keep it seriously for yourself; think it over, and don't consider it a misfortune if, through this thinking, it concentrates itself and takes a more or less important place in your activity. But perhaps I am venturing on forbidden ground, so no more about it for today.

One more thing, there is “colour” in your short description which is palpable and visible to me, though you did not carry your impression through till it assumed a more robust form, and stood visible and palpable to everybody. The real throes and anguish of creating begin at the point where you drop the description; but you possess a damn good creative intelligence. Right now you can go no further because you don't believe in yourself in this respect; otherwise you would jump the ditch, that is to say, you would venture further. But enough of this; there is a je ne sais quoi in your description, a fragrance, a memory, for instance, of a watercolour by Bonington - only it is still vague, as if in a haze. Do you know that drawing with *words* is also an art, which sometimes betrays a slumbering hidden force, like small blue or grey puffs of smoke indicate a fire on the hearth?

I certainly appreciate what Father and Mother did during my illness - you know that I wrote you about it at once - likewise, I appreciated Tersteeg's visit. However, I did not write at once to Father and Mother about Sien or the like, but only kept them informed of my recovery with a few words. And this is why: something of what happened last summer and last winter seemed to put an iron barrier between the past and the present.

I did not intend to ask Father and Mother for their advice and opinions *in the same way* as I did last year, because it was then proved to me that there is a decided difference in our thoughts and views on life. However, it is my greatest longing to keep peace, and to convince Father and Mother that they would do well not to oppose me, thinking me a person who is always dreaming and incapable of action - and that they would be mistaken if they thought I regarded things so impractically that it would be necessary for them to “guide” me.

Look here, Theo, believe me I do not say this in bitterness, despising or depreciating Father and Mother - or in self-praise - but only to prove to you this fact: Father and Mother are not the people who understand me - neither in my faults nor in my good qualities - they cannot realize my feelings - it's no use arguing with them. What is to be done now??? This is my plan, which I hope you will approve of. I hope to be able to manage so that I can save 10 or 15 guilders next month. Then - but not before - I shall write Father and Mother that I have something to tell them. I shall beg Father to make another trip here at my expense, and to come and stay with me for a few days. Then I shall show him Sien and her little baby, which he will not expect - and the neat house and studio full of the things I am working on - and I myself quite recovered by then, I hope.

I think all this will make a better and deeper and more favourable impression on Father than words or letters. In a few short words I will tell him how Sien and I struggled through the hard time of her pregnancy this winter - how faithfully you helped us, though you only heard about Sien afterward; that she is invaluable to me, first, by the love and affection which circumstances created between us, and second, because from the beginning she has devoted herself to helping me in my work with much good will, intelligence, and common sense.

So that she and I sincerely hope that Father will approve my taking her to wife. I cannot say otherwise than “taking her,” for the ceremony of marriage is not what makes her my wife, but it is a bond which already exists - a feeling that on both sides we love each other, help each other, and understand each other.

And as to what Father will say about my marrying, I think he will say, “Marry her.”

I wish Father could get a fresh, clear impression of a new future for me, that he could see me here in surroundings quite different from what he possibly expected, that he could be quite reassured about my feeling for him and might have good courage for my future and forget the business of putting me under guardianship or supervision. See, Theo, I know of no shorter, no more honest way or means to redress quickly and practically the good understanding between us than the ones I'm writing you about. Write and tell me what you think of it.

Also, I do not think it superfluous to tell you once more, though it is difficult to say it, what I feel for Sien. I have a feeling of being at home when I am with her, as though she gives me my own hearth, a feeling that our lives are interwoven. It is a heartfelt, deep feeling, serious and not without a dark shadow of her gloomy past and mine, a shadow which I have already written you about - as if something evil were threatening us which we would have to struggle against continuously all our lives. At the same time, however, I feel a great calm and brightness and cheerfulness at the thought of her and the straight path lying before me.

You know I wrote you a lot about Kee last year, so I think you know what went on in my mind. Don't think that I exaggerated my feelings then; I had a strong, passionate love for her, quite different from that for Sien. When I unexpectedly learned in Amsterdam that she had a kind of aversion to me, that she considered my behaviour as coercing her and refused even to see me, and that “she left the house as soon as I entered it” - then, but not before, that love for her received a death blow. And I only perceived this when I awoke to reality here at The Hague this winter.

I then felt an inexpressible melancholy inside, which I cannot possibly describe. I know that then I often, often thought of a manly saying of father Millet's: Il m'a toujours semblé que le suicide était une action de malhonnête homme. [It has always seemed to me that suicide was the deed of a dishonest man.]

The emptiness, the unutterable misery within me made me think, Yes, I can understand people drowning themselves. But I was far from approving this, I found strength in the above-mentioned saying, and thought it much better to take heart and find a remedy in work. And you know how I put this into practice. It is hard, very hard, aye, quite impossible to consider last year's love an illusion, as Father and Mother do, but I say, "*Though it will never be, it might have been.*" It was not illusion, but our viewpoints differed, and circumstances took such a turn that our paths diverged farther and farther, instead of coming together.

This is what I think of it: my clear and sincere thought is, *It might have been, but now it is no longer possible.* Was Kee right in feeling an aversion to me? Was I wrong in persisting? I declare, I do not know. And it is not without pain and sorrow that I recall and write about it. I only wish I could understand why Kee acted that way, and also why my parents and hers were so steadfastly and ominously against it - less by their words, though certainly by them too, than by their complete lack of warm, live sympathy. I cannot soften these last words, but consider it a feeling of theirs which I want to forget.

Now, as things are, it is like a large, deep wound which has healed but is still sensitive.

Then last winter could I feel a new "love" immediately? Most certainly not. But is it wrong that those human feelings were not extinguished or deadened within me - and that my sorrow awoke within me a need for sympathy for others??? I think not. So at *first* Sien was to me only a fellow creature as lonesome and unhappy as myself. However, as I was not discouraged, I was then just in the mood to be able to give her some practical support, which at the same time helped me stand fast. But gradually and slowly it became different between us - *a real need of each other*, so that she and I could not be separated - our lives became more and more united, and then it was *love*.

The feeling between Sien and me is real; it is no dream, it is reality. I think it is a great blessing that my thoughts and energy have found a fixed goal and a definite direction. It may be that what I felt for Kee was a stronger passion, and that she was in some respects more charming than Sien; but certainly not that my love for Sien should be less true, for the circumstances are too serious, and everything depends on doing things and being practical, and this has been so ever since the beginning, when I met her.

Theo, I am now obliged to touch on a subject which will perhaps be painful to you, but which will possibly make you understand what I mean. In the past you also had an "illusion," as Father and Mother call it, about a woman of the people; and it was not because you *could* not have chosen that path in life that nothing came of it after all, but because things in general took another turn. Now you have adapted yourself to life in another social station and are solidly situated, and if you should want to marry a girl of your own station, it would not mean a new "illusion" for *you*. You would not be admonished; and though nothing came of the first affair, something would certainly come of a new love affair, and you would be successful. As I see it, it would not be at all the right thing for you to take a woman of the people - for *you* the woman of the people was the so-called *illusion* - for you reality has become finding a woman of the same station in life as Kee Vos.

But for me the opposite is true; my *illusion (although I do not think this word or this definition the least bit appropriate or correct either in your case or in mine)* was Kee Vos - reality became the woman of the people.

In many respects there is a difference between your case and mine. Your failure happened when you were twenty years old, mine happened last year; and although you as well as I may have been in for an illusion, or failure, or whatever it was - I really have no idea what to call it - this does not alter the fact that there is something real for you as well as for me. For I am definitely of the opinion that neither of us is fitted by nature to remain a bachelor.

What I want to explain is this - what exists between Sien and me is *real*; it is not a dream, it is *reality*! Look at the result. When you come, you will not find me discouraged or melancholy; you will enter an atmosphere which will appeal to you, at least it will please you - a new studio, a young home in full swing. No mystical or mysterious studio but one that is rooted in real life - *a studio with a cradle*, a baby's crapper - where there is no stagnation, but where everything pushes and urges and stirs to activity.

Now, if anybody should come and tell me that I am a poor financier, I shall show him my domain. I have done my best, brother, to take care that you will see (and not only you, but anyone with eyes in his head) that I aim at and sometimes succeed in doing things practically. *How to do it*. This winter we had the woman's pregnancy, my expenses for getting settled; now the woman has been confined, I have been ill for four weeks and am not yet well. Notwithstanding all this, the house is neat and bright and clean and well kept, and I have most of my furniture, beds and painting materials. It has cost what it has cost - indeed, I shall not minimize it - but then your money has not been thrown away. It has started a new studio which cannot do without your help even now, but which is going to produce more and more drawings, and which is full of furniture and working materials that are necessary and retain their value.

Well, boy, if you come here to a home full of life and activity and know that you are the founder of it, won't that give you a real feeling of satisfaction - much more than if I were a bachelor living in bars? Would you wish it otherwise? You know my life has not always been happy, but very often miserable; and now through your help my youth has returned and my real self is developing.

I only hope that you will keep this great change in mind, even when people think it foolish of you to have helped me and to continue helping me. And I hope that you will continue to see the germ of the next drawings in the present ones. A little time in the hospital and then I set to work again, the woman posing for me with the baby.

To me it is as clear as day that one must feel what one draws, that one must live in the reality of family life if one wishes to express that family intimately - a mother with her child, a washerwoman, a seamstress, whatever it may be. Through constant practice the hand must gradually learn to obey that feeling. But to try to kill that feeling - that strong wish to have a household of my own - would be suicide. Therefore I say “Forward,” notwithstanding dark shadows, cares, difficulties - alas, often caused by the meddling and gossip of people. Theo, know it well - though I *keep out of it*, as you rightly advise me to do, it often grieves me to the heart. But do you know why I do not contradict them any more and why I keep out of it? Because I must do my work, and all that gossip and worry must not cause me to deviate from my path. But I do not keep out of it because I am afraid of them or because I am at a loss for an answer. Also, I often notice that they do not say anything when I am present, and even pretend they never said anything.

As to you, since you know that I keep out of it so as not to make myself nervous and because of my work, you will also understand my attitude and not think it cowardly of me, won't you?

Do not imagine that I think myself perfect or that I think that many people taking me for a disagreeable character is no fault of mine. I am often terribly melancholy, irritable, hungering and thirsting, as it were, for sympathy; and when I do not get it, I try to act indifferently, speak sharply, and often even pour oil on the fire. I do not like to be in company, and often find it painful and difficult to mingle with people, to speak to them. But do you know what the cause is - if not at all, of a great deal of this? Simply nervousness; I am terribly sensitive, physically as well as morally, the nervousness having developed during those miserable years which drained my health. Ask any doctor, and he will understand at once that nights spent in the cold street or in the open, the anxiety to get bread, a continual strain because I was out of work, the estrangement from friends and family, caused at least three-fourths of my peculiarities of temper, and that those disagreeable moods or times of depression must be ascribed to this. But you, or anyone who will take the trouble to think it over, will not condemn me, I hope, because of it, nor find me unbearable. I try to fight it off, but that does not change my temperament; and even though this may be my bad side, confound it, I have a good side too, and can't they credit me with that also?

Now tell me if you approve of the following little plan for telling Father and

Mother and bringing about a better situation. I haven't the slightest desire to write about it or go and talk about it, because then I should relapse into my old failing, namely putting it in such a way that they would be hurt by some expression or other. Well, I think when the woman comes back with her baby and I am quite recovered and back from the hospital and the studio is in full swing - then I would like to say to Father, Will you visit me again now, and stay a few days with me to talk some things over? And then as a little gesture, I should enclose the money for the journey. I do not know of a better plan.

Adieu, thanks for everything, a handshake and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 7 July 1882

Friday evening.
Dear Theo,

I'm just adding a few words to last night's letter. And I can tell you that I have been to see the doctor at the hospital, who told me that as I had been fairly well these days, I need not come back unless I should happen to get worse. The fact that during these days I have been able to pass water freely, although not quite normally and painlessly yet, proves that I am on the road to recovery.

This afternoon I at once sent a drawing to the doctor who treated me - not the superintendent - to show my gratitude. It was a Scheveningen girl knitting, done at Mauve's studio, and really the best watercolour I had, especially since Mauve had put in some touches, and had watched me do it and called some details to my attention. I should have liked to keep it as a souvenir, but in the delight of recovery I felt the need to show my gratitude.

Today I received a letter from Father and Mother, and wrote them as soon as I heard that I needn't go back to the hospital.

Now I should like to take a trip to Scheveningen by streetcar tomorrow morning, and then draw a little on the beach.

So my address is now Schenkweg No. 136.

In acknowledgement of the honourable gentleman's visit, I also wrote a note to Mr. Tersteeg to tell him I had left the hospital, and thanked him for his unexpected visit.

I should like to go to see Sien next Sunday. I had a note from her telling me that yesterday she was allowed to sit up for half an hour for the first time, and that the baby was all right.

I get tired and exhausted very easily because I had to keep quiet in bed so long, and it is a queer feeling. But in many respects I feel well and better than last winter, and I am so cheerful and grateful for many things.

I hope you will soon find a half hour to write me whether you approve of my telling Father and Mother in that way. First Sien must get a little stronger, for she must not be upset or anxious about anything at present, most decidedly not - but in a month or six weeks, depending on how her recovery progresses.

She saw Father when he visited me, for it was visiting hour and she was siting in the hall downstairs waiting; but of course Father did not know her.

It is already late, and I want to get up early tomorrow morning and go out with my drawing materials as if nothing had happened between now and the last time I sat in the dunes at Scheveningen. I wish I could succeed in making something for Rappard.

Adieu, Theo, good night, how delightful it is to be back home again; best wishes and good luck, and what I especially wish you is that serenity I mentioned before. A handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

P. S. This Émile Zola is a glorious artist. I am now reading Le Ventre de Paris; it is confoundedly clever.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 15-16 July 1882

Dear Theo,
Friday I was informed by the hospital at Leyden that Sien might come home Saturday; so I went there today, and we came home together, and now she is here at Schenkweg and so far all is well, both she and the baby. She has enough milk, and the baby is quiet.

How I wish you could have seen her today. I assure you her appearance has quite changed since last winter, it has been a complete transformation. If some of this is to my credit, and that through your help, of course much more is due to the professor who treated her. But what the professor has less to do with is the effect on her of the strong attachment between us two. A woman changes when she loves and is loved; when nobody cares for her, she loses her spirits and the charm is gone. Love draws out what is in her, and her development definitely depends on it. Nature must have its free course, must go its normal way; what a woman wants is to be with one man, and with him forever. This is not always possible, but any other way is against nature. So she now has quite another expression than last winter, and her eyes look different; her glance is calm and quiet, and there is an expression of happiness on her face, of peace and quiet, the more touching because she is of course still suffering. I wrote you once that the form of her head, the line of her profile, is exactly like that figure by Landelles, “L'Ange de la Passion,” so it is far from ordinary; it is decidedly noble, but it does not always strike the eye at once. Today, however, it was exactly, exactly so.

Before she left the hospital, the professor - who felt real sympathy for her, as he had known her before, and treated her with special care this time and examined her thoroughly at her request (because I had made her promise to ask this before she went) - took the trouble to speak with her at length and in detail about what she should and should not do to keep well.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 19 July 1882

Dear Theo,
This time I have to tell you something about a visit from Mr. Tersteeg. This morning he came here and saw Sien and the children. I could have wished that he had shown a kind face to a young little mother just out of childbed. But that was asking too much.

Dear Theo, he spoke to me in a way which you can perhaps imagine.

“What was the meaning of that woman and that child?”

“How could I think of living with a woman, and children into the bargain?”

“Wasn't it just as ridiculous as driving my own four-in-hand all over town?”

To which I answered that this was certainly quite a different case.

“Had I gone mad? It was certainly the result of an unsound mind and temperament.”

I told him that I had just received the most reassuring information from persons more competent than he, namely the physicians at the hospital, as much about the condition of my body as about the power of my mind to stand exertion.

So he jumped from one thing to another, brought in my father and, just fancy, even my uncle at Prinsenhage!!!

He would do something about it. He would write.

Dear Theo, for the woman's sake, for my own, I restrained myself, I kept my temper. I answered his, in my opinion, too indiscreet questions curtly and dryly, perhaps a little too mildly; but I preferred being too mild to losing my temper. By and by he calmed down a little. I asked him if it wouldn't be ridiculous if the people at home received an indignant letter from him, and then soon after a kind request from me to come and visit me at my expense, so as to speak about the same matter. That was not without effect. At least he looked up and asked, “Did I intend to write myself?”

“Need you ask?” said I. “Of course I will, but you must admit that now is a very inopportune moment, as they are in the bustle of moving at home, and as the woman's condition is such that the least emotion might bring about a prolapse of the womb which might be incurable. To cause her any anxiety, strain or nervousness now would be murder.”

Oh! then of course he would not write, but again he talked about my being just as foolish as a man who wanted to drown himself, and his wanting to save me from it. I said that I did not doubt his good intentions, and therefore I tried not to be angry at his words, though such a conversation was very disagreeable to me. And at last, because I showed that I definitely wanted to avoid further discussion, he went away.

I told him only that I had written you all about it. That calmed him somewhat.

I tried to draw his attention to the drawings, but he just looked around and said, “Oh! Those are the old ones.” There were some new ones, but he did not seem to notice them. Well, you know you have most of the new ones, and C. M. has some of them, *etc.* he was hasty in everything; he was sure of just one thing: I was a fool and everything I did was wrong.

I ask you, how is it possible to talk to anyone who acts like that, and what can be the use of it? It is just what I am afraid of, unsympathetic, domineering, indelicate and indiscreet meddling in my most intimate and private affairs. No man will stand for that. So though I did not lose my temper, I am very angry with Mr. Tersteeg, and will have nothing to do with him nor speak with him again as long as he is in that policeman-like mood. I am writing you about it at once.

You know, I will not hide from you that for Sien and for the little child and for myself it is desirable that such scenes do not occur again. Upsetting the woman is the same thing as dealing her a *hard blow*. I cannot repeat this often enough. After all, she is weak and very sensitive. A little thing may spoil her milk, and even cause far worse things, at least during the next six weeks.

I think he is capable of causing all kinds of miseries through his untimely interference. Can't his causing trouble and worry at home and at Prinsenhage (and Prinsenhage has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with it) be stopped??? I am on good terms with Father and Mother now, and who knows but that he will spoil everything again? I shall write myself as soon as possible, but how confoundedly mean it is of Tersteeg to make so much trouble. And over whom? - a poor weak woman only a few weeks out of childbed. I think it mean, but he does not feel that way about it; with him it is always, always the same thing, *money*. It seems he knows and worships no other god. Personally, I feel that one must be good and kind to women, children and the weak; I have a sort of respect for them, I am moved by them.

Then he uttered one other abusive remark - I should make that woman unhappy, *etc.* I said he was not capable of judging this now, and I asked him not to repeat such a thing. Sien loves me and I love Sien; we can and will live together on what I should otherwise have lived on alone - we will save and economize in all respects and as much as possible - you know well enough I have already told you this.

At least you know more about the matter than Tersteeg, but you know Sien too little to understand how much we love each other, and how well we get on together. I cannot repeat to you often enough, brother, how my whole future depends on it. For a man may recover once from disappointment and injury in love - and in his business and plans. But that must not happen too often. Now I have recovered or am recovering in body and soul, and so is Sien, but it might be fatal if we were knocked on the head again, so to speak. But there is an understanding between Sien and me; in the extreme case of their trying to force us, that is, if we cannot live here together, we will at least leave the country together. The chances of certain death are ten to one if one has no money and is not strong, but we would prefer that to being separated. So just think it over and try to prevent, if you possibly can, my being thwarted too much by Tersteeg or other persons.

I myself am not yet so strong that I can defend myself the way I could at another time. By and by, very slowly, I must become absorbed in my work again, but I really cannot stand visits like the one this morning.

If Tersteeg and others had their own way, they would of course tear Sien and me apart. That is what they want, and they would not hesitate at violence. Our staying together depends entirely on the monthly allowance from you. For myself, I would refuse your allowance if you took Tersteeg's view. I will not leave Sien; I should be a broken man without her, and then I should also be ruined in my work and everything; then I should never get over it, and not wanting to be a nuisance or trouble to you any longer, I should say, Theo, I am a broken man, and everything is lost; it's no use your helping me any more. *Living with the woman*, I have good courage, and then I say, The money from you will make a good painter of me. With Sien I shall work with all my strength and energy, but without her I shall have to give up. So that's the way things are.

You have proved you understood me more and have treated me infinitely better than others did so often. I hope it will be the same this time.

In many respects there is real sympathy between you and me, and it seems to me, Theo, that all your trouble and all my trouble will not be in vain. You have always helped me. I have continued working, and now while I am recovering, I feel that new forces are developing. See, I think, what is between you and me is more serious than Tersteeg's anger, and cannot be spoiled by his or others' interference. But to keep order and peace we must try to stop this interference quietly. You must excuse my being rather upset by it. It was the first painful hour for Sien and me since our return from the hospital. But we shall not mind it any more if you still approve of us, and we shall not allow ourselves to be upset by it.

Write us soon, for I am anxiously awaiting a letter from you. I will not let my mind be filled with care and anxiety because my recovery depends on my remaining calm. Otherwise I am pretty well; the woman and the child are so good, so quiet and dear that one cannot fail to be cheered by it. But Sien seemed to wither when she heard Tersteeg talk, and so did I.

I saw the doctor again, and he gave me some medicine to hasten my recovery as much as possible. I am getting stronger and the fever is slowly going away.

Now, because of Tersteeg, I should like to send my letter to Father and Mother a little sooner, though I should have preferred to wait until later. As soon as you have sent the money, about the twentieth, I shall write home, but I would much rather have waited until they had moved and Sien had quite recovered. And even now I should much rather wait, but I am afraid Tersteeg will beat me to it. Sending Father the money for the journey is a proof of my good will, I think, and a little attention which I hope will make them understand that I appreciate them.

So write soon, and if this might bind us more firmly together, brother, and cause us to understand each other better and have more confidence in each other instead of being separated by Tersteeg's interference, or anyone else's, then I do not regret this morning's incident.

Whatever he is to others - and I am quite willing to believe that he is a better man at heart - to me he is unsupportable. If Tersteeg were to get his way, I should be unhappy and lost. I believe he would look on quite cold-bloodedly while Sien was drowning or some such thing, not lifting a finger, and say it was beneficial to civilized society.

As long as I drown at the same time, I don't care. But we felt distinctly enough that her life and my life are as one, when we met again in that hospital by the side of the baby's little cradle.

Hello, brother! what's all this? I should not give way to such things. It is healthier to continue calmly thinking about my work and getting better, and to go on quietly day by day.

There is love between her and me, and there are promises of mutual faithfulness between her and me.

This is a thing, Theo, people ought not to meddle with, for it is the most sacred thing in life.

Her wish and mine is that things will not take a dramatic turn; we are too full of a new zest for life, too full of a yearning for working and toiling not to do everything in our power to avoid extremes.

But if there were many people, particularly yourself, who felt the way Tersteeg does about us, things could not last; ultimately they could only turn out miserably.

If all remains quiet, we shall continue our struggle here by working, and though this may seem humdrum and commonplace, it is far from easy; one needs courage and energy to attack things vigorously and to persevere. We have got through the whole winter, and with God's help we shall be able to carry on for a bit. I say with God's help, because I am grateful to God, as well as to you, for the help I have received, and am still receiving, from you.

Tersteeg is an energetic man, but I hope he will not use his energy to persecute Sien and me or anything of the kind. Perhaps he will see for himself that he is not obliged to interfere and will keep quietly out of things. After all, he has no great liking for me, and as a matter of fact, he doesn't care one way or another, but he does it because he thinks that it will please Uncle Cent or Father and that he is rendering them a service.

He does not consider or spare my interests, my feelings, in the least. He comes into my house, he looks at the woman - who has her baby at her breast - with an expression in his eyes that makes her crumble, and without one kind word to her (a thing one does involuntarily to a young mother, even if one does not know her), says to me, “Is this your model or is she something else?” Look here, that is neither humane nor delicate.

I myself am not always polite to men, but in any case I should make allowances for a weak little woman. He says nothing about my drawings, about my studio, etc., but so much the more about my uncle at Prinsenhage, in whom I am not the least bit interested and with whom I have had no intercourse. And about Father - taking it for granted a priori that I am on bad terms with him, whereas things have been improving for quite a long time.

Enough of this - but, my dear fellow, write soon, for I assure you, a kind letter from you does me more good than my pills, *etc.*

As for my constitution - Tersteeg is not my physician and he does not understand my constitution in the least - when I want information on the subject, I shall go to my own doctor and ask for it, but I absolutely refuse to discuss it with him any more. But it is certain that there are few things more harmful either to the woman or to myself than visits like that one we just went through. Avoiding these is absolutely one of the first medical orders I shall have to carry out. *Never* has a doctor told me that there was something abnormal about me in the way and sense Tersteeg dared to tell me this morning. That I was not able to think or that my mind was deranged. No doctor has told me this, neither in the past nor in the present; certainly I have a nervous constitution, but there is definitely no real harm in that. So those were serious insults on Tersteeg's part, just as they were on Pa's, but even worse, when he wanted to send me to Gheel. I cannot take such things lying down. I am looking forward to discussing my indisposition further with you, what caused it, *etc*. If in his haste Tersteeg should blindly push on, he might cause a lot of mischief, of this I am certain.

I repeat, I have no pretension to keeping up any social standing or to living easily; all the expenses needed for the woman are only what is necessary for her, and they must be met, *not by receiving more but by our economizing*. That economizing is no obstacle for us but a pleasure because of the love between us. The feeling of recovery thrills her, as I am thrilled by the urge to work again and to become absorbed in it. She is a very sweet little mother, so simple, so touching - if one only knows her. But there was an ugly expression of pain, or I do not know what, on her face when she heard Tersteeg talk to me and caught a few words. It may be that Tersteeg acted that way because he was taken by surprise - but I cannot think it right of him or quite excuse it.

Well, adieu, boy - I must tell you that when she is calm, Sien becomes at once a little mother, so quiet, so delicate, so touching, just like an etching or drawing or painting by Feyen-Perrin. I am longing to draw again with her posing for me. I long for her complete recovery and for mine, for peace and quiet, and especially for some sympathy from you. Sien sends you her regards, a handshake in thought and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 19 July 1882

Wednesday
Dear Theo,
I cannot tell you how much I regret Tersteeg's untimely visit. It is why I am writing about a few things now, although I would rather have waited and talked them over with you. I have told you that I wanted to marry Sien, and as soon as possible. Mind, however, that I wish to talk this over with you personally before saying anything to Father. I can get along with you better; you feel things more justly than all the others put together, and when you say something, it is worth while. Even though we do not agree about some things, we can always meet each other halfway because we speak in sympathy and calmness.

I also believe that if no one else meddled, unasked, everything would come right in all respects. As soon as there is any question of marriage, however, people flare up quickly and noisily, and there is no arguing with them; you can hardly get a word in edgewise. So I shall no longer wait to write about what I would rather talk over.

About marrying, you said, Do not marry her, etc., and you thought Sien fooled me, *etc.*

I then answered you that I could not agree with you in that, *etc.*

But I did not want flatly to contradict you, because I believed, and still believe, that in time you would grow to like Sien if you knew her better; and then of course you would no longer think that she fooled me or any such thing. When this has been achieved, we can talk about marriage again, I thought. But you will also remember that I did not speak openly about it in my last letter.

Only I said this much at the time, there is a promise of marriage between her and me, and I do not want you to think of her as a mistress or as someone with whom I have a liaison without caring about the consequences.

Now I shall come back to it once more. That promise of marriage is twofold; first, a promise of civil marriage as soon as circumstances will permit, and second, a promise to help each other meanwhile, to support each other, to cherish each other, not letting ourselves be separated by anything. Now the civil marriage is probably the most important question to the family. Indeed, it is important to her and to me, but it is secondary to the real essence of the matter, the love and faith between us as it already exists and is growing daily.

I am ready to propose to you letting the whole question of civil marriage rest for an indefinite time and, for instance, postponing it until I earn 150 francs a month by selling my work, at which time your help will no longer be necessary. With you, but only with you, I will thus agree that for the time being I shall not enter into a civil marriage, not until my drawing has progressed so far that I am independent.

As I begin to earn, you will gradually send less every month; and when I finally do not need your money any longer, we can talk about civil marriage again. But until then it would be quite absurd, after what has happened all last winter and especially these last months, to try to separate or divide us. We are bound and knit together by a strong bond of mutual affection, and by the help we mutually give each other. For she is my partner in work, if I may call her so, and is infinitely more than an ordinary model because she poses so willingly and intelligently that I cannot praise her enough.

After all I have told you now, I hope you will look at things with more confidence. This winter you heard from Heyerdahl, for instance, better things about my work than what Tersteeg thinks about it. I now feel so much renewed animation for my work that I have high hopes of making some progress this autumn. Perhaps about Christmas, when the year I have allowed myself is over, I will send you a number of small watercolours, of which the last little drawings, which already have some touches of brown and red and grey in them, were the beginning. And sometimes I feel a great longing to paint too, a very great longing and ambition. Especially now that the better light and the better studio involuntarily urge me on. The doctor forbids my working hard, as I still tire very easily; but this will gradually disappear, and then I shall set to work with full energy.

I want to reserve to myself the right of discussing with you in general the question of marriage, housekeeping expenses, etc., when you come here, particularly as I believe there are some points on which you are mistaken; but this will be in quite a friendly way, and it does not bear directly on the question of a legal marriage to Sien. As all this forces me to write at once, I only ask that the matter be allowed to rest until such time as I earn more by the direct sale of my work. When you come here, I shall certainly tell you the reason why I should have preferred to marry her without delay, but please do not consider this a further insistence on my part. No, to the extent I mentioned I am prepared to make concessions as far as I told you, of my own accord and of my own free will.

If people should speak to you about the affair, I think you might say that you and I are on sufficiently confidential terms to ensure your getting the necessary information from me, but that you do not think the matter need be discussed for the time being.

Such interviews like the one with Tersteeg have a more aggravating effect on the woman and myself than the rawest north wind; they must be avoided. The main thing is to get fully recovered, and to be fit to work regularly again.

I only hope now, Theo, that what I tell you about marrying will show you that I do not want to have my own way in everything, that I am willing to give in to your wishes as far as I can; but then let this prove to you that I deserve your confidence and your writing me about various things. I cannot get on with the others, but I can talk and settle things with you.

What I want is to save Sien's life and that of her two children. I do not want her to fall back into that terrible state of illness and misery in which I found her, and from which she is saved for the present. This I undertook, this I must continue. I do not want her ever to feel again that she is deserted and alone. I want her to feel and to know in every way that I feel tender love for her and affection for the children. And - whoever may disapprove of this - you will understand and not try to prevent it. I attribute her recovery to you, as I credit myself with only a small part. I have only been the means of bringing it about.

I repeat, I am sorry that I have not been able to tell you personally, and after you had made the acquaintance of the woman, what I have told you in this letter; then perhaps I might have added some more things to make you feel that I am not unreasonable. But even now I hope you will come before long and that at all events you will write soon.

Sien will soon be at her ease with you, and then you will not look down on her, and think of her the way Tersteeg did yesterday.

Be fully assured of her and my warmest affection, receive a handshake in thought and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

What I should like to talk over with you once more is the condition in which I found her, and things about her past. The poor creature has had a very hard time of it. And yet there is still a vitality and delicacy of feeling in her which have not been quenched.

I repeat once more that I am longing so very much for your coming, apart from everything, because I so need sympathy and affection. I should like so much to walk with you once more, though the Rijswijk mill is no longer there. Enfin.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 21 July 1882

Dear brother,
It is already late, but I felt like writing to you again anyway. You are not here - but I need you and sometimes feel that we are not far away from each other.

Today I promised myself something, that is, to treat my illness, or rather what remains of it, as if it didn't exist. Enough time has been lost, work must go on. So, well or not well, I am going back to drawing regularly from morning until night. I don't want anybody to be able to say to me again, “Oh! but those are only old drawings.”

I drew a study today of the baby's little cradle with a few touches of colour in it. I am also at work on one like one of those meadows I sent you recently.

My hands have become a little too white for my liking, but that's too bad. I'm going to go back outdoors again, a possible relapse matters less to me than staying away from work any longer.

Art is jealous, she does not like taking second place to an illness. Hence I shall humour her. So you will, I hope, be receiving a few more reasonably acceptable things shortly.

People like me really *should* not be ill. I would like to make it perfectly clear to you how I look at art. To get to the essence of things one must work long and hard.

What I want and have as my aim is infernally difficult to achieve, and yet I don't think I am raising my sights too high. I want to make drawings that *touch* some people.

“Sorrow” is a small beginning - perhaps such little landscapes as the “Meerdervoort Avenue,” the “Rijswijk Meadows,” the “Fish-Drying Barn,” are also a small beginning. There is at least something straight from my own heart in them. What I want to express, in both figure and landscape, isn't anything sentimental or melancholy, but deep anguish. In short, I want to get to the point where people say of my work: that man feels deeply, that man feels keenly. In spite of my so-called coarseness - do you understand? - perhaps even because of it. It seems pretentious to speak this way now, but that is the reason why I want to put all my energies into it.

What am I in the eyes of most people - a nonentity, an eccentric or an unpleasant person - somebody who has no position in society and never will have, in short, the lowest of the low.

All right, then - even if that were absolutely true, then I should one day like to show by my work what such an eccentric, such a nobody, has in his heart.

That is my ambition, based less on resentment than on love malgré tout [in spite of everything], based more on a feeling of serenity than on passion.

Though I am often in the depths of misery, there is still calmness, pure harmony and music inside me. I see paintings or drawings in the poorest cottages, in the dirtiest comers. And my mind is driven towards these things with an irresistible momentum.

Other things increasingly lose their hold on me, and the more they do so the more quickly my eye lights on the picturesque. Art demands dogged work, work in spite of everything and continuous observation. By dogged, I mean in the first place incessant labour, but also not abandoning one's views upon the say-so of this person or that.

I am not without hope, brother, that within a few year's time, or perhaps even now, little by little you will be seeing things I have done that will give you some satisfaction after all your sacrifices.

I have had very little contact with other painters lately. I haven't been the worse for it. It isn't the language of painters so much as the language of nature that one should heed. I can understand better now than I could six months ago why Mauve said: don't talk to me about Dupré, I'd rather you talked about the bank of that ditch, or something of that sort. That may sound a bit strong, and yet it is absolutely right. The feeling for things themselves, for reality, is of greater importance than the feeling for painting; anyway it is more productive and more inspiring.

Because I now have such a broad, such an expansive feeling for art and for life itself, of which art is the essence, it sounds so shrill and false when people like Tersteeg do nothing but harry one.

For my own part, I find that many modern pictures have a peculiar charm which the old ones lack. To me, one of the highest and noblest expressions of art will always be that of the English, for instance Millais and Herkomer and Frank Holl. What I would say with respect to the difference between old and present-day art is - perhaps the modern artists are deeper thinkers.

There is a great difference in sentiment between, for instance, Chill October by Millais and Bleaching Ground at Overveen by Ruysdael. And equally between Irish Emigrants by Holl and the women reading from the Bible by Rembrandt. Rembrandt and Ruysdael are sublime, for us as well as for their contemporaries, but there is something in the moderns that seems to us more personal and intimate.

It is the same with Swain's woodcuts and those of the old German masters.

And so it was a mistake when the modem painters thought it all the rage to imitate the old ones a few years ago. That's why I think old Millet is right to say, `Il me semble absurde que les hommes veuillent paraître autre chose que ce qu'ils sont. [It seems absurd to me that people want to seem other than they are.] That may seem trite, and yet it is as unfathomably deep as the ocean, and personally I am all for taking it to heart.

I just wanted to tell you that I am going to get back to working regularly again, and must do so quand même [at that] - and I'd just like to add that I look forward so much for a letter - and for the rest, I bid you goodnight. Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours,

Vincent

Please remember the *thick* Ingres if you can, enclosed is another sample. I still have a supply of the thin kind. I can do watercolour washes on the *thick Ingres*, but on the sans fin, for instance, it always goes blurry, by no fault of mine.

I hope that by *keeping hard at it* I shall draw the little cradle another hundred times, besides what I did today.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 23 July 1882
Sunday morning
My dear Theo,

I received your letter with enclosed 50 fr. My warm thanks for both, and I am very glad you have given some details about your visit. Do you approve of our arranging to spend the time you have free from business and visits together, and both trying to be in the same frame of mind as we were in the days of the Rijswijk mill?

As for me, brother - though the mill is gone and the years and my youth are gone as irrevocably - deep within me has risen again the feeling that there is some good in life, and that it is worth while to exert oneself and to try to take life seriously. Perhaps, or rather certainly, this is more firmly rooted than it used to be, when I had less experience. The question for me now is how to express the poetry of that time in my drawings.

Your letter to me crossed one of mine in which I told you I had resolved to set to work again, sick or not sick. Well, I have done so, and I find it does me no harm, though I must take more medicine to brace me up. But of course the work itself puts me in a much better mood. I could not bear staying away from my drawings any longer.

Now when you come, brother, I shall have a few watercolours for you. It is damn nice working in the studio. Do you remember that last winter I told you you would have your watercolours within a year?

Those I have done now are simply to show you that my studying drawing, correct perspective and proportions, helps me make progress in watercolours. And for my part, I did them as an experiment to find out what progress I had made in watercolours after six months of drawing exclusively; and secondly, to see what I shall have to work harder on in that fundamental drawing which everything depends on.

They are landscapes with complicated perspective, very difficult to draw, but for that very reason there is a real Dutch character and sentiment in them. They resemble those I sent last, the drawing is no less conscientious; but in addition these have colour - the soft green of the meadow contrasting with the red tile roof, the light in the sky contrasting more strongly with the sombre tones of the foreground, a yard full of wet wood and sand.

When judging me and my behaviour, Tersteeg always starts with the fixed idea that I can do nothing and am good for nothing. I heard it from his own lips, “Oh, that painting of yours will be like all the other things you started, it will come to nothing.”

He spoke like this last winter; he speaks that way now, to which I replied that I did not wish to go to see him or have him come here for six months. You should thoroughly understand - for this reason I no longer care for him; and he should clearly understand once and for all that lately I have developed a strong aversion to him, and prefer to be done with him for good and all. I quietly continue working, and I shall gladly let him tell all the absurdities about me he may get into his noodle, as such sayings only annoy and upset me. As long as he does not hinder my work, I shall absolutely forget him.

It was different last winter when he said something about his seeing to it that I should get no more money from you, and I wrote you about it at once. But I shall not write about him any more unless such a thing happens again. It would be too foolish to run after him, saying, Mr. Tersteeg, Mr. Tersteeg, I am a real painter like other painters, no matter what you say.

No, since I do indeed have the artistic sense in the very marrow of my bones, I think it's much better to go quietly camping in the meadows or the dunes, or to work in the studio from the model, without paying the slightest attention to him.

I am glad that you have been reading Le Ventre de Paris; lately I read Nana too. I tell you, Zola is really a second Balzac. Balzac the First describes society from 1815 to 1848. Zola begins where Balzac leaves off and goes on until Sedan, or rather until now. I think it's splendid. I just want to ask you what you think of *Mme.* François, who lifted poor Florent into her cart and took him home when he was lying unconscious in the middle of the road where the greengrocers' carts were passing.

Though the other greengrocers cried, Let that drunkard lie, we have no time to pick men up out of the gutter, *etc.*

That figure of *Mme.* François stands out so calmly and nobly and sympathetically all through the book, against the background of the Halles, in contrast with the brutal egoism of the other women.

See, Theo, I think *Mme.* François is truly humane; and I have done, and will do, for Sien what I think someone like *Mme.* François would have done for Florent if he had not loved politics more than her. Look here, that humanity is the salt of life; I should not care to live without it, that's all.

I care as little about what Tersteeg says as *Mme.* François cared about the other women and greengrocers when they cried, “Let him be, we have no time,” and about all the noise and gossip.

Then I must tell you that it will not be long before Sien earns her own bread by posing. My very best drawing, “Sorrow” - at least, I think it's the best I've done - well, she posed for that, and in less than a year I shall draw the figure regularly. I promise you that. For understand clearly that however much I may like landscapes, I love drawing the figure more. But it is the most difficult, and therefore costs me more study and work, and also more time. But don't let them tell you she keeps me from my work; at the studio you will see for yourself how things are. If it were true that I worked less for her sake, yes, then you would be right; but, indeed, now it is exactly the reverse.

Well, I hope we shall agree on that by and by, less by words than by drawings. I hate words. Enough.

But, brother, I am so very glad you are coming; when you are here, shall we really go through the meadows together, with nothing around us but that quiet, tender, soft green and the light sky above? Fine - and the sea and the beach, and the *old* part of Scheveningen. Delightful.

Apropos - the other day I saw some very beautiful little fusains by Th. de Bock, with touches of white and a delicate blue in the sky, very well done; I like them better than his pictures.

I can't tell you how wonderful I find all the space in the studio - now that I have set to work, the effect is immediately apparent. We'll teach them to say of my drawings “*they're only the old ones*.” After all, I didn't get ill for the fun of it.

So you must picture me sitting in my attic window as early as 4 o'clock in the morning, studying the meadows and the carpenter's yard with my perspective frame just as they're lighting the fires to make coffee in the yard and the first worker comes strolling in. A flock of white pigeons comes soaring over the red tile roofs between the smoking black chimney stacks. Beyond it all lies an infinity of delicate, soft green, miles and miles of flat meadow, and a grey sky, as calm, as peaceful as Corot or Van Goyen.

That view over the ridges of the roofs and the gutters with grass growing in them, very early in the morning, and those first signs of life and awakening - the flying bird, the smoking chimney, the small figure strolling along far below - that is the subject of my watercolour. I hope you will like it.

I'm sure that it depends more on my work than on anything else whether or not I succeed one day. Provided I can just keep going, well then, I shall fight my fight quietly in this way and no other - by calmly looking through my little window at natural things and drawing them faithfully and with love. For the rest, I shall just adopt a defensive attitude against possible molestation, and beyond that I love drawing too much to want to be distracted by anything else. The peculiar effects of perspective intrigue me more than human intrigues.

If Tersteeg only understood that my painting is a thing apart, quite different from the rest, he would not make a fuss.

But in his opinion I have deceived and disappointed Mauve. Furthermore, he thinks I'm only doing it to get more money from you. All this is absurd - too absurd to attach any importance to it. Mauve himself will understand later that he was not deceived in me, and that I was not at all unwilling. *He himself* was the one who taught me to draw more conscientiously before trying anything else. But then there was a misunderstanding between us, perhaps Tersteeg was behind it. Relationships with people like Tersteeg, who cling to their prejudices, are absolutely sterile and useless.

In answer to your letter I must say one thing, that your not knowing about Sien's child was not my fault, for when I told you about her I certainly mentioned it, but you probably thought of the child that had not yet been born.

I have already spoken a few words about the love for humanity which some people possess, for instance, *Mme.* François in the book by Zola. However, I haven't any benevolent plans or projects for trying to help everybody, but I am not ashamed to say (though I know quite well that the word *benevolence* is in bad repute) that for my part I have always felt and will feel the need to love some fellow creature. Preferably, I don't know why, an unhappy, forsaken or lonely creature.

Once I nursed for six weeks or two months a poor miserable miner who had been burned. I shared my food for a whole winter with a poor old man, and heaven knows what else, and now there is Sien. But so far I have never thought all this foolish or wrong. I think it so natural and right that I cannot understand people being so indifferent to each other in general. I must add that if I were wrong in doing this, you were also wrong in helping me so faithfully - it would be too absurd if this were wrong. I have always believed that “love thy neighbour as thyself” is no exaggeration, but a normal condition. So be it. And you know that I shall make every effort to try to sell my drawings soon, for the very reason that I do not want to abuse your kindness.

I certainly and confidently believe, brother, that to all the hints they may give you to convince you to stop sending me money, you will quietly answer that you have faith in my becoming a good painter, and so will continue to help me; that as to my private life and business, you left me free therein, and will neither force me nor help others to force me. Then I believe they will soon stop their gossip. The only thing they can do is exclude me from some circles where they consider me an outcast. Which is nothing new and doesn't bother me one way or the other. I will concentrate more and more on art. And though some people may damn me irrevocably and forever, in the nature of things my profession and my work will open new relationships to me, that much fresher for not having been frozen, hardened and made sterile by old prejudices.

Well, brother, thanks for your letter and the 50 fr.; my drawing has dried in the meantime, and I want to touch it up. The lines of the roofs and gutters shoot away into the distance like arrows from a bow, they are drawn without hesitation.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

P. S. Read as much of Zola as you can; that is good for one, and makes things clear.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 26 July 1882
Wednesday morning
Dear Theo,
I do not want you to imagine my being in a depressed or abnormal mood. And therefore I already wrote you in my last letter about my work, and as I have to ask you a few things in connection with it, I will not put off writing again.

When you come, I want to try and show you some watercolours done in different ways. Then we can see and talk over what you think is best. So I work regularly on that every day, and will continue to do so until you come.

I have now made three of Scheveningen, also the “Fish Drying Barns,” which you know - drawn as elaborately - but now there is colour too. I am sure you know, Theo, that it is not more difficult to work in colour than in black and white; indeed, perhaps the reverse, for as far as I can see, three-fourths of it depends on the original sketch, and almost the whole watercolour rests on its quality.

It is not sufficient to give an à peu près; it was and is my aim to intensify it.

In the black-and-white “Fish Drying Barns” that is already apparent, I think, for in them you can follow everything and trace the composition of the whole. And look here, I think the reason for my working so much more easily in watercolours is that I have tried so hard and for such a long time to draw more correctly.

Tersteeg called my activities a waste of time, but you will soon see that I have gained time. I already feel it now, and when you come, you will see it for yourself.

This evening I made the rounds of all the shops, looking for the thick Ingres paper, but had no luck. They have the thin kind, but not the thick or “double.” Some time ago I bought out all of Stam's supply, and since it had been in stock for some time, it had turned a fine colour. When you come, do try to bring some for me. And if you cannot get it, ask for *papier de la forme*, which is cream coloured, strong, and one can wash on it. I also think it is much cheaper than Harding or Whatman, so that in the long run it saves a great deal.

When you come, I know a few beautiful paths through the meadows where it is so quiet and restful that I am sure you will like it. There I discovered old and new labourers' cottages and other houses that are characteristic, with little gardens by the water's edge, very cosy. I will go and draw there early tomorrow morning. It is a road which runs through the meadows of the Schenkweg to Enthoven's factory or the Zieke.

I saw a dead willow trunk there, just the thing for Barye, for instance. It was hanging over a pool that was covered with reeds, quite alone and melancholy, greenish, yellowish, but mostly a dull black, with bare white spots and knotted branches. I am going to attack it tomorrow morning.

I also did a bleaching-ground at Scheveningen right on the spot, washed in at one sitting, almost without preparation, on a piece of very coarse Torchon (unbleached linen). Enclosed a few small sketches of it[F None, JH 163].

About the time of your arrival I will have some things to show you. I think you will like that "Fish Drying Barn" now that it is done in colour.

Be sure, boy, that I am quite my old self again, and be sure I believe that all depends on the work, and that I consider everything in direct relation to it. The new studio is a great improvement on the old one; it makes work easier, and it is much better for posing especially because one can take a greater distance.

I am sure that the extra rent I pay is made up for by better work.

But I have a favour to ask. I could very well understand, and it would be very natural if, instead of sending money on the first of August, you gave it to me when you came, for instance on the seventh of August. But as I bought paper and paint and brushes as soon as I received your last letter, and shall need a few other things about the first of August, I beg you kindly to send me the money about the first, though you will be coming soon after. For I figured it out exactly, and I shall be absolutely penniless after the first few days of August. I hope it will not be inconvenient for you. Of course I am not asking for more, but I am asking you to send it on time, on the first day of August if possible, if not, in the first days of the month.

I also have a second drawing of the Rijswijk meadow, in which the same subject gets quite a different aspect through a change of viewpoint.

[A sketch of the Rijswijk meadow was drawn here.]

You see I am quite taken up by landscape, but it is because Sien is not yet fit to pose; nevertheless, the figure remains the principal thing for me.

When you come, I shall take care to be near the house as long as you are in town so you will know where to find me; and then while you attend to business and pay your calls, I will go on drawing as usual. I can meet you by appointment wherever you wish, but for several reasons it is better for us both, I think, if I do not go with you to see Tersteeg or Mauve, *etc.* and then, I am so used to my working clothes, in which I can lie or sit on the sand or the grass, whichever is necessary (for in the dunes I never use a chair, only an old fish basket sometimes); so my dress is a little too Robinson Crusoe-like for paying calls with you.

I tell you this before your visit so that you may know that I will not be any trouble to you, but for the rest you will understand that I actually long for *every half hour that you can spare*. I think we shall feel easier with each other if we stick to the subject of painting and drawing, and talk especially about that. But if there is nothing else which bothers or worries you, then remember I haven't a single secret from you and you have my full confidence in everything.

I am also very anxious to show you the wood engravings. I have a splendid new one, a drawing by Fildes, “The Empty Chair of Dickens,” from the Graphic of 1870.

I could have bought three etchings by Méyron for 2 guilders, but I let them go. They were indeed very beautiful, but I have so few etchings, and when I buy anything, I stick to wood engravings. But I wanted to tell you about them - Blok is the one who has them; I don't know if all Méryons are rare and have any money value. They are from an old series L'Artiste.

I am still wrapped up in those books by Zola. How he *painted* those Halles!

My health is pretty good, but I still feel the effect of my illness and will continue to for a pretty long time. Sien and the baby are well and are getting stronger, and I love them both.

Someday I must do the cradle in watercolour (when it is rainy and I cannot work outside). But for the rest I want to show you landscape watercolours when you come. I hope to do figure watercolours this winter after I have been here a year. First I shall have to draw more from the nude, and more in black and white too, I think. We shall talk all that over, and I am sure that your visit will contribute much toward keeping things in order and making the work go smoothly.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

By going quietly on with my work I have every hope of eventually getting an entirely new circle of acquaintances to compensate for the loss of the sympathy of Mauve, Tersteeg and others; but I will make no step toward it, not the least - it must come from the work itself.

What has happened to me with Tersteeg is not at all unusual; everybody meets with such things in life. One cannot tell exactly where the fault lies. But with Tersteeg it is an old trouble. I am now almost certain that long ago he said things about me which contributed not a little toward putting me in a bad light. But I need not mind that - what could harm me before cannot harm me now.

When you come to the studio, you will see for yourself that it really is absurd when he says, “Oh! Your drawing will never amount to anything.” However, it is hard to contradict such a remark, for as soon as one does, one is called conceited, and they mention the greatest artists and say, “He fancies he's like them.”

But I repeat, everyone who works with love and intelligence finds a kind of armour against the opinion of other people in the very sincerity of his love for nature and art. Nature is also severe and, so to speak, hard; but she never deceives and always helps us on.

So I do not count my falling into disgrace with Tersteeg, or whomever, a misfortune; though I am sorry about it, *that* cannot be the real cause of misfortune. If I had no love for nature or my work, then I should indeed be misfortunate. The worse I get along with people, the more I learn to have faith in nature and to concentrate on her.

All those things make me feel brighter and fresher - you will see that I am not afraid of a bright green or a soft blue, and the thousands of different greys, for there is scarcely any colour that is not grey: red-grey, yellow-grey, green-grey, blue-grey. This is the substance of the whole colour scheme.

When I returned to that fish drying barn, a wonderfully bright fresh green of turnips or rapes had sprouted in those baskets full of sand in the foreground which serve to prevent the sand from drifting off the dunes. Two months ago everything was bare except the grass in the little garden, and now this rough, wild, luxuriant growth forms a very pretty effect in contrast to the bareness of the rest.

I hope you will like this drawing, the distant horizon, the view across the roofs of the village with the little church steeple, and the dunes - it was all so fine. I can't tell you what great pleasure I had making it. So do come soon. I think you will approve of the change of studio when you see that it gives me an infinitely better opportunity to work - more distance, better light, more room.

Last night I received a parcel from home. Among other things there was a sort of spring coat, which comes in very handy. I thought it very kind of them. And there was tobacco in it, and cigars, and cake and some underwear. In short, quite a parcel. Wasn't that nice of them? I appreciate it perhaps more for the kind thought than for anything else.

I also had a letter from Van Rappard.

I am confoundedly pleased that the fellow is so absorbed in his English wood engravings. It is true I encouraged him in the beginning, but now he no longer needs any encouragement, he is almost as enthusiastic about it as I. When you come, I will show you a few which you will not soon forget after you have seen them. And there are things among them quite different from Boughton's style, for instance, though he certainly is also one of the main ones. I mean things remarkable for their reality and style, like Albrecht Dürer's, and yet at the same time with much local colour and chiaroscuro. One does not see these things often now, for one has to look for them in magazines of ten and fifteen years ago, for instance, at the time of the war of '70 - '71.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 1 August 1882

Dear Theo,

Just a line to welcome you in anticipation of your arrival. Also to let you know of the receipt of your letter and the enclosed, for which I send my heartiest thanks. It was very welcome, for I am hard at work and need a few more things.

As far as I understand it, we of course agree perfectly about black in nature. Absolute black does not really exist. But like white, it is present in almost every colour, and forms the endless variety of greys, - different in tone and strength. So that in nature one really sees nothing else but those tones or shades.

There are but three fundamental colours - red, yellow and blue; “composites” are orange, green and purple.

By adding black and some white one gets the endless varieties of greys - *red* grey, *yellow*-grey, *blue*-grey, *green*-grey, *orange*-grey, *violet*-grey. To say, for instance, how many green-greys there are is impossible; there are endless varieties.

But the whole chemistry of colours is not more complicated than those few simple rules. And to have a clear notion of this is worth more than seventy different colours of paint, - since with those three principal colours and black and white, one can make more than seventy tones and varieties. The colourist is he who, seeing a colour in nature knows at once how to analyse it. And can say for instance: that green-grey is yellow with black and blue, *etc.*

In other words, someone who knows how to find the greys of nature on his palette. In order to make notes from nature, or to make little sketches, a strongly developed feeling for outline is absolutely necessary as well as for strengthening the composition subsequently.

But I believe one does not acquire this without effort, rather in the first place by observation, and then especially by strenuous work and research, and particular study of anatomy and perspective is also needed. Beside me is hanging a landscape study by Roelofs, a pen sketch - but I cannot tell you how expressive that simple outline is, everything is in it.

Another still more striking example is the large woodcut of “The Shepherdess” by Millet, which you showed me last year and which I have remembered ever since. And then, for instance, the pen and ink sketches by Ostade and Peasant Breughel.

When I see such results I feel more strongly the great importance of the outline. And you know for instance from “Sorrow” that I take a great deal of trouble to make progress in that respect.

But you will see when you come to the studio that besides the seeking for the outline I have, just like everyone else, a feeling for the power of colour. And that I do not object to making watercolours; but the foundation of them is the drawing, and then from the drawing many other branches beside the watercolour sprout forth, which will develop in me in time as in everybody who loves his work.

I have attacked that old whopper of a pollard willow, and I think it is the best of the watercolours: a gloomy landscape - that dead tree near a stagnant pool covered with reeds, in the distance a car shed of the Rhine Railroad, where the tracks cross each other; dingy black buildings, then green meadows, a cinder path, and a sky with shifting clouds, grey with a single bright white border and the depth of blue where the clouds for an instant are parted. In short, I wanted to make it as the signal man in his smock and with his little red flag must see and feel it when he thinks: “It is gloomy weather to-day.”

I have worked with great pleasure these last days, though now and then I still feel the effects of my illness.

Of the drawings which I will show you now I think only this: I hope they will prove to you that I am not remaining stationary in my work, but progress in a direction that is reasonable. As to the money value of my work, I do not pretend to anything else than that it would greatly astonish me if my work were not just as saleable in time as that of others. Whether that will happen now or later I cannot of course tell, but I think the surest way, which cannot fail, is to work from nature faithfully and energetically. Feeling and love for nature sooner or later find a response from people who are interested in art. It is the painter's duty to be entirely absorbed by nature and to use all his intelligence to express sentiment in his work, so that it becomes intelligible to other people. To work for the market is in my opinion not exactly the right way, but on the contrary involves deceiving the amateurs. And true painters have not done so, rather the sympathy they received sooner or later came because of their sincerity. That is all I know about it, and I do not think I need know more. Of course it is a different thing to try to find people who like your work, and who will love it - that of course is permitted. But it must not become a speculation, that would perhaps turn out wrong and would certainly cause one to lose time that ought to be spent on the work itself.

Of course you will find in my watercolours things that are not correct, but that will improve with time.

But know it well, I am far from clinging to a system or being bound by one. Such a thing exists more in the imagination of Tersteeg, for instance, than in reality. As to Tersteeg, you understand that my opinion of him is quite personal, and that I do not want to thrust upon you this opinion that I am forced to have. So long as he thinks about me and says about me the things you know, I cannot regard him as a friend, nor as being of any use to me; quite the opposite. And I am afraid that his opinion of me is too deeply rooted ever to be changed, the more so since, as you say yourself, he will never take the trouble to reconsider some things and to change. When I see how several painters here, whom I know, have problems with their watercolours and paintings, so that they cannot bring them off I often think: friend, the fault lies in your drawing. I do not regret for one single moment that I did not go on at first with watercolour and oil painting. I am sure I shall make up for that if only I work hard, so that my hand does not falter in drawing and in the perspective: but when I see young painters compose and draw from memory - and then haphazardly smear on whatever they like, also from memory - then study it at a distance, and put on a very mysterious, gloomy face in the endeavour to find out what in heaven's name it may look like, and finally make something of it, always from memory it sometimes disgusts me, and makes me think it all very tedious and dull.

The whole thing makes me sick!

But those gentlemen go on asking me, not without a certain patronizing air, “if I am not painting as yet?”

Now I too on occasion sit and improvise, so to speak, at random on a piece of paper, but I do not attach any more value to this than to a rag or a cabbage leaf.

And I hope you will understand that when I continue to stick to drawing I do so for two reasons, most of all because I want to get a firm hand for drawing, and secondly because painting and watercolouring cause a great many expenses which bring no immediate recompense, and those expenses double and redouble ten times when one works on a drawing which is not correct enough.

And if I got in debt or surrounded myself with canvases and papers all daubed with paint without being sure of my drawing, then my studio would soon become a sort of hell, as I have seen some studios look. As it is I always enter it with pleasure and work there with animation. But I do not believe that you suspect me of *unwillingness*. It only seems to me that the painters here argue in the following way. They say: you must do this or that; if one does not do it, or not exactly so, or if one says something in reply, there follows a: “so you know better than I?” So that immediately, sometimes in less than five minutes, one is in fierce altercation, and in such a position that neither party can go forward or back. The least hateful result of this is that one of the parties has the presence of mind to keep silent, and in some way or other makes a quick exit through some opening. And one is almost inclined to say: confound it, the painters are almost like a family, namely, a fatal combination of persons with contrary interests, each of whom is opposed to the rest, and two or more are of the same opinion only when it is a question of combining together to obstruct another member. This definition of the word family, my dear brother, is, I hope, not always true, especially not when it concerns painters or our own family.

With all my heart I wish peace may reign in our own family, and I remain with a handshake.

Yours, Vincent

This is nearly enough the effect of the pollard willow, only in the watercolour itself there is no black, except a broken one.

[A sketch heightened in watercolours added here.]

Where in this little sketch the black is darkest, there in the watercolour are the strongest effects, dark green, brown and grey. Well, adieu, and believe me that sometimes I laugh heartily, because people suspect me of all kinds of malignity and absurdities, of which I do not nourish an inkling. (I who am really nothing but a friend of nature. of study. of work, and of people in particular.)

Well, hoping to see you soon, with a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5 August 1882

Dear Theo,

Still quite under the spell of your visit, I write you a word or two, not a little pleased that I can go ahead vigorously with my painting.

I should have liked to see you off at the station the next morning, but I thought you had already given me so much of your time that it would have been indiscreet to ask to see you again that morning. I am so thankful that you have been here. I think it a delightful prospect to be able to work a whole year without anxiety, and a new horizon has been opened to me in painting through what you gave me.

I think I am privileged over thousands of others because you removed so many barriers for me.

Of course many a painter cannot go on because of the expenses, and I cannot express to you in words how thankful I am to be able to go on working regularly. I began later than others, and I must work doubly hard to make up for lost time; but in spite of my ardour, I should have to stop if it were not for you.

I will tell you what I have bought.

First, a large-size moist-colour box containing 12 pieces or tubes of watercolours, with a double cover, one of which can be used as a palette; there is also room for about six brushes. It is an article which is of great value for working in the open air, and really absolutely necessary, but it is very expensive; and I had always put it off and worked with loose pieces on saucers, which, however, are very difficult to take with you, especially if one has to carry other things besides. So this is a fine thing which, now that I have it, will last a long time.

At the same time I stocked up on watercolours and renewed my brushes. Then, for oil painting, I now have everything which is absolutely necessary, and also a stock of paints, large tubes (which are much cheaper than the little ones); but you will understand that I limited myself to the simple colours in watercolour as well as in oil: ochre (red - yellow-brown), cobalt and Prussian blue, Naples yellow, sienna, black and white, completed with some smaller tubes of carmine, sepia, vermilion, ultramarine, gamboge.

But I refrained from choosing “nice” colours which one ought to mix oneself.

I believe this is a practical palette with healthy colours. Ultramarine, carmine, or the like are added when strictly necessary.

[Vincent drew a sketch of his palette with the colours here.]

I will begin with little things, but this summer I hope to practice making large sketches in charcoal, so I can paint them later on a somewhat larger scale.

And therefore I ordered a new and I hope better perspective frame, which can be fixed in uneven ground in the dunes by two poles, in this way, for instance:

[A sketch of him using his perspective frame drawn here.]

What we saw in Scheveningen together - sand, sea and sky - is something I certainly hope to express sometime.

Of course I didn't spend everything you gave me immediately, though I must say that the prices of the different things were much higher than I had anticipated, and on second thought, there are always more things needed than one at first expected. If I ask you kindly to send the usual allowance about the twentieth, it is not because I shall have spent all I have, but because I think it better to keep something in my pocket, in case I should need some more things while working - it guarantees my working in a very quick and orderly fashion.

The moist-colour box fits into my paintbox, so that I can carry everything necessary for watercolour and painting in *one piece*.

I attach great importance to having good stuff to work with, and I should like my studio to look well - not with antiques or tapestry or rugs, but simply because of the studies on the wall and because of good material; but this will come in time through hard work. Speaking about the village-policeman-style - I myself feel less like a policeman than like a kind of Delft bargeman, for instance, and I have no objection to making my studio look like a kind of comfortable barge.

Yesterday afternoon I was in the attic of the wholesale paper firm of Smulders on the Laan. There I found - can you guess? - the double Ingres, under the name of Torchon paper; the grain is even coarser than in yours. I'm enclosing a sample to show you. There is a whole stock of it, old and yellowed, very good. I took only half a quire now, but I can always get more later on. I went there to buy something else, the so-called honey paper which I use now and then. Very cheap, originally an undelivered Land Registry order. It is very suitable for charcoal drawing, and comes in large sheets about the same colour as the Harding.

You can see this sample has a grain as rough as a piece of canvas, what you brought has a prettier colour and is delightful, for studies of banks and ditches or soil, for instance. But I am very glad I discovered this new kind, too.

Well, boy, thanks for everything, a handshake in thought. I'm back to work again. Give my warmest greetings to Father and Mother; thank them for what you brought me from them, and tell them I shall write soon, but as we agreed, not about anything personal.

Adieu, I wish you a pleasant time and a good return to your work, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5 or 6 August 1882

Dear Theo,

In my last letter you will have found a little sketch of that perspective frame I mentioned. I just came back from the blacksmith, who made iron points to go on the sticks and iron corners for the frame.

It consists of two long stakes; the frame may be attached to them either upright or horizontally with strong wooden pegs.

[Here was drawn a sketch of the perspective frame.]

So on the shore or in the meadow or in the fields one can took through it as *through a window,* the vertical lines and the perpendicular line of the frame and the diagonal lines and the point of intersection, or else the division in squares, certainly give a few basic markers, with the help of which one can make a firm drawing, from the indication of the main lines and proportions - at least for those who have some instinct for perspective and some understanding of the reason why and the manner in which perspective gives an apparent change of direction to the lines and a change of size to the lines and to the whole mass. Without this the instrument is of little or no use at all, and it makes one *dizzy* to look through it. I think you can imagine how it is a delightful thing to focus the viewer on the sea, on the green meadows, or in winter on the snowy field or in autumn on the fantastic network of thin and thick branches and trunks or on a stormy sky.

With long and continuous practice it enables one to draw quick as lightning, - and once the drawing is established to paint quick as lightning also.

In fact, *for painting* it is absolutely the thing, for to express sky-earth-sea one needs the brush, or rather in order to express all that in drawing it is necessary to know and to understand the treatment of the brush. I certainly believe that if I paint for some time, it will have great influence on my drawing. I already tried it in January, but then I had to stop, the reason for my decision being, aside from a few other things, that I was too hesitant in my drawing. Now six months have passed that have been quite devoted to drawing. Well, it is with new courage that I start to paint again. The perspective frame is really a fine piece of workmanship; l am sorry you did not see it before you left. It cost me quite a bit, but I have had it made so solidly that it will last a long time. So next Monday I begin to make large charcoal studies with it, and begin to *paint* small studies. If I succeed in these two things, then I hope that better-painted things will follow soon.

I want my studio to be a real painter's studio by the time you come again. I had to stop in January, as you know, for several different reasons, but after all it may be considered like some defect in a machine, a screw or a bar that was not strong enough and had to be replaced by a stronger one.

I bought a pair of strong and warm trousers, and as I had bought a pair of strong shoes just before you came, I am now prepared to weather the storm and rain. It is my decided aim to learn from this painting of landscape a few things about *technique* which I feel I need for the *figure*, namely to express different *materials*, and the *tone* and the *colour*. In one word, to express the bulk - the body - of things. Through your coming it became possible to me, but before you came there was not a day when I did not think in this way about it, only I should have had to keep exclusively to black and white and to the outline a little longer. - But now I have *launched my boat*. Adieu, boy, once more, a hearty handshake and believe me,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 10-12 August 1882

Dear Theo,

During the few days since you left, I have made some experiments with painting. And I thought you might be curious to know how it turned out. I wish you could spend an hour with me in the studio again, that would be the best way to tell you how it went. But as this is of course impossible, I shall only tell you that I now have three painted studies. One of a row of pollard willows in a meadow (behind the Geest bridge); then a study of the cinder path near here; and today I was at the vegetable gardens on Laan van Meerdervoort again, and saw a potato field with a ditch; a man in a blue smock and a woman were picking up potatoes, and I put their figures in.[Paintings lost]

It was a white, sandy field, partly dug up, partly still covered with rows of dried stalks, with green weeds in between. In the distance, dark green trees and a few roofs.

I did this last study with special pleasure. I must tell you that painting does not seem so strange to me as you would perhaps suppose; on the contrary, I like it very much, as it is a very strong means of expression. And at the same time one can express tender things with it too, let a soft grey or green speak amid all the ruggedness.

I am very glad I have the necessary materials, for already I had often suppressed the desire to paint. It opens a much broader horizon.

Now I should prefer to go on making quite a number of painted studies, and hang them in my studio without speaking to anybody about the change. And in case someone wonders at seeing things painted by me, I should say, Did you think that I had no sentiment for it, or was unable to do it?

But I have attached great value to drawing and will continue to do so, because it is the backbone of painting, the skeleton that supports all the rest. I like it so much, Theo, that it is only because of the expenses that I shall have to restrain myself rather than urge myself on. These studies are of medium size, a little larger than the cover of an ordinary paintbox, because I do not work inside the cover, but thumbtack the paper for the study onto a frame which has canvas stretched on it, and which I can carry easily in my hand. I will *draw* larger things before I paint them, or I will make grisailles of them if I can discover the technique - I will try to find it.

It becomes too expensive if one is not economical with the paint; but, boy, it is so delightful to have so many new and good materials; once more, many, many thanks. I will certainly try and take care that you never regret it, but have the satisfaction of seeing progress. I write you just this little word to tell you I have made a beginning. Of course the studies must get even better. I know they have many faults, but I believe that in these first ones you will already see something of the open air, which proves that I love nature and that I have a painter's heart. Enclosed, a small scratch of the Laan van Meerdervoort. Those vegetable gardens there have a kind of old Dutch character which always appeals to me greatly.

Well, goodnight, it is already late, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I am reading Zola's La Curée

When I finished this letter, it seemed to me something was missing.

I thought, I ought to be able to write him that I have started to paint a scene of sand, sea and sky like the one we saw together at Scheveningen.

[A sketch of the work was drawn here.]

So I kept my letter, and this morning I marched to the beach and have just returned from there with a rather large-sized painted study of sand, sea and sky, a few fishing smacks, and two men on the beach. There is some dune sand in it, and I assure you that this will not be the last one. I thought you would like to hear that I had started it.

I repeat, I shall see to it that when you come back in half a year or in a few months or a year, the studio will have become a painter's studio. These pen-and-ink sketches have been made in a great hurry, as you can see. Now that I am making some progress, I will try and strike while the iron is hot - that means I shall go on painting. If you can send the usual amount about the twentieth, I can certainly go on painting for some time. I think that after a month of steady painting, the studio will have quite a different aspect. Hoping this will please you, I shake hands with you again and warmly wish you prosperity in everything.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 13 August 1882

Sunday evening
Amice Rappard,
Your letter, which I received last night, gladdened my heart. I had been expecting it, but I thought you were on a jaunt somewhere. What you say about Drenthe interests me - I do not know it at all from my own observation, but I do through the things Mauve and ter Meulen, for instance, brought back from there.

I imagine it is something like Brabant *when I was young* - say, some twenty years ago. I remember as a boy seeing that heath and the little farms, the looms and the spinning wheels in exactly the same way I see them now in Mauve's and ter Meulen's drawings. But since then that part of Brabant with which I was acquainted has changed enormously in consequence of agricultural developments and the establishment of industries. Speaking for myself, in certain spots I do not look without a little sadness on a new red-tiled tavern, remembering a loam cottage with a moss-covered thatched roof that used to be there.

Since then there have come sugar-beet factories, railways, agricultural developments of the heath, etc., which are infinitely less picturesque.

It can't be helped - but what is sure to remain is something of the stern poetry of the real heath. And this real heath seems to exist in Drenthe as it used to in Brabant.

Yet there is an enormous amount of beautiful scenery in Brabant, even now - do you remember 't Heike, where we were together?

I think the little sketches in your letter very good; I find much character in that “Churchyard” especially. As for me, in consequence of a visit from my brother, who saw my watercolours, I am also very busy painting.

Speaking frankly, I do not think people would conclude from my first painted studies that they really are my first.

There is nothing strange in it for me, and it greatly attracts me.

Last night I found a very pretty effect in the meadows near Rijswijk. Flat green meadows, across which runs a black coal path with a ditch alongside. The sun is setting fiery red - a poor peasant is trudging home - in the far distance a farmhouse.

Further, I have a small marine - and patches of dune soil - a row of pollard willows, a potato field and so on.

Painting is so sympathetic to me that it will be very difficult for me not to go on painting *forever*.

It is more virile than doing watercolours, and there is more poetry in it.

Probably you know that at present there is an exhibition of the Hollandse Tekenmaatschappij [“Dutch Drawing Society”] here. There are splendid things

There is a “Woman at a Weaving Loom” by Mauve that I cannot get out of my mind. A “Poor Old Woman” by Israëls, the same. Neuhuys, Maris, Duchâtel [Du Chattel], ter Meulen and a lot of others, to say nothing of Weissenbruch!

There is an extremely nice portrait of Weissenbruch by Israëls, so true and characteristic that I cannot describe it to you.

There is also a beautiful large marine by Mesdag and two Swiss things by him that I think rather silly, although there is a certain boldness in them - but not carried through and not “felt.” But I think the large marine superb.

By Willem Maris, a very striking “Sow” with a legion of piglets.

And a Jaap [Jacob] Maris, a very large “Town View,” as vigorous as Vermeer of Delft.

Some time ago we had an exhibition of French art from private collections: Daubigny, Corot, Jules Dupré, Jules Breton, Courbet, Diaz, Jacque, Th. Rousseau; this work stimulated me very much - but for all that I felt a certain melancholy when I thought how these faithful veterans are disappearing one by one. Corot is dead and gone, Th. Rousseau, Millet, Daubigny are resting after their labours. Jules Breton, Jules Dupré Jacque, Ed. Frère are still there, but how long will they be going around in their painter's smocks? They are all elderly men, with one foot in the grave. And their successors - are they worthy of those first truly modern masters? All the more reason for us to bestir ourselves energetically and not to slacken.

I am much pleased with my new studio; I can find my subjects in the immediate neighborhood. With all my heart I hope you will come and see me eventually, and I am always eager to see something of your work, or to read about it in a letter.

My brother also sends you his kind regards; I told him you were working so hard. The same is true of me in this respect, so that at present I am writing only a few letters, and I am writing in great haste now too.

Good luck and success in everything, and believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 14 August 1882

Dear Theo,

You must not take it amiss if I write you again - it is only to tell you that painting is such a joy to me.

Last Saturday night I attacked a thing I had been dreaming of for a long time. It is a view of the flat green meadows, with haycocks. It is crossed by a cinder path running along a ditch. And on the horizon in the middle of the picture the sun is setting, fiery red.[Painting lost]

[Sketch of the work drawn here.]

I cannot possibly draw the effect in such a hurry, but this is the composition.

But it was purely a question of colour and tone, the variety of the sky's colour scheme - first a violet haze, with the red sun half covered by a dark purple cloud which had a brilliant fine red border; near the sun reflections of vermilion, but above it a streak of yellow, turning into green and then into blue, the so-called *cerulean blue*; and then here and there violet and grey clouds, catching reflections from the sun.

The ground was a kind of carpetlike texture of green, grey and brown, but variegated and full of vibration - in this colourful soil the water in the ditch sparkles.

It is something that Émile Breton, for instance, might paint.

Then I have painted a huge mass of dune ground - thickly painted and sticky.

And as for these two, the small marine and the potato field, *I am sure no one could tell that they are my first painted studies*.

To tell you the truth, it surprises me a little. I had expected the first things to be a failure, though I supposed they would improve later on; but though I say so myself, they are not bad at all, and I repeat, it surprises me a little.

I think the reason is that before I began to paint, I had been drawing so much and had studied perspective in order to build up the composition of the thing I saw.

Now, since I have bought my paint and brushes, I have drudged and worked so hard on seven painted studies that right now I'm beat. One of them has a figure in it, a mother with her child, in the shadow of a large tree, in tone against the dune, on which the summer sun is shining - almost an Italian effect. I simply couldn't restrain myself or keep my hands off it or allow myself any rest.

[Painting lost]

As you perhaps know, there is an exhibition of the Black and White Society. There is a drawing by Mauve - a woman at a weaving loom, probably in Drenthe - which I think superb.

No doubt you saw some of them at Tersteeg's. There are splendid things by Israëls - including a portrait of Weissenbruch, with a pipe in his mouth and his palette in his hand. By Weissenbruch himself, beautiful things - landscapes and also a marine.

There is a very large drawing by J. Maris, a splendid town view. A beautiful W. Maris, among other things, a sow with a litter of pigs, and cows. Neuhuys, Duchâtel, Mesdag. By the last, besides a fine large marine, two Swiss landscapes which I think rather stupid and dull. But the large marine is splendid.

Israëls has four large drawings, a girl at the window, children near a pigsty - the sketch for the little picture at the Salon - a little old woman kindling the fire in the twilight, at the time engraved for the Art Chronicle.

It is very inspiring to see such things, for then I perceive how much I still have to learn.

But this much I want to tell you - while painting, I feel a power of colour in me that I did not possess before, things of broadness and strength.

Now I am not going to send you things at once - let it ripen a little first - but know that I am full of ambition and believe that for the present I am making progress. (In three months, however, I will send something to give you an idea of how I'm getting on.) But that is just the reason for me to persevere and to acquire what I need.

So do not think that I am satisfied with myself from what I say about my work - the contrary is true; but I think this much is gained: in the future when something strikes me in nature, I shall have more means than before with which to give it new vigour.

And I am not displeased that what I shall make in the future will look more attractive.

Neither do I believe that it will hinder me if my health should give way a little from time to time. As far as I can see, the painters who occasionally cannot work for a week or two are not the worst ones. It may be because they are the ones “qui y mettent leur peau,” as father Millet says. That doesn't matter, and in my opinion one must not spare oneself when there is something important to do. If a short period of exhaustion follows, it will soon pass, and so much is gained that one harvests one's studies just the way a farmer harvests his crops. Now for myself, I have not yet thought of taking a rest. Only yesterday, Sunday, I did not do so much - at least I did not go out to paint. I will see to it that even if you come this winter, you will find the studio full of painted studies.

I had a letter from Rappard yesterday; he has been to Drenthe, and judging from the two little sketches he sent me, he has not been idle. He seems to work very hard and well, too - figures as well as landscape.

Well, adieu, I must set off to work again; with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

It is now just *two* years since I began to draw in the Borinage.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 19 August 1882

Saturday evening
Dear Theo,
My sincere thanks for your letter and the enclosed. As soon as I received your letter I bought 7 guilders' worth of colours immediately, so as to have some provisions and to replenish my box. All during the week we have had a great deal of wind, storm and rain, and I went to Scheveningen several times to see it.

I brought two small marines home from there.

One of them is slightly sprinkled with sand - but the second, made during a real storm, during which the sea came quite close to the dunes, was so covered with a thick layer of sand that I was obliged to scrape it off twice. The wind blew so hard that I could scarcely stay on my feet, and could hardly see for the sand that was flying around. However, I tried to get it fixed by going to a little inn behind the dunes, and there scraped it off and immediately painted it in again, returning to the beach now and then for a fresh impression. So I brought a few souvenirs home after all.

But another souvenir is that I caught cold again, with all the consequences you know of, which now forces me to stay home for a few days.

In the meantime, I have painted a few studies of the figure - I'm sending you two sketches.

Painting the figure appeals to me very much, but it must ripen - I must get to know the technique better - what is sometimes called “la cuisine de l'art.” In the beginning I shall have to do much scraping, and shall often have to begin anew, but I feel that I learn from it and that it gives me a new, fresh view of things.

The next time you send money, I shall buy some good marten brushes, which are the real *drawing* brushes, as I have discovered, for *drawing* a hand or a profile in colour. Also, I see they are absolutely necessary for very delicate branches, *etc.* No matter how fine, the Lyon brushes make too broad stripes or strokes. My painting paper is also almost used up - toward the first of September I shall have to buy a few more supplies, but I shall not need more than the usual allowance.

Then I want to tell you that I quite agree with several points in your letter. Especially, I fully agree that, with all their good and bad qualities, Father and Mother are the kind of people who are becoming rare in the present time - more and more rare - and perhaps the new type is not at all better - and so one must appreciate them that much more.

Personally, I do indeed appreciate them. I am only afraid that the feeling about which you reassured them for the time being would come back, especially if they saw me again. They will never be able to understand what painting is. They cannot understand that the figure of a labourer — some furrows in a ploughed field - a bit of sand, sea and sky — are serious subjects, so difficult, but at the same time so beautiful, that it is indeed worth while to devote one's life to expressing the poetry hidden in them.

In the future, whenever they saw me toiling and pegging away at my work — scraping it out and changing it — now severely comparing it to nature then changing it a little so they can no longer exactly recognize the spot or the figure — it would always be a disappointment to them. They will not be able to understand that painting cannot succeed at once, and over and over again they will think, “He doesn't really know anything about it,” and that real painters would work in quite a different way.

Well, I dare not allow myself any illusions, and I am afraid that Father and Mother may never really appreciate my art. This is not surprising, and it is not their fault; they have not learned to look at things as you and I have learned to look at them. They look at different things than we do; we do not see the same things with the same eyes, nor do the same thoughts occur to us. It is permissible to wish this were otherwise, but in my opinion it is not wise to expect it.

They will hardly be able to understand my frame of mind, and they will not know what urges me on. When they see me doing things which they think strange and eccentric, they will ascribe them to discontent, indifference, or carelessness, whereas in reality there is something quite different at the bottom of it, namely, the wish to pursue, coùte que coùte, what I need for my work. Now they are perhaps looking forward to the “painting in oil.” Now at last it will come — and oh! how disappointed they would be, I am afraid, if they could see it; they would notice nothing but daubs of paint — besides, they consider drawing a “*preparatory study*” an expression which many years ago I learned to hate inexpressibly, and think as incorrect as it can be. As you well know. And when they see me still at it, the way I was before, they will think I am going to be doing that preparatory study forever.

Well, let us hope for the best and try to reassure them.

What you tell me about their new surroundings is very interesting. I should certainly love to paint such a little old church, and the churchyard with its sandy grave-mounds and old wooden crosses. I hope I shall have the chance sometime.

Then you write about the stretch of heath and the pine wood close by. I can tell you, I feel an everlasting homesickness for heath and pine trees, with the characteristic figures - a poor woman gathering wood, a poor peasant carrying sand - in short, those simple things that have something of the grandeur of the sea. I have always had a wish to go and live somewhere quite in the country, if I had an opportunity and circumstances would permit. But I have plenty of subjects here - the woods, the beach, the Rijswijk meadows near by, and so, literally, a new subject at every footstep.

But it would also be to live more cheaply.

But for the moment, as far as I can see, there is no immediate reason, and so I am in no hurry.

I only tell you so you'll realize how sympathetic I am to scenery like that which you describe as Father and Mother's new surroundings.

It is the painting that makes me so happy these days. I restrained myself up to now, and stuck to drawing just because I know so many sad stories of people who threw themselves headlong into painting - who sought the solution of their problems in technique and awoke disillusioned, without having made any progress, but having become up to their ears in debt because of the expensive things they had spoiled.

I had feared and dreaded this from the start: I have considered drawing, and still do, the only way to avoid such a fate, and I have grown to love drawing instead of considering it a nuisance. Now, however, painting has unexpectedly given me much scope: it enables me to see effects that were unattainable before - just the ones which, after all, appeal to me most - and it enlightens me so much more on many questions and gives me new means by which to express effects. All together, these things make me very happy.

It has been so beautiful in Scheveningen lately. The sea was even more impressive before the gale, than while it raged. During the gale, one could not see the waves so well, and the effect was less of a furrowed field. The waves followed each other so quickly that one overlapped the other, and the clash of the masses of water raised a spray which, like drifting sand, wrapped the foreground in a sort of haze. It was a fierce storm, and if one looked at it long, even more fierce, even more impressive, because it made so little noise. The sea was the colour of dirty soapsuds. There was one fishing smack on that spot, the last of the row, and a few dark little figures.

There is something infinite in painting - I cannot explain it to you so well - but it is so delightful just for expressing one's feelings. There are hidden harmonies or contrasts in colours which Involuntarily combine to work together and which could not possibly be used in another way.

Tomorrow I hope to go and work in the open air again.

I have read most of Zola's La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret and Son Excellence Eugène Rougon, both beautiful. I think Pascal Rougon, the doctor who appears in his series of books, but always in the background, a noble figure. He really proves that no matter how degenerate a race may be, it is always possible for energy and will-power to conquer fate. In his profession he found a force stronger than the temperament he had inherited from his family; instead of surrendering to his natural instincts, he followed a clear, straight path, and did not slide into the wretched muddle in which all the other Rougons perished. He and Madame François of Le Ventre de Paris are to me the most sympathetic figures.

Well, adieu, I often think of you, and how I should love to see you now and then. A handshake in thought and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

While writing this I have done another study, of a boy - grey, charcoal, oil, and very little colour, just for the tone.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 20 August 1882

Sunday afternoon
Dear Theo,
I have just received a nice letter from home which gave me very real pleasure, and from which it is clear that your visit and the things you told them about me and my work have had a reassuring effect on them. This is bound, I think, to have welcome repercussions, and I should like to thank you in particular for the way in which you spoke about me, although it seems to me that you had more good things to say than I as yet deserve.

At home they seem very much pleased with their new surroundings, and are still full of your visit.

For that matter, so am I, for several things you told me make me think of you more often than before, and certainly not with less affection. Especially what you told me about your health makes me think of you often. I am pretty well; my not sparing myself and acting as if I had never been ill works all right. But you realize that I have not entirely recovered. I feel it at times, especially in the evening when I'm tired; but fortunately it never got bad enough to prevent my working.

This week I have painted some rather large studies in the wood, which I tried to carry out more thoroughly and vigorously than the first ones.

The one which I believe succeeded best is of nothing but a piece of dug-up earth - white, black and brown sand after a pouring rain. Here and there the lumps of earth caught the light, and stood out in strong relief. After I had been sitting drawing that piece of ground for some time, there was another violent thunderstorm with a terrific cloudburst, which lasted for at least an hour. I was so eager to continue that I remained at my post and sheltered myself as well as I could behind a big tree. When it was over at last, and the crows flying again, I was not sorry I had waited, because of the beautiful deep tone which the rain had given to the soil. As I had begun before the rain, with a low horizon, on my knees, I now had to work kneeling in the mud, and it is because of such adventures, which often present themselves in different forms, that I think it is not superfluous to wear an ordinary workman's suit, which is less easily spoiled. The result of this was that I could bring that piece of ground home to the studio - though Mauve once rightly said, while speaking about a study of his, It is a hard job to draw those lumps of earth and get perspective into them.[Painting lost]

The other study in the wood is of some large green beech trunks on a stretch of ground covered with dry sticks, and the little figure of a girl in white. There was the great difficulty of keeping it clear, and of getting space between the trunks standing at different distances - and the place and relative bulk of those trunks change with the perspective - to make it so that one can breathe and walk around in it, and to make you smell the fragrance of the wood.

It was with extreme pleasure that I made these two studies.

The same with a thing I saw at Scheveningen, a stretch in the dunes in the morning after the rain. The grass was comparatively green, and the black nets were spread over it in enormous circles, giving the soil deep reddish-black and greenish-grey tones. On this somber ground, women in white caps and men spreading or repairing the nets were sitting or standing, or walking around like dark fantastic ghosts. In nature it was as strikingly gloomy and serious as the most beautiful Millet, Israëls or De Groux one can imagine - over the landscape a simple grey sky with a light streak on the horizon. Notwithstanding showers of rain, I made a study of it on a sheet of oiled Torchon. Much will have to happen before I shall be able to make it as vigorous as I should like, but these are the things in nature that strike me most.

How beautiful it is outside when everything is wet from the rain - before - in - and after the rain. I oughtn't to let a single shower pass.

This morning I have put all the painted studies up in the studio. I wish I could talk them over with you.

As I had already expected and counted on, while I was busy, I had to buy a great many things, and the money is nearly all spent on them.

For two weeks I have painted from early in the morning until late at night, so to speak; if I continued this way, it would be too expensive as long as I do not sell.

I think it possible that if you saw the paintings, you would say that I ought to go on with it, not just at times when I feel particularly inclined, but regularly, as absolutely the most important thing, though it might cause more expenses. But though I myself love doing it, and for the present shall probably not paint as much as my ambition and desire demand because of the heavy expenses, I think I shall not lose by giving a great deal of my time to drawing, and I do this with no less pleasure. However, I am in doubt - painting comes easier to me than I expected - perhaps it would be better to throw myself into it with all my strength, first pegging away with the brush. I must say I cannot tell.

At all events, drawing in charcoal is something I am sure I must study now more than ever - at all events, I have enough to do and can go on. Even when I restrain myself a little in painting, I can work just as hard.

If I have now painted so many studies in a short time, it is because I work hard, literally working all day, scarcely taking time even to eat or drink.

There are little figures in several of the studies. I also worked on a large one and have scraped it off twice, which you would perhaps have thought too rash if you had seen the effect; but it was not impatience, it was because I feel I can do even better by grinding and trying, and I absolutely want to succeed in doing better, however much time, however much trouble it may cost.

Landscape, as I have taken it up now, decidedly requires the figure too. They are studies for backgrounds which one must do so thoroughly because the tone of the figure and the effect of the whole depend on it.

What I like so much about painting is that with the same amount of trouble which one takes over a drawing, one brings home something that conveys the impression much better and is much more pleasant to look at - and at the same time, more correct too. In a word it is more gratifying than drawing. But it is absolutely necessary to be able to draw the right proportion and the position of the object pretty correctly before one begins. If one makes mistakes in this, the whole thing comes to nothing.

I am longing for autumn. I must be sure to have a stock of colours and other things against that time. I love so much, so very much, the effect of the yellow leaves; the green beech trunks stand out so well against them, and figures, too.

Lately I read part of a rather melancholy book, Letters and Diary of Gerard Bilders. [A Dutch painter who died young.] He died at the age when I began. When I read that, I was not sorry that I started late. He certainly was unhappy and was often misunderstood, but at the same time I find a great weakness in him, something morbid in his character. It is like the story of a plant which shoots up too soon, and cannot stand the frost, and gets stricken to the roots by it on a certain night and then withers. At first everything goes all right - he is with a teacher (as in a hothouse) - he makes quick progress but in Amsterdam he is almost alone, and with all his cleverness, he cannot stand it there, and comes back home to his father quite discouraged, dissatisfied, listless - he paints a little there, and then dies of consumption or of some other disease in his twenty-eighth year.

What I don't like about him is that *while he paints*, he complains of terrible dullness and idleness, as though it were something he couldn't do anything about; and he continues to run around with a, to him, too oppressive circle of friends, and persisting in the amusements and way of life which bore him to death. In short, he is a sympathetic figure; but I would rather read the life of father Millet or of Th. Rousseau or of Daubigny. Reading Sensier's book on

Millet gives one courage, and Bilders's makes one feel terrible.

I often find an enumeration of difficulties in Millet's letters, but still, j'ai tout de me me fait ceci ou cela [I have done this or that after all], and then he always has other things in mind which he absolutely must do and which he will carry out.

And too often G. Bilders says, “I've been blue this week and have been making a mess of things - I went to this or that concert or theater, but came home even more miserable than when I went.”

What strikes me in Millet is this simple, “l must do this or that *after all*.”

Bilders is very witty, and can lament in a most ludicrous way about “Manila cigars” - which he likes and which he cannot afford - about tailors' bills which he cannot figure out how to pay. He describes his anxiety about money affairs so wittily that he himself and the reader have to laugh. But no matter how wittily these things may be told, I dislike it, and have more respect for Millet's private difficulties, “il faut tout de même de la soupe pour les enfants” [after all, there must be soup for the children]; he does not talk about “Manila cigars” or about amusements.

What I want to say is, Gerard Bilders's view of life was romantic, and he never got over the illusions perdues; for my part I think it a certain advantage that I started only when I had left romantic illusions behind me. I must make up for lost time now. I must work hard, but just when one has left the lost illusions behind, work becomes a necessity and one of the few pleasures left. And this gives a great quiet and tranquillity.

I regret that it will be a year perhaps before you will see all my paintings (even though I might send you something now and then) and before we can talk things over. I assure you that the things I have painted now will prove useful to me. Perhaps I shall succeed now where I did not succeed in January. The reason I enjoy painting so much is not its agreeable aspect, but its throwing light on various questions of tone and form and material. I used to be helpless before them, but now by means of painting I can attempt them. Now I also see a better chance of getting results with charcoal.

Please do not suspect me of being indifferent to earning money; I am trying to find the shortest way to that end. If only those means of earning money be real and lasting, which I personally can only see in the future if there is some real good in my work, not if I aim exclusively at saleability - one has to suffer for that later - but if I study nature carefully.

If you saw that my painting would have the best chance, of course I should not refuse to paint more. But if it would be a long time before it became saleable, I would be the first to say, Meanwhile we must practice the greatest economy, and, by drawing, many expenses are avoided and one makes solid though slow progress. I see a change in these painted things, and I am writing you about it because you can tell better than I how it may affect the eventual saleability. At all events it seems to me that the painted studies have a *more pleasant aspect* than my drawings.

Personally, I attach less value to the more pleasant, less meager effect; my goal is the expression of more severe and virile things, for which I still have to drudge a great deal.

But if you said, Work on those landscapes or woods scenes or marines, I would have nothing against it, as it would not prevent my attempting larger or more serious things. I should only want the assurance that they are worth the brushes, the paint and the canvas, and that it is not throwing money away to do them, but that they are worth what they cost. In that case I should even work on them with great ambition. I will begin by letting them ripen a little more, by putting some more vigour into them. Then in a few months, for instance, I will send you something again, and we can see.

I believe most painters have eventually succeeded in reaching a higher level this way. I should not want to make things that were intrinsically bad, untrue, and of false conception, because I love nature too much. But this is the problem: I must still make many studies to reach something higher and better. What will be most profitable, drawing those studies or painting them?

If the painted ones are unsaleable, then certainly it will be more advantageous to draw with charcoal or something. But if it were possible to make good the expense of painted studies, then I want to tell you that in principle I have nothing against it, now that I see that they turn out rather well and may perhaps turn out to be a source of good fortune. In principle I am only against wasting paint on things which one can learn just as well another way, when there is no chance of selling them at present.

I should not want to cause either myself or you unnecessary expense, but I see clearly that the painted things have a more pleasant aspect. This makes me uncertain what to do. My money is not quite gone, but there is not much left. If I am not mistaken, today is the twentieth; I have spent less rather than more than usual on the household this month. It is true I have had to spend a good deal on painting materials, but much of this will last quite a while. But it is true that everything is very expensive. I hope you will be able to send something soon. Receive a warm handshake in thought and believe me,

Yours sincerely,

Vincent

I certainly hope that you will not infer from this letter that I am pretentious enough to think these first studies saleable. Formerly I could tell better than now what things were worth, whether they were saleable or not; now I notice daily that I do not know any more, and studying nature is more important to me than studying the prices of pictures. But I think I see that the painted studies have a much more pleasing aspect than either those drawn in black and white or the watercolours you saw recently. And therefore I am uncertain as to whether it might possibly be more profitable after all to make painting absolutely the principal thing, notwithstanding the greater expense. I would rather you decided this than I, because I think you are more competent to judge financial success, and I absolutely trust your judgment.

You told me to try to finish a little drawing in watercolour. I believe that by painting I shall actually be able to make better watercolours than before, if I start them again. But if it does not turn out well, you must not get discouraged, neither must I, and you must not be afraid to criticize me. I do not systematically ignore criticism, but it generally takes more time to change a thing than to indicate a change. Thus I have only just put into practice things that Mauve told me in January. And, for instance, I painted that piece of ground according to a conversation I had with him about a study of his.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3 September 1882

Sunday morning
My dear Theo,
I have just received your very welcome letter, and as am taking some rest today, I am answering it at once. Thank you very much for it and for the enclosure, and for the various things you say in it.

And many thanks for your description of that scene with the workmen at Montmartre, which I found very interesting because you convey the colours so well that I can see them. I am glad you are reading the book on Gavarni. I found it very interesting, and it made me love G. twice as much.

Paris and its environs may be beautiful, but we have no complaints here either.

This week I did a painting that I think would remind you a little of Scheveningen as we saw it when we walked there together: A large study of sand, sea and sky - a big sky of delicate grey and warm white, with a single small patch of soft blue shimmering through - the sand and the sea light, so that the whole becomes golden, but animated by the boldly and distinctively coloured figures and fishing smacks, which tend to set the tonal values. The subject of the sketch I made of it is a fishing smack weighing anchor. The horses stand ready for hitching up before pulling the smack into the sea. I am enclosing a little sketch of it.

It was really hard to do. I just wish I'd painted it on a panel or on canvas. I tried to get more colour into it, that is, depth, strength of colour.

How strange it is that you and I so often seem to have the same thoughts. Yesterday evening, for instance, I came home from the woods with a study, having been deeply preoccupied with the question of depth of colour the whole week, and particularly at that moment. And I should very much have liked to have talked to you about it, especially with reference to the study I had done - and lo and behold, in this morning's letter you chance to mention that you were struck by the very vivid, yet harmonious, colours of Montmartre. I don't know if it was precisely the same thing that struck the two of us, but I do know that you would most certainly have been affected by what struck me so particularly and would probably have seen it in the same light.

As a start, I am sending you a little sketch of the subject and I shall tell you what the problem was.

The woods are becoming thoroughly autumnal, and there are colourful effects I don't often see in Dutch paintings.

Yesterday evening I was working on a slightly rising woodland slope covered with dry and mouldering beech leaves [F 008, JH 182]. The ground was light and dark reddish brown, emphasized by the weaker and stronger shadows of trees casting half-obliterated stripes across it. The problem, and I found it a very difficult one, was to get the depth of colour, the enormous power and solidity of that ground - and yet it was only while painting it that I noticed how much light there was still in the dusk - to retain the light as well as the glow, and depth of that rich colour, for there is no carpet imaginable as splendid as that deep brownish-red in the glow of an autumn evening sun, however toned down by the trees.

Young beech trees spring from the ground, catching the light to one side, where they are a brilliant green, and the shadowy side of the trunks is a warm, intense black-green.

Behind those saplings, behind that brownish-red ground, is a sky of a very delicate, blue-grey. Warm, hardly blue at all, sparkling. And against it there is a hazy border of greenness and a network of saplings and yellowish leaves. A few figures of wood gatherers are foraging about, dark masses of mysterious shadows. The white cap of a woman bending down to pick up a dry branch stands out suddenly against the deep reddish-brown of the ground. A skirt catches the light, a shadow is cast, the dark silhouette of a man appears above the wooded slope. A white bonnet, a cap, a shoulder, the bust of a woman show up against the sky. These figures, which are large and full of poetry, appear in the twilight of that deep shadowy tone like enormous clay figurines taking shaped in a studio.

I am describing nature to you - I'm not sure to what extent I reproduced it in my sketch, but I do know that I was struck by the harmony of green, red, black, yellow, blue, brown, grey. It was very de Groux-like, an effect like, say, that sketch of “The Conscript's Departure” formerly in the Palais Ducal.

It was a hard job painting it. The ground used up one and a half large tubes of white - even though the ground is very dark - and for the rest red, yellow, brown, ochre, black, sienna, bistre, and the result is a reddish-brown, but one ranging from bistre to deep wine-red and to a pale, golden ruddiness. Then there are still the mosses and a border of fresh grass, which catches the light and glitters brightly, and is very difficult to capture. So there in the end you have it, a sketch that I maintain has some significance, something to tell, no matter what may be said about it.

I said to myself while I was doing it: don't let me leave before there is something of the autumnal evening in it, something mysterious, something important. However - because this effect doesn't last - I had to paint quickly, putting the figures in all at once, with a few forceful strokes of a firm brush. It had struck me how firmly the saplings were rooted in the ground - I started on them with the brush, but because the ground was already impasted, brush-strokes simply vanished into it. Then I squeezed the roots and trunks in from the tube and modelled them a little with the brush.

Well, they are in there now, springing out of it, standing strongly rooted in it.

In a way I am glad that I never *learned* painting. In all probability I would then have learned to ignore such effects as this. Now I can say to myself, this is just what I want. If it is impossible, it is impossible, but I'm going to try it even though I don't know how it ought to be done. *I don't know myself* how I paint it, I just sit down with a white board in front of the spot that appeals to me, I look at what is in front of my eyes, and I say to myself: that white board has got to turn into something - I come back, dissatisfied, I lay it to one side and when I have rested a little, I go and look at it with a kind of awe. Then I am still dissatisfied, because I have that splendid scenery too much in my mind to be satisfied with what I made of it. Yet I can see in my work an echo of what appealed to me, I can see that the scenery has told me something, has spoken to me, and that I have taken it down in shorthand. My shorthand may contain words that cannot be deciphered, mistakes or gaps, and yet there is something left of what the wood or the beach or the figure has told me, and it isn't in tame or conventional language derived from a studied manner or from some system, but from nature itself.

Enclosed another little sketch from the dunes. There are small bushes there whose leaves are white on one side and dark green on the other and are constantly moving and glittering. Beyond them dark trees.

You can see that I am plunging full speed ahead into painting, I am plunging into colour. I have refrained from doing so up till now and I am not sorry for it. Had I had not already done some drawing, I should be unable to get the feeling of, or be able to tackle, a figure that looks like an unfinished clay figurine. But now that I sense I have gained the open sea, painting must go full speed ahead as fast as we are able.

If I am going to paint on panel or canvas then the expenses will go up again, everything is so expensive, paint is expensive, too, and is so quickly used up. Well, these are complaints all painters have, we must see what can be done. I know for certain that I have a feeling for colour and shall acquire more and more, that painting is in the very marrow of my bones.

I value your loyal and effective help more than I can say. I think of you so much; I should so like my work to become vigorous, serious, virile, so that you too may get some pleasure out of it as soon as possible.

One thing I should like to bring to your attention as a matter of importance - wouldn't it be possible to obtain paint, panels, brushes, etc., at *discount* prices? I am having to pay the *retail* price at the moment. Have you any connection with Paillard or someone like that? If so, I think it would be much more economical to get paints, say, wholesale, for instance white, ochre, sienna, and we could then come to some arrangement about the money. Everything would be cheaper, it goes without saying. Do think it over.

One doesn't paint well by using a lot of paint, but in order to do a ground effectively or to get a sky bright, one must sometimes not spare the tube. Sometimes the subject calls for less paint, sometimes the material, the nature of the subjects themselves demands impasto. Mauve, who paints very frugally in comparison with J. Maris and even more so in comparison with Millet or Jules Dupré, nevertheless has cigar boxes full of the remnants of tubes in the corners of his studio, as plentiful as the empty bottles in the corners of rooms after a soirée or dinner such as Zola describes, for instance.

Well, if there could be a little extra this month, that would be wonderful. If not, then not. I shall work as hard as I can. You ask about my health, but what about yours? I would imagine my remedy would be yours as well: to be out in the open, painting. I am well, I still feel like it even when I'm tired, and that is getting better rather than worse. It's also a good thing, I think, that I live as frugally as possible, but my main remedy is painting.

I sincerely hope that your luck is in and that you will have even more. Please accept a handshake in my thoughts, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

You will see that there is a soft, golden effect in the little marine sketch and a more sombre, more serious mood in the woods. I am glad that both exist in life.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 9 September 1882

Dear Theo,
A few words to congratulate you on September 10 [their Mother's birthday]. I do not know if I have already told you that I have had a letter from Willemien, who describes the country around Nuenen very prettily.

It seems to be very beautiful there.

I have asked her for some particulars about the weavers, who interest me very much. I saw them when I was in the Pas-de-Calais - it was indescribably beautiful. However, I need not paint weavers yet, though I certainly hope to sooner or later.

It is autumn now in the woods, it quite absorbs me.

There are two things in autumn which particularly appeal to me.

There is sometimes a soft melancholy in the falling leaves, in the tempered light, in the haziness of things, in the elegance of the slender stems.

But I also love the other, more sturdy and rugged, side - those strong light effects, for instance, on a man who stands digging and perspiring in the midday sun. Enclosed a few sketches I made this week.

I was thinking again about those workmen on Montmartre whom you described in your last letter. I knew there was somebody who had made those things remarkably well.

I mean A. Lançon. I looked over his wood engravings in my collection - how clever that man is. Among them I found “Gathering of Ragpickers,” “Soup Distribution,” “Snow-Clearing Gang,” which I think are splendid. He is so very productive that they seem simply to drop out of his sleeve.

Speaking of wood engravings, this week I found some beautiful new ones in L'Illustration. It is a series by Paul Renouard: “Les prisons de Paris”; what beautiful things are among them!

At night when I cannot sleep, which often happens, I always look at the wood engravings with renewed pleasure.

Another famous draughtsman is G. Mahoney, who illustrated the Household Edition of Dickens.

I think that painting will teach me to interpret the light better, which should bring a great change in my drawings, too.

How many difficulties have to be overcome before one can express something, but those very difficulties are the stimulus.

Enclosed is another sketch of the woods. I made a large study of it.

I feel such creative power in myself that I know for sure that the time will arrive when, so to speak, I shall regularly make something good every day.

But very rarely a day passes that I do not make something, though it is not yet the real thing I want to make.

Well, sometimes it seems to me that I might soon become productive. I would not be at all surprised if it should happen someday.

I feel that at all events painting will indirectly rouse other things in me too.

Look, for instance, at this little sketch of the potato market on the North Wall. That bustling of the workmen and the women, with the baskets being loaded from the barge, is very intriguing to look at. Those are the things I should want to draw and paint vigorously - the life and movement in such a scene, and the types of people. But I am not surprised that I cannot do it at once, and that up to now I have often failed when I tried. By painting I shall certainly become more proficient with the colours and better able to take on such a subject.

Well, to have patience and to work on, that is the question. I am sending you the little sketch - I make a lot of them in this way - just to tell you that indeed, things like that scene of the workmen on Montmartre, for instance, preoccupy me too. A general knowledge of the figure is needed for it, which I try to acquire by drawing large figure studies. And I firmly believe that if I continue doing this, I shall learn to express the bustle of labourers in the streets or in the fields.

That potato market is such a curious place. All the poor people from the Geest, from the Ledig Erf, and all those places in the neighborhood, come running out. There are always such scenes - one time it is a barge full of peat, then one with fish, then one with coal or something or other. I have a great many sketches of Ireland by English artists. I think the quarter I'm writing you about must be very much like an Irish town.

I always try my best to put all my energy into my work, for my greatest desire is to make beautiful things. But making beautiful things costs trouble and disappointment and perseverance.

I enclose another view of the wood in the evening after the rain. I cannot tell you how splendid that effect was in nature, with the green turned to bronze, and here and there the fallen leaves.

I wish you could walk here some evening in this splendid autumn wood. What I bring back from it this year will be just a scanty harvest. However, I hope to bring a few things, and in time it will grow more and more.

In the meantime all my paint has been used up. I sincerely hope that you yourself are not hard up. But at all events I hope you will send the usual allowance around September 10. This afternoon I must go to the potato market again. It is impossible to paint there because of the people; they already give me trouble enough. I wish one could have free access to the houses and sit down by the windows without ceremony. Well, it is Saturday night, and so there will certainly be something characteristic going on worth looking at. I wish you all good luck, know that I think of you daily. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 11 September 1882

Dear Theo,
I have just received your letter and the enclosed 50 fr., for which my warm thanks. A few small watercolours are again enclosed.

As you will remember, when you were here, you spoke about my someday trying to send you a little drawing of a “saleable” nature. However, you must excuse my not knowing exactly when a drawing is, and when it is not, that kind. I used to think I knew, but now I perceive daily that I am mistaken.

Well, I hope this little bench, though perhaps not yet saleable, will show you that I am not averse to choosing subjects sometimes which are pleasant or attractive and, as such, will find buyers sooner than things of a more gloomy sentiment.

I enclose with the little bench another one as a pendant [JH 195], also a part of the wood. I struck off the little bench after the larger watercolour I am working on, in which there are deeper tones, but I do not know whether I shall succeed in finishing it well [JH 196]. The other sketch is after a painted study.

Now I should like to hear from you if this little drawing is more or less the kind we spoke about. I send it to you because I should not want you to think I had forgotten, but later I hope to send you some better things.

You remember I wrote you in my last letter that I was going to the potato market.

I brought home many sketches that time, it was extraordinarily intriguing - but it may serve as an example of The Hague public's politeness towards painters that suddenly a fellow from behind me, or probably from a window, spat his quid of tobacco onto my paper. Well, one has trouble enough sometimes. But one need not take it so very seriously; those people are not bad, they do not understand anything about it, and probably think I am a lunatic when they see me making a drawing with large hooks and crooks which don't mean anything to them.

Recently I have also been very busy drawing horses in the street. I would love to have a horse for a model sometime. Yesterday, for instance, I heard someone behind me say, That's a queer sort of painter - he draws the horse's ass instead of drawing it from the front. I rather liked that comment.

I love to make those sketches in the street, and as I wrote you in my last letter, I certainly want to reach a sort of perfection in it.

Do you know an American magazine called Harper's Monthly? There are wonderful sketches in it. I myself know it only slightly. I have seen only six numbers, and possess but three of them. But there are things in it which strike me dumb with admiration, including “Glassworks” and “Foundry,” all scenes from factories. And also sketches of a Quaker town in the olden days by Howard Pyle. I am full of new pleasure in those things, because I have new hope of making things that have soul in them myself.

What you write about the money you lent and did not get back is indeed a calamity. I still have to pay for some colours, and have to buy more, so that by September 20 I shall certainly be short. But I am going to vary the work a little, and try to make both ends meet. But please remember that a little extra money will help me make extra progress - more than would otherwise be the case.

One needs so many things and everything is so expensive. But, at all events, I am doubly thankful to you, and feel I am so much luckier than the others because of the money I receive from you; and I assure you that I try very hard to make progress.

Today I shall again go to the usual Monday market, to try and make some sketches when they are pulling down the stalls.

Adieu, good luck in everything, write me soon and know that I always love to read a description like the one of Montmartre.

I am messing around so much with paint that there is even paint on this letter. I am busy with the large watercolour of the bench.

I wish it would turn out well, but the great trouble is to keep the correct form together with depth of tone; and it is very difficult to keep clear.

Once more adieu, a handshake in thought, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Thank you very much for sending me the money when you yourself are so very hard up. I doubly need it because autumn will be over so soon, and it is the most beautiful season for painting.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 12-14 September 1882

Amice Rappard,

It pleases me to be able to send you the enclosed wood engravings. You will see that these too are somewhat damaged along the folds, which is not caused by the forwarding but rather by their having been so long in use in a public library. But you will be able to paste them together, as I myself have to do quite often. Please let me know whether you have a small figure of a woman by McQuoid - she is holding a light in her hand on the stairs of an armory, where one sees the glint of armour. I think I have already given it to you, as well as the “Girl in White” leaning against a tree, but if you do not have it, I shall add it to another batch some time. McQuoid is one of the most distinguished of the English illustrators. I think you will also like the Renouards - later on I may be able to add a few others, as the Jew told me he had part of the kit of old magazines (from which I took these as well as mine) at home; he had not brought them along because they were too badly damaged. As soon as I have time, I am going to hunt through that mess - which, by the way, is not a pleasant job.

Personally I think “The Strike of the Miners” superb; I feel sure you will like it too.

I have taken a lot of trouble to get things about miners. This and an English one of an accident are the most beautiful - but for the rest these subjects are rare - I wish I myself could make studies of them eventually. Do let me know, Rappard, but in all seriousness, whether - if I went away - for instance to the mining district of the Borinage for two months - you would like to come with me.

It is rather a difficult stretch of country - such a journey is not a pleasure trip - but it is one of those things I should undertake with enormous pleasure as soon as I feel I have gained more dexterity in drawing people in action with lightning speed - for I know that there are so many beautiful things to do which have hardly, if ever, been painted by others. But because one has to contend with all kinds of difficulties in such a district, it would not be superfluous to have a friend along.

Anyway, *at present* my circumstances would not permit it, but the thought is deeply rooted in my mind. Recently I have been working often on the beach, either drawing or painting. And I am more and more attracted by the sea.

I don't know what your experience has been with artists here - more than once I have found that fellows started to abuse most maliciously what they call “the illustrative,” and this in a way that showed me quite clearly that they were wholly unacquainted with the subject, and hadn't the slightest idea of what is going on in this field. Moreover, they were not to be convinced, or rather they did not choose to take the trouble to look at things themselves. And when they did look, it remained in their heads for only a short time, and then went out of them radically.

Now I know from my experience with you that you think quite differently about it.

The other day I found some other things by Lançon: a “Soup Distribution,” a “Gathering of rag pickers,” a “Snow-Cleaning Gang”; I got up during the night to look at them again, so strong was the impression they had made on me.

And especially as I myself am working at trying to do things that interest me more and more - scenes in the street, the third-class waiting room, on the beach, in a hospital - my respect for those great black-and-white artists of the people, as for instance Renouard or Lançon or Doré or Morin or Gavarni or du Maurier or Ch. Keene or Howard Pyle or Hopkins or Herkomer or Frank Hol, and countless others, is forever increasing.

Perhaps you feel the same way to some extent.

Well - however that may be - I always find it highly interesting that you are working away at subjects that are so very sympathetic to me, and at times I feel really sorry that we live rather far away from each other, and have relatively little contact with each other.

I have no more time to write now, so receive a handshake in thought, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Herewith a very hasty sketch of a watercolour I am working on [F 951, JH 197].

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 17 September 1882

Dear Theo,
The weeks pass quickly and it is Sunday again.
I have often been to Scheveningen these last few days, and one evening I just hit that curious moment when a fishing smack was coming in. Near the monument is a little wooden shed in which a man sits on the lookout. As soon as the boat came in sight, the fellow appeared with a large blue flag, followed by a crowd of little children who just reached his knees. It was apparently a great pleasure for them to stand near the man with the flag, and I suppose they fancied they were helping the fishing smack come in. A few minutes after the man had waved his flag, a fellow on an old horse arrived who had to go and get the anchor.

Then the group was joined by several men and women - including mothers with children - to welcome the crew. When the boat was near enough, the man on horseback went into the water and came back with the anchor.

Then the men were carried ashore on the backs of men wearing high wading boots, and there was a great cheer of welcome at each new arrival. When they were all ashore, the whole troop marched home like a flock of sheep or like a caravan, with the man on the camel - I mean the man on the horse - towering over them like a tall spectre.

Of course I tried to sketch the various incidents most carefully. I have also painted part of it, namely, the group of which I enclose a little sketch.

Then I painted another study of a marine, nothing but a bit of sand, sea, sky - grey and lonely. I sometimes long for that quiet, where there is nothing but the gray sea - with a solitary sea bird - except for that, no voice other than the roaring of the waves. It is a refreshing change from the noisy bustle of the Geest or the potato market.

For the rest, this week I have been working on sketches for watercolours.

I also carried the large one of the bench out further, and then I made a sketch of women in the hospital garden, and part of the Geest.

You can see from the enclosed sketch what I want to make - groups of people who are in action some way or another. But how difficult it is to bring life and movement into it and to put the figures in their places, yet separate from each other. It is that great problem, *moutonner*: groups of figures form one whole, but in it the head or shoulders of one rise above those of another; in the foreground the legs of the first figures standout strongly, and somewhat higher the skirts and trousers form a kind of confusion in which the lines are still quite visible. Then to the right or the left, according to the point of view, the greater or lesser extension or shortening of the sides. As to composition, all possible scenes with figures - either a market or the arrival of a boat, a group of people in line at the soup kitchen, in the waiting room of the station, the hospital, the pawnshop... groups talking in the street or walking around - are based on that same principle of the flock of sheep, from which the word *moutonner* is surely derived, and it all depends on the same problems of light and brown and perspective. There is the same effect of the chestnut trees here as you describe in your last letter, as you will have seen from the drawing of the little bench; only here very little of the new green leaves is still visible, though some time ago I also noticed it, but here they are withered by the many gales.

Soon the leaves will really start to fall here, and then especially I hope to paint many studies of the wood and also of the beach, for though there are no effects of autumn leaves there, the peculiar light of autumn evenings has its own effect, and it is twice as beautiful there during this time of the year, as it is everywhere.

Am rather short of colours and other things, but you know how it is - I can vary my work in different ways, and there are always so many things to draw. For the group of figures in the enclosed sketch varies infinitely and requires innumerable separate studies and sketches of each figure, which one must catch quickly in the street. In this way it gradually gets character and vigour. Recently I made a study of ladies and gentlemen on the beach, a hustling crowd of people.

Sooner or later, after some more study, I should love to do drawings for illustrations. Perhaps one thing will result from the other. The main thing is to continue working.

I certainly hope you are well, and that you will write me about yourself and the things which strike you in your surroundings. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely,

Vincent

I am so afraid that you are in great embarrassment because of the occurrence you wrote me about, and I hope things will settle themselves.

You see from the little sketch that I have started the thing I mentioned in my last letter, namely, regularly sketching the scenes of working people, of fishermen, which strike me - either drawing or painting them; and these are the very things which, with some practice, might serve as illustrations, I think.

Of course the characters must be much more vigorously executed for that purpose.

I made about ten different sketches of the fishing smack's arrival, also of the weighing of the anchor which I sent you in my last letter.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 18-19 September 1882

Amice Rappard,

Your very welcome letter came to hand a minute ago, and as I am longing for another chat with you, I am answering it at once.

You write, “Have you many German things?” As it happens, I wrote in a letter to my brother, with reference to some figure studies I had done, practically exactly the same things about Vautier and some other Germans as you do. I told him I had been to an exhibition of watercolours where there were a good many things by Italians. Clever, very clever - and yet they left me with a feeling of emptiness, and I told my brother, Old fellow, what jolly times those were when that artists' club in the Alsace was started: Vautier, Knaus, Jundt, Georg Saal, Van Muyden, *Brion*, and especially Anker and Th. Schuler, who mostly did drawings that were, one might say, explained and propped up by artists of another kind, namely such writers as Erckmann-Chatrian and Auerbach. Oh, certainly, these Italians are very clever, but where is their sentiment, their human feeling? I would rather see a little grey sketch by Lançon - some rag pickers eating soup, while outside it is raining or snowing - than those brilliant peacock's feathers by those Italians - who seem to multiply daily, whereas the soberer artists remain just as rare as always.

I mean it, Rappard, I would just as soon be a waiter in a hotel, for instance, than the kind of watercolour manufacturer some of those Italians are.

I do not say this of all of them, but I am sure you will feel as I do about the trend and the purpose of this school. What I say does not imply that I do not appreciate many of them - I mean such artists as have something Goya-esque about them, for instance Fortuny in some things, and Morelli, and at times even Tapero, *etc.* - further Heilbuth, Zues. Some ten or twelve years ago - I was with Goupil then - I saw these things for the first time; I thought them splendid, and I admired them even more than the elaborate things by the German or English artists, for instance Rochussen or Mauve. But I changed my mind a long time ago, because I think these artists are a bit like birds that can sing only one note, and I happen to be feeling more sympathy for larks and nightingales that tell us more with less noise and more passion. For all that, I don't have many things by the Germans - the fine things of Brion's time are hard to find now.

At the time I made a collection of wood engravings, particularly after the artists mentioned above, but I gave it away to a friend in England when I left Goupil. Now I am mighty sorry I did. If you want something very beautiful, then order from the offices of L'Illustration*:* l'Album des Vosges, dessiné de Th. Schuler, Brion, Valentin, Jundt, etc.; I think the price is 5 francs, but I am afraid it might be sold out. At any rate it is worth inquiring. It is even probable that the price has been raised now - they won't send it for inspection, so I did not venture to inquire myself.

I know only a few particulars about English black-and-white artists, by which I mean that I could not give a biography of any of them. But generally speaking, as I lived in England for fully three years, I learned much about them and their work by seeing a lot of what they did. Without having been in England for a long time it is hardly possible to appreciate them to the full.

They have quite another way of feeling, conceiving, expressing themselves, to which one must get used to begin with - but I assure you it is worth the trouble to study them, for they are great artists, these Englishmen. Israëls, Mauve and Rochussen come nearest to them - all the same the aspect of a picture by Thomas Faed, for instance, is greatly different from one by Israëls; and a drawing by Pinwell, Morris or Small looks different from one by Mauve; and a Gilbert or du Maurier is different from a Rochussen.

Speaking of Rochussen, I saw a marvelous drawing by him: French generals in a room of an old Dutch town hall, demanding information and papers from the burgomaster and the town councilors. I thought it just as beautiful as, for instance, that scene in Dr. Wagner's house in Madame Thérèse by Erckmann-Chatrian. I know that at one time you did not appreciate Rochussen very much, but I feel sure that, when you see his important drawings, you will like him quite a lot.

For me the English black-and-white artists are to art what Dickens is to literature. They have exactly the same sentiment, noble and healthy, and one always returns to them. I greatly wish you had the opportunity some time to look over my whole collection at leisure. *You gain an insight, particularly from seeing many of them together, and the work begins to speak for itself, and you see clearly what a splendid whole this school of artists forms* - just as one must read the whole of Dickens or of Balzac or of Zola to understand their books separately.

For instance, at present I have no less than fifty sheets about Ireland. Separately one might easily overlook them; but as soon as one sees them together, one is struck by them.

I do not know the portrait of Shakespeare by Menzel, but I'd very much like to see how one lion understood the other. For Menzel's work has this much in common with Shakespeare's, that it is so intensely *alive.* I have the small edition by Fred and the big one by Menzel. Please bring Shakespeare's picture along next time you come to The Hague.

I haven't got the prints you write about, except Régamey, Heilbuth and Marchetti; I haven't got Jacquet either.

I haven't anything by Whistler, but at the time I saw some beautiful etchings of his, figure and landscape.

The marines by Wyllie in the Graphic, about which you write, struck me too. I know the “Widow's Field” by Boughton; it is very beautiful. My mind is so occupied by all this that I am organizing my whole life so as to do the things of everyday life that Dickens describes and the artists I've mentioned draw. Millet says, “Dans l'art - *il faut y mettre sa peau”* - yes, art demands the sacrifice of the whole man. I have engaged in the struggle, I know what I want, and drivel about what is called “the illustrative” cannot mislead me. My intercourse with artists has stopped almost completely, without my being able to explain precisely how and why this has come about. All kinds of eccentric and bad things are thought and said about me, which makes me feel somewhat forlorn now and then, but on the other hand it concentrates my attention on the things that never change - that is to say, the eternal beauty of nature. Often I think of the old story of Robinson Crusoe, who did not lose courage in his isolation, but managed to create a round of activities for himself so that through his own seeking and toiling his life became very active and animated.

Well - of late I have also been painting and doing watercolours, and further I am doing a lot of figure drawing after the model and making sketches in the street. Besides, I have rather often had a man from the almshouse posing for me.

Now it is really high time I returned Karl Robert's Le fusain to you. I have read it through more than once, but fusain [charcoal] does not come easily to me, and I prefer to work with a carpenter's pencil. I wish I could see someone doing a fusain - with me it becomes overdone so rapidly, and this must be caused by something that, I think, might be overcome when I saw someone else doing it. Next time you come I'll have to ask you a number of things about it.

All the same I'm glad I've read it, and I quite agree with the author that it is splendid material to work with, and I greatly wish I knew how to use it better.

Perhaps I shall find out someday, together with a number of other things that are still obscure to me.

So I am returning it with many thanks. I am including some wood engravings - among which there are two German ones by Marchal. I think the Lançons beautiful, and especially the one by Green and “The Miners.”

If you have duplicates, please remember to send them to me.

And the same holds true with regard to letters. And if you read something that strikes you, please let me know it too, for I am practically uninformed about what is being published nowadays - I know something more of the literature of some years ago. When I was ill and afterward I read Zola's books with great admiration. I thought Balzac unique, but now I see that he has successors. But all the same, Rappard, that time of Balzac and Dickens, that time of Gavarni and Millet - how far away it is. For though it isn't so long since these men passed away, yet it's a long, long time *since they began*, and since then many changes have taken place which in my opinion are not exactly changes for the better. Once I read in Eliot, “Though it be dead, I think of it all as alive.” To my mind the same may be said of the period I am writing about. And that is why I am so very fond of Rochussen, for instance. You are speaking of the illustration of fairy tales - do you know that Rochussen did some splendid watercolours of scenes out of German legends? I know a series called Lenore - brilliant of sentiment. But Rochussen's important drawings are not much in circulation; they are to be found, rather, in the portfolios of wealthy collectors. As soon as you put a little vigour into collecting wood engravings you are sure to hear some learned drivel about “the illustrative.” But what is happening to the wood engravings? - the beautiful ones are getting scarcer and scarcer, and more and more difficult to get hold of, and eventually people who are hunting for them will no longer be able to find them. The other day I saw a complete set of Doré's pictures of London. I tell you it is superb, and noble in sentiment - for instance that room in the “Night Shelter for Beggars” - I think you have it, or else you will be able to get it.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Among other things I am working on a watercolour of orphans - and I have started many other things - so I am very busy.

When I had finished this letter, I went out and came back with another batch of illustrations, namely from the old Dutch Illustration, so that I can add a few more duplicates to the little package.

In the first place three very fine Daumiers, and one Jacque. If you have them already, then please return them to me sometime.

I have always thought “The Four Ages of a Drinker” by Daumier one of the most beautiful things. There is as much soul in it as in a De Groux. I am very glad to be able to send you this sheet; the Daumiers are getting scarce.

Even if you had nothing else by Daumier than this one, the master would still be well represented in your collection. At the time I certainly saw splendid drawings by Frans Hals, and in this particular sheet I found something - aye, *everything* - of Frans Hals and Rembrandt.

Further, I am including extremely fine Morins and old Dorés - sheets that are becoming scarcer and scarcer and scarcer.

Of course you have heard, like myself, a lot of cheap talk - with regard to “the illustrative” - aimed at Doré - and of course at Morin too. But I believe that, notwithstanding this, you still like the work of these artists - and yet, unless one is on guard, such things may influence one. Therefore, now that I am sending you these sheets, I don't think it superfluous to tell you that I find in these soiled wood engravings a certain flavour of the days of Gavarni, and of Balzac and Victor Hugo - something of the now almost forgotten *Bohème* - for which I feel a deep respect, and which, every time I see them again, stimulates me to do my best and to attack things energetically.

Of course I too see the difference between a drawing by Doré and one by Millet, but the one does not exclude the other.

There is a difference, but there is also a resemblance. Doré can model a torso and put together the joints better, infinitely better, than many who revile him with pedantic self-conceit - witness that one sheet which to him was no more than a rough sketch of sea bathers.

I say that, if somebody like Millet had criticized Dorés drawing - I doubt if he would ever have done it, but suppose he had - well, then he would have had a *right* to do so; but when those who with their ten fingers cannot do a tenth of what Doré can do with a single finger revile his work, then it is nothing but humbug, and it would be more appropriate if they held their tongues and learned to draw better themselves.

It is so ridiculous that nowadays this non-appreciation of drawing should be such a general phenomenon.

Surely you saw in Brussels the drawings by Lynen - how witty and funny and clever they were; if you spoke about them to one of the fellows, he would answer arrogantly and with a certain disdain, Oh yes, they were “rather nice.” This Lynen himself, for instance, will probably always be a poor man, though it is quite likely that he is very active and productive, and will become more and more so. Well, speaking for myself - provided I remain active and productive too - as long as I may have my daily bread, I shall not mind being relatively poor all my life.

Well, goodbye once more; I hope you will like the wood engravings and that I shall hear from you soon. Adieu.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 18 September 1882

Dear Theo,
When you were here we spoke about a certain little drawing which I would send you, so I then sent you the one of the little bench. To show you that I myself seriously intend to work on in that style, I am enclosing a few little sketches.

I am doing a watercolour of the flocks of orphans with their spiritual shepherds, which probably will not succeed well enough to be saleable.

But to show you that it is not so easy to get some character into the figures, and that I am trying hard to overcome this difficulty, I am also sending you sketches of figure studies which I made recently, and which are of course more elaborate than these sketches.

If I had remained on good terms with Mauve, and had done a watercolour like the one of the little bench, or now the one of these orphans, I think that he would have pointed something out to me which would have made it saleable, and which would have given it quite a different aspect.

It is a fact that many a painter's watercolours or pictures are worked up by another painter - and sometimes even completely altered.

That is what I miss now - but though I don't exactly disapprove of more experienced painters either making suggestions or working it up themselves (especially because it is so necessary for the younger ones to earn money in order to be able to keep going), I think it is not exactly a misfortune to struggle on alone.

What one learns from personal experience is not learned so quickly, but it is imprinted more deeply on the mind.

I went to see the drawings in the Gothic Hall; I thought the ones by Rochussen were splendid. It was a thing from Napoleon's time: French officers in an old town hall, who seemed to be asking for papers and information from the mayor and town council. It was so typical, that little old mayor and then those generals, exactly the way Erckmann-Chatrian, for instance, describes it in Madame Thérèse. I enjoyed it immensely.

There were also some very beautiful things by Allebé [Dutch painter], drawings from the Zoological Gardens, and a landscape with fir trees on the rocks by the seashore, through which one sees a fisherman's cottage in the valley. By Hoeterinks there were beautiful town and beach views with small figures. But however much I like his current drawings, it seems a pity to me that he didn't stick to his origional style, when he did characters taken from the people (for instance, a picture “Le Mont de Piété.”) [The Pawnshop.]

It is the same with drawing as it is with writing. When a child learns to write, it seems almost impossible to him that he will ever learn, and seeing the teacher write so quickly seems almost like a miracle. But nevertheless, in time every child learns. And I really believe one must learn to draw in such a way that it becomes as easy as writing, and that one must know the proportions as well, and learn to see so accurately that one can reproduce whatever one sees on a larger or smaller scale.

We are having very beautiful bad weather here at present, rain, wind, thunderstorms, but with splendid effects; that's why I like it, but for the rest, it is rather chilly. The time for working in the open air is drawing to a close, and the main thing is to profit as much as possible before the winter comes.

Toward winter I shall clean up the studio - that is, I shall take the studies down from the walls and remove everything that takes up too much room - so that I shall have plenty of room to work with models. I feel that I need a great many figure studies - also of Scheveningen fisherwomen. I should like to get some of the studies you have back sometime, the ones you do not care to keep (of course, if you have a chance to send them). If there is anything you want to keep, if there is anything I have here you would like to have, just say so, for I consider everything as belonging to you. If I ask it back, it is because what is made directly from the model is often necessary for watercolours, for instance. But there is no hurry - just don't throw them away, even though they are not so very well done, for everything may be useful. I do not think I am mistaken in believing that being and remaining productive depends on the studies one has and continues to make. The more variety there is in them, the more one drudges on them, the more easily one works later when it comes to making real pictures or drawings. In short, I reckon the studies to be the seed, and the more one sows, the more one may hope to reap.

Lately I read Les Deux Frères by Erckmann-Chatrian, and I liked it. It must have been a pleasant time when there were so many artists in the Alsace - Brion, Marshall, Jundt, Vautier, Knaus, Schuler, Saal, Van Muyden and a great many more - together with many others who worked in the same line, like Chatrian and Auerbach. I myself like them better than Tapiró or Capibianchi, or those hordes of other Italians who seem to go on multiplying.

Adieu, believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 19 September 1882

Dear Theo,

At the moment I write you, I have almost spent my last guilder. Well, I hope to hear from you soon, but considering what you wrote me lately, I think it very possible that perhaps you will not be able to send the usual amount on the twentieth. In that case I beg you to send as much or as little as you can spare, even if it is only a small part of it. I have a model coming Friday afternoon, a man from the workhouse, and I wouldn't like to send him away without his money.

I had some extra expenses because my paint box got broken when I had to jump from a high bank and collect my belongings as quickly as possible in order to get out of the way of a horse which had bolted outside the Rhine railway station, where they load coal.

It is very beautiful there. I had to ask permission to paint there, as it is not public ground, and I hope to work there often now.

On that occasion I painted the heaps of coal where the men were at work and where a horse and wagon stood.

Then I made another study of a little almshouse with a bleaching green and sunflowers.

It is beautiful outside now - the leaves have all kinds of bronze colours - green, yellow, reddish - everything warm and rich.

How I wish you could see all my studies together. The studio already has a different aspect since your visit. I have had many expenses, that is true, but the walls are now full of painted studies.

That little almshouse and those heaps of coal were so splendid that I couldn't keep my hands off them, though I had intended to draw this week because of the expenses. I should love to have the kind of things in my studio - it is what I am working for - which remind me of the country every morning when I see them. So that I know immediately what to do that day - and at once feel like doing some particular thing or going to some particular spot.

As to sending you a painted study someday, I haven't the slightest objection; but before I do, we must agree on a few things.

Somebody like Mauve - or any other artist - certainly has his particular colour scheme, but nobody can get this all at once, and it doesn't show in studies made in the open air, even with painters who are much more experienced than I. Especially Mauve's studies, which I personally like very much, just because of their soberness and because they are done so faithfully. Still, they lack a certain charm which the resultant pictures possess in such a high degree.

With me, for instance, it is such that the marine I recently brought home is already quite different in colour from the first or second I did. So you should not yet judge my palette from what I might send you now. And if I myself would rather wait until it has become riper before I send you anything, it is because I believe that my colour will change a great deal, and the composition, too.

So this is the first reason; and the second is that studies done in the open air are different from pictures which are destined to come before the public.

In my opinion, the latter result from the studies, yet they may, in fact must, differ a great deal from them. For in the picture the painter gives a personal idea; and in a study his aim is simply to analyze a bit of nature - either to get his idea or conception more correct, or to find a new idea. So studies belong more to the studio than among the public, and must not be considered from the same point of view as the pictures. Well, I think you will look at it the same way, and take these things into consideration of your own accord.

But write me sometime what you want me to do, and know that I will do what you think best - I'll either send them or I won't.

But what I should like best of all is for you to see everything together. Is there any chance of your coming again this winter? If so, I should certainly prefer not to send anything. Enfin. But I will certainly pay attention and keep in mind whatever you may say about the work's saleability, and do not think I underrate your opinion.

I consider making studies like sowing, and making pictures like reaping.

I believe one gets sounder ideas when the thoughts arise from direct contact with things than when one looks at them with the set purpose of finding certain facts in them.

It is the same with the question of the colour scheme. There are colours which harmonize together wonderfully, but I try my best to make it as I see it before I set to work to make it as I feel it. And yet feeling is a great thing, and without it one would not be able to do anything.

Sometimes I long for harvest time, that is, for the time when I shall be so imbued with the study of nature that I myself can create something in a picture. However, analyzing things is no trouble to me, nor is it something I dislike doing.

It is already late. I have not slept well these last few nights. It is all that beautiful autumn scenery that I have on my mind, and the desire to profit by it.

But I wish I could sleep at the right time, and I try my best, for it makes me nervous; but there is no help for it. How do you feel? I hope you do not have too many cares, for that doesn't improve one's health. I think if I were not in the open air so much and found less pleasure in my painting, I should soon become melancholy. But being in the open air and working with animation are things which renew and keep up our strength. It is only at times when I am overtired that I feel thoroughly miserable, but for the rest I believe I shall regain my health. Adieu, a handshake in thought, and write me what I should do - send you a painted study or wait. And know that I think of you every day and believe me,

Yours Sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 22 or 23 September 1882

Amice Rappard,
I just received your letter, for which I thank you. Once again I am pleased to see from it that you enjoy the wood engravings. Furthermore I respect your point of view with regard to what I sent you now and then, something I hope to go on doing unless you should object. But I am confronted with a difficult problem, which I can't really solve, though I am going to anyway, namely telling you what I have paid for them. As you know, I have a special penchant for wood engravings. Usually I buy them very cheap, yet I spend rather much on them, considering my circumstances - although I have never regretted it. But whether I paid much or little for them is a question entirely of what I sent you, for I sent you duplicates, and not one that I did not have myself - you saw that for yourself last summer, when we sorted out the duplicates.

What I sent you I did not buy expressly for you - with a few exceptions, and I spent very little money on these few, and I only wish I could find more of them. But as you insist on it, I shall charge you, let us say, a *daalder* [1.50 guilders] for them, which you can remit any time, for instance in stamps, and then you need no longer have any pangs of conscience about having injured me financially.

So I think that question is settled.

Now I have asked you to let me know if you are receiving regularly magazines such as L'Illustration and the Graphic - I mean the current issues. I mention this because I am negotiating with a man who has a number of magazines from a public library for sale. I have decided to take them in any case, but I have some of the current year already, so I shall probably get some more duplicates. For example, if these are from L'Illustration and I know you have them already, I want to give them to someone else who might like them and is collecting them (although for the moment I don't know of anyone). But if I know you do not have them, they are yours of course.

Even before I received your letter I agreed to take the lot - so please let me know how you stand with regard to current magazines.

Of course I don't know whether I'll have a small or large number of duplicates, but at any rate there will be some, I think. So *please let me know*. If it amounts to anything, I will charge you something for it, or we can make an arrangement some time or other, but let me know if I can be of use to you in this respect. I am greatly interested in your collection, and I should like to see it become a very beautiful one. Perhaps I shall be able to send you more important things later on.

I already have forty larger and smaller sheets by Renouard. For instance, I found some time ago his “La Bourse” [The Exchange] and “Un Discours de M. Gambetta,” and also sheets called “Enfants assistés.” But I am sure you will be delighted with some large Lançons.

Caton Woodville too is very clever; the more I see of his work, the better I like it.

Do you know Monthard? - I think that at any rate you have some of his landscapes - well, a short while ago I got some sketches of his from Ireland and also from Jersey, in which there was a great deal of sentiment.

I sincerely hope you will derive pleasure from your picture at “Arti”; I don't think I shall see this exhibition.

I am very busy working on drawings of an *orphan*-man, as these poor old fellows from the workhouse are popularly called here. Don't you think the expressions “*orphan*-man” and “*orphan*-woman” characteristic? It is not easy to do those characters one is always meeting in the streets.

As for watercolours, I have started several, but I have not been as successful with them as I should wish, although I enjoy doing them more than formerly. Herewith another rough sketch of an *orphan*-man. Adieu, I am writing in haste - please let me know soon how you stand with regard to those wood engravings - whether you have them or not.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 25 September 1882

Dear Theo,
I received your last letter and the enclosure in good order and thank you for it with all my heart. I was and am even now rather hard up, that is to say, in regard to painting. There are so many, many expenses. This is partly because so many things that I start turn out wrong, and then one has to begin anew, and all the trouble has been in vain - except that after all, this is the way to make progress, and one must persevere.

In your last letter there was no answer to what I asked you about, whether or not to send the painted studies. Perhaps you forgot all about it. So I thought that after all it is not a question of real importance, and today I sent you a painted study by mail. But as I told you in my last letter, of course I would much rather that you saw them all together; and of course you can't judge the future from the one, as I have been handling the brush for too short a time not to expect great changes.

I would rather have sent you something else, but the one I would like to send is not dry enough to be rolled. Like myself, you will find much to criticize in the background. I can only give this explanation for it, the study is made as a study of the foreground, that is, the tree roots; there had already been so much work on them, and as usual I didn't sit quietly because of the passers-by, and when I had brought the study as far as you see it now, I couldn't stand it any longer.

You cannot imagine how irritating and tiring it is when people always stand so close to you. Sometimes it makes me so nervous that I have to give up. So yesterday morning, though it was still very early and I had hoped to be left alone, a study of the chestnut trees in the Bezuidenhout (which are so splendid) turned out all wrong for this reason. And people are sometimes so rude and impertinent. Well, but it is not just the disappointment it causes, but also the waste of materials. Of course such things will not get the better of me, and I shall overcome them just as other people do, but I feel I should reach my goal much more quickly if there were less of those little miseries.

Now as for this study; if when looking at it and knowing that I have many more besides this one, you do not regret having enabled me to make it, then I shall be satisfied and shall continue with good courage. If it is a disappointment to you, you must remember that it is such a short time since I began painting. If it pleases you, so much the better for me, for I want so much to send you something that gives you pleasure.

Now I still have to tell you that quite unexpectedly I had a very pleasant visit from Father, at my house at the studio; I think this infinitely better than his hearing about me from others.

If people come to see me, well, then their impression is at least original, but I do not like opinions which are based on what people say.

I was really very glad to see Father and to talk to him. I again heard a great deal about Nuenen; that churchyard with the old crosses. I cannot get it out of my head. I hope I shall be able to paint it someday. I also heard a great deal about your visit, and that you gave them that engraving after Israëls, which greatly touched them.

I should have liked to send you a marine too, but the last one is not quite dry. I might have sent the first one, but since then I have caught the colour of the sea better, and so I'll wait until one of the last ones is dry. I have painted much more lately than I originally intended and than I agreed on with you. But perhaps it is necessary to keep on doing it, if at all possible.

I have just received a letter from Rappard. I wish he lived a little nearer.

And remember that I want to hear your criticisms exactly as you think. I often feel the longing and need to ask someone's advice on different questions, but I do not give in to it after what happened with Mauve, and I do not talk to painters about my work. Somebody may be remarkably clever, but what use is it to me when he tells me to do things differently from the way he does it himself? I would rather Mauve had told me something about the use of body colour instead of saying, “Under no circumstances must you use body colour,” whereas he himself and all the others almost always use it, and with the best results. Well, in many cases, one will eventually be able to find out things for oneself, and that is what I try to do. Yes, if I could do exactly what I wanted, I should undertake painting on an even larger scale, and especially with more models.

When I don't paint, I draw from the figure a great deal.

In this study the figure is there only for the size, so that I shall be able to find the proportions of some other figure when I use this study. Of course a real figure is quite different; it presents many more difficulties. Then it is also there to give a little accent.

So please understand, brother, that I am sending you this only because I didn't know what to do, as you didn't write about it. Of course a real figure is quite different from this, and I send it the same way I sometimes send you a little sketch, to give you an idea of what I am making.

Adieu, a handshake in thought. I send you all possible good wishes, and hope that your headache is not chronic or one which returns again and again. With me it is also more a feeling of uncomfortable fatigue than of excessive pain.

I took a walk on the Rijswijk road with Father; it is very beautiful there. Again farewell, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

If this one arrives in good condition, it will be an easy way to send you things. I don't know if one can send drawings or pictures by mail as printed matter.

Another thing, you understand that I could do with some little branches, etc., differently if I painted them anew; but in my opinion one mustn't change too much in studies which must be used later. They must be put up in the studio just the way they come from the wood; to some people they may look less pleasant, but for the painter himself there is more of his own impression in them.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 1 October 1882

My dear Theo,

Just a word to acknowledge the safe receipt of your letter, for the contents of which my hearty thanks.

I have done hardly anything but watercolours these last few days. Enclosed is a small sketch of a large one. You may remember Mooijman's State Lottery office at the top of Spuistraat. I passed it one rainy morning when a crowd of people were standing outside waiting to get their lottery tickets. Most of them were little old women and the sort of people of whom one cannot tell what they do or how they live, but who evidently scrape and struggle to make their way through life.

Of course, superficially a small crowd of people like that so patently interested in “Today's Draw” is something to make you and me smile, neither of us giving two pins for the lottery.

But I was struck by that small group and their expectant expressions, and while I did the sketch it assumed a greater and deeper significance for me than it had at first sight. It seems to me that it takes on more significance when one views it as: *the poor and money*. However, that is true of nearly all groups of figures - one must think about them before one can tell what one is looking at. The keen interest in, and the illusions about, the lottery may seem rather childish to us, but are serious indeed when we think of their counterpart, the misery and the sort of efforts de perdus [forlorn efforts] of those poor wretches to find salvation, as they think, through a lottery ticket possibly paid for with their last pennies, money that should have gone on food.

Be that as it may, I am trying my hand at a large watercolour of it. And am also doing one of a pew, which I saw in a small church in the Geest attended by the almshouse people (in these parts they are called, very expressively *orphan* men and women).

Once again hard at work drawing. I sometimes think there is nothing nicer than drawing.

This is a part of that pews piece - there are other heads, of men, in the background. Things like this are difficult, however, and don't always work straight away. When they do work, it's sometimes the end result of a whole series of failures.

Speaking of orphan men, I was interrupted while writing these lines by the arrival of my model. And I worked with him until dark. He was wearing a large old overcoat (which lends him a curiously broad figure) [F 962, JH 212].

I think you may perhaps like this collection of orphan men in their Sunday best and their working clothes.

Then I got him sitting with a short pipe as well. He has a nice bald head, large (N.B. deaf) ears and white side-whiskers.

I did this sketch at dusk, but perhaps you can just make out the composition. Once it's all together, it's quickly drawn, but it wasn't all that easy to put it together and I wouldn't say that I've put it together as well as I would have liked. I should like to paint it, with the figures about one foot high, or a little less, and the composition a little wider.

But I don't know if I'll do it. It would need a large canvas, and if things go wrong it could mean quite a bit of money wasted. So, much as I should like to do it, I think that if I carry on with my typical figures, these things will come by themselves. They will spring naturally from the studies after the model, be it in this or in another form, but with the same sentiment.

I am beginning to see more and more how useful and essential it is to keep hold of one's studies after the model. Though they have less value for others, the one who made them will recognize the model in them and will be reminded vividly of how things were.

If you get a chance, please try to return some of my old studies. I hope that I shall be able to do better things with them in time.

It goes without saying that in that group of figures, of which I am sending you a quick black sketch, there were many splendid things in colour - blue smocks and brown jackets, white, black and yellowish workmen's trousers, faded shawls, an overcoat that had turned greenish, white bonnets and black top hats, muddy paving stones and boots setting off pale or weather-beaten faces. And it all cries out for watercolour or oils. Well, I am hard at it.

I count on your writing again - you will, won't you? And once more thanks for the timely remittance which is indispensable if I am to carry on working hard. Goodbye, my dear fellow, let me shake your hand warmly in thought, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

There is a bit more foreground in the watercolour - here, the figures are too prominent and the eye doesn't have enough command of the foreground.

[Sketch `The State Lottery', JH 223, enclosed with the letter.]

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 8 October 1882

Dear Theo,
Enclosed you will find a little sketch of a larger watercolour. I also started another one with many more figures, the last summer guests on the beach - an evening effect.

I do not know whether I shall be able to carry it out, but we must do what we can and struggle on until we reach our goal. The large one which I sent you a sketch of in my last letter is progressing.

I am sure you would like the things I am doing now. What you would notice at once, as I do, is that *I need a lot of figure studies*; therefore I am working with all my strength and have a model almost every day.

I have made even more studies of the old men, and this week I also hope to have a woman from the almshouse, but I am badly in need of some money; so many things are necessary. I also owe Stam something.

Just imagine, this week to my great surprise I received a parcel from home, with a winter coat, a pair of warm trousers and a warm woman's coat. It touched me very much.

I can't get that churchyard with the wooden crosses out of my mind. Perhaps I shall make some studies of it beforehand. I should like to make it in the snow - a peasant's burial or the like - in short, an *effect* like the enclosed sketch of miners. To complete the seasons, I am sending you a little sketch of the spring and another of the fall; they came into my mind while I was making the first one.

How beautiful it is outside now! I try my best to catch the autumn effects. I am writing you in a great hurry. I can assure you those compositions with figures are no joke, and I am deep in my work. It is like weaving - one needs all one's attention to keep the threads apart - one must manage to keep an eye on several things at once.

The little drawing of the beach is more finished than the others because it has served me when doing the large one, whereas the others are less watercolour.

Well, I certainly hope that your own pocket is not too empty. Nature is so beautiful these days that I really must put some of it on paper.

Adieu, write as soon as possible, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 10 October 1882

Dear Theo,

Your letter and its contents, literary as well as financial, were very welcome, and I thank you warmly for it. In the first place, I was especially glad to hear that perhaps it will not be so very long before you come to Holland again. I should like very much to know as soon as it is possible for you to decide whether it will be before or after New Year's. Am very glad that you sent off the studies. These days, when I am making many new ones, I feel so strongly that I must try to keep my studies after the model together. How delightful it would be if I could consult with you about the work more, but we are too far away from each other.

Recently I saw, and I also have it in my collection, a large wood engraving after a picture by Roll, “Une Grève de Charbonniers” [Miners' Strike]. Perhaps you know that painter, and if so, what have you seen of his work? This one represents the entrance to a mine, before which there are groups of men and women and children who have evidently stormed the building. They are standing or sitting around an overturned cart, and are kept in order by mounted police. One fellow is about to throw a stone, but a woman is trying to seize his arm. The characters are excellent, and it is drawn roughly and vigorously; I am certainly sure it is painted quite in accordance with the nature of the subject. It is not like Knaus or Vautier, but done with more passion, as it were - hardly any details, everything massed and simplified - but there is much style in it. There is such expression and atmosphere and feeling, and the movements of the figures - the different actions - are masterfully expressed. I was greatly impressed by it, so was Rappard, to whom I also sent one. It was in *L'Illustration,* but in an old number.

By chance I have another one by an English draughtsman, Emslie, whose subject is men going down into a mine to assist, if possible, the injured, while women stand waiting. One seldom comes across such subjects.

As to the one by Roll, I myself was once present at such a scene, complete in every detail, and I think the beauty of his picture is that it expresses such a situation so accurately, though one finds but very few of the details in it. I thought of a saying by Corot, “Il y a des tableaux où il n'y a rien et *pourtant tout y est.”* [There are pictures in which there is nothing and yet *everything is in them.*] There is something grand and classic in the whole, in the composition and in the lines, in a beautiful historical painting; and that is a quality which is as rare nowadays it always has been and always will be. It reminds me a little of Géricault, namely, “Le Radeau de la Méduse” [The Raft of The Medusa], and at the same time of Numkaczy, for instance.

This week I have drawn a few heads and also some children's figures and a few old men from the almshouse.

I agree with you in what you say about those small drawings, namely that the one of the little bench is done in more of an old-fashioned manner. But - I did it more or less on purpose, and will perhaps do it again sometime. However greatly I may admire many pictures and drawings that are made especially with a view to the delicate grey harmonious colour, and the local tone, yet I believe that many artists, who aimed less at this, and are called old-fashioned now, will always remain green and fresh because their manner *had, and will keep*, its own raison d'être.

To tell you the truth, I couldn't spare either the old-or the new-fashioned manner. Too many beautiful things have been done too unusually well for me to prefer one to the other systematically. And the changes which the moderns have made in art are not always for the better; not everything means progress - neither in the works nor in the artists themselves - and often it seems to me that many lose sight of the origin and the goal, or in other words, they do not stick to the point.

Your description of that night effect again struck me as very beautiful. It looks very different here today, but beautiful in its own way, for instance, the grounds near the Rhine railway station: in the foreground, the cinder path with the poplars, which are beginning to lose their leaves; then the ditch full of duckweed, with a high bank covered with faded grass and rushes; then the grey or brown-gray soil of spaded potato fields, or plots planted with greenish purple-red cabbage, here and there the very fresh green of newly sprouted autumn weeds above which rise bean stalks with faded stems and the reddish or green or black bean pods; behind this stretch of ground, the red-rusted or black rails in yellow sand; here and there stacks of old timber - heaps of coal - discarded railway carriages; higher up to the right, a few roofs and the freight depot - to the left a far-reaching view of the damp green meadows, shut off far away at the horizon by a greyish streak, in which one can still distinguish trees, red roofs and black factory chimneys. Above it, a somewhat yellowish yet grey sky, very chilly and wintry, hanging low; there are occasional bursts of rain, and many hungry crows are flying around. Still, a great deal of light falls on everything; It shows even more when a few little figures in blue or white smocks move over the ground, so that shoulders and heads catch the light.

I think, however, that in Paris everything probably looks much cleaner and less chilly. For the chilliness even penetrates the house, and when one lights a pipe, it seems damp from the drizzling rain. But it is very beautiful.

But it's on days like this that one would like to go and see some friend or would like a friend to come to the house; and it's on days like this that one has an empty feeling when one can go nowhere and nobody comes. But it's then that I feel how much the work means to me, how it gives tone to life, apart from approval or disapproval; and on days which would otherwise make one melancholy, one is glad to have a will.

I had a model for a few hours today, a boy with a spade, hod-carrier by trade, a very intriguing type - flat nose, thick lips and very coarse, straight hair - yet whenever he does something, there is grace in the figure, at least style and - character. I think I shall have some good models this winter; the owner of the yard has promised to send me the ones who come to ask for work, which often happens in the slack season. I am always glad to give them a few sixpences for an afternoon or morning, for that is just what I want. I see no other way than to work from the model. Of course one must not extinguish one's power of imagination, but the imagination is made sharper and more correct by continually studying nature and wrestling with it. Next Sunday I hope to have the same boy again. Then I should like to draw him as if he were towing one of the boats filled with stones, which one often sees in the canal here.

Working out-of-doors is over now - I mean, sitting quietly, for it is getting too chilly - so we shall have to take up our winter quarters.

I look forward to the winter with pleasure; it is a delightful season, when one can work regularly. I have some hope I shall get on well. I need not tell you that I sincerely hope you will get back the money in question. As you know, I carried painting and watercolours further than I originally intended, and now I have to pay for it by being hard up. But we shall get over that, and it must not be a reason for slacking off. I now vary my work by drawing a great deal from the model, though that is also rather expensive, but it fills my portfolios in proportion to its emptying my purse.

If you do not have the whole sum by the twentieth of the month, send me part of it; but I would rather receive it a day sooner than later, as I have to pay the week's rent on that day.

The house continues to please me, except that one wall is very damp. I can work here with a model much better than at the other studio. I can even work with several people at the same time, for instance, two children under an umbrella, two women standing talking, a man and woman arm-in-arm, *etc.*

But how short a spring and summer we have really had. Sometimes it seems to me as if there had been nothing between last autumn and this one, but perhaps it is because of my illness lying between. I feel quite normal now, except when I am very tired; then I sometimes have a day or half a day when I feel indescribably weak and faint, much more so now than before. However, I do not pay attention to it any more, for I'm getting sick of it, and I can't afford to be ill, as I have too much work to do. At such times taking a long walk to Scheveningen or somewhere often helps me.

Well, be sure to write by the twentieth, I have had to buy some Whatman paper and brushes. You cannot believe how many things one sometimes needs. Well, it's the same with every painter.

A handshake in thought, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 22 October 1882

Sunday afternoon
My dear Theo,
I don't need to tell you how delighted I was with your letter and the enclosure, it comes just in time and will be of tremendous help to me.
We are having autumn weather here, rainy and chilly, but full of atmosphere, especially splendid for figures, which stand out in tone against the wet streets and roads reflecting the sky. It is what Mauve, in particular, does so beautifully time and again. So I have been able to do some work on the large watercolour of the crowd of people in front of the lottery office, and I have also started another one of the beach, of which this is the composition.

I entirely agree with what you say about those times now and then when one feels dull-witted in the face of nature or when nature seems to have stopped speaking to us.

I get the same feeling quite often and it sometimes helps if I then tackle something quite different. When I feel jaded with landscape or light effects, I tackle figures, and vice versa. Sometimes there is nothing for it but to wait for it to pass, but many a time I manage to do away with the numbness by changing my subject matter.

However, I am becoming more and more fascinated by the figure. I remember there used to be a time when my feeling for landscape was very strong and I was much more impressed by a painting or drawing which captured a light effect or the atmosphere of a landscape than I was by the figure. Indeed, figure painters in general filled me with a kind of cool respect rather than with warm sympathy

However, I remember very well being most impressed by a drawing of Daumier's: an old man under the chestnut trees in the Champs Elysées (an illustration for Balzac), though the drawing was not all that important. What impressed me so much at the time was something so stout and manly in Daumier's conception, something that made me think It must be good to think and to feel like that and to overlook or ignore a multitude of things and to concentrate on what makes us sit up and think and what touches us as human beings more directly and personally than meadows or clouds.

That is also why I always feel attracted to the figures of both the English draughtsmen and of the English writers, whose Monday-morning-like soberness and studied restraint and prose and analysis is something solid and substantial to which one can hang on in days when one feels weak. Among French writers the same is true of Balzac and Zola.

I don't know the books by Murger you mention, but I hope to become acquainted with them soon.

Did I tell you that I was reading Daudet's Les Rois en Exil? I thought it rather good.

The titles of those books greatly appeal to me, for instance, La Bohème [he is referring to Scènes de la vie Bohème, by Henry Murger]. How far we have strayed nowadays from la bohème of Gavarni's time! It seems to me that there was definitely something warmer and more light-hearted and alive about those days than there is today. But I cannot be certain, and there is much good nowadays, or there could be much more than in fact there is if there were greater solidarity.

At the moment I can see a splendid effect out of my studio window. The city, with its towers and roofs and smoking chimneys, is outlined as a dark, sombre silhouette against a horizon of light. This light is, however, no more than a broad streak over which hangs a heavy raincloud, more concentrated below, torn above by the autumn wind into large shreds and lumps that are being chased away. But that streak of light is making the wet roofs glisten here and there in the dark mass of the city (on a drawing one would achieve this with a stroke of body colour), so that although the mass has a single tone one can still distinguish between red tiles and slates. The Schenkweg runs through the foreground like a glistening streak through the wetness; the poplars have yellow leaves, the banks of the ditches and the meadows are a deep green; the little figures are black. I would have drawn it, or rather tried to draw it, if I hadn't been working hard all afternoon on figures of peat-carriers, which are still too much on my mind to allow room for anything new, and should be allowed to linger.

I long for you so often and think of you so much. What you tell me about the character of some artists in Paris, who live with women, and are less narrow minded than others, perhaps trying desperately to preserve something youthful, I think is shrewdly observed indeed. Such people can be found here as well. It may be even more difficult over there than it is here to preserve some freshness in one's daily life, because to do so there means swimming even more against the tide. How many have not become desperate in Paris - calmly, rationally, logically and rightly desperate. I have been reading something of that sort about Tassaert, whom I like very much, and I feel sorry that this was what happened to him.

All the more, all the more do I consider every effort in that direction worthy of respect. I also think it is possible to achieve success without having to start out with despair. Even though one loses out here and there, and even though one sometimes feels a kind of exhaustion; one must rally and take courage again, even though things should turn out differently from what one originally intended.

Please don't think that I look with contempt on such persons as you describe, just because their lives are not based on serious and well-considered principles. My opinion on the matter is this: what matters is *deeds*, not some abstract idea. I only approve of principles and think them worth the trouble if they turn into deeds, and I think it is good to reflect and to try to be conscientious, because this concentrates a man's energies and combines his various actions into a whole. The people you describe would, I believe, be more resolute if they thought more clearly about what they were going to do, but for the rest I greatly prefer the likes of them to people who parade their principles without taking the slightest trouble or even thinking about putting them into practice. For the latter gain nothing from the most beautiful principles and the former are precisely the people who, *if* they come round to living with resolve and thoughtfulness, might do something great. For great things do not done just happen by impulse but are a succession of small things linked together.

What is drawing? How does one learn it? It is working through an invisible iron wall that seems to stand between what one *feels* and what one *can do*. How is one to get through that wall - since pounding at it is of no use? In my opinion one has to undermine that wall, filing through it steadily and patiently. And there you are - how can one continue such work assiduously without being distracted or diverted, unless one reflects and orders one's life according to principles? And as it is with art so it is with other things. And great things are not something accidental, they must be distinctly *willed*.

Whether a man's deeds originate in his principles or his principles in his deeds is something that seems to me as indeterminable (and as little worthy of determination) as the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. But I consider that trying to develop one's power of thought and will is something positive and of much moment.

I am very curious to know what you will make of the figures I am doing these days, when you eventually see them. That poses another chicken and egg question: must one do figures for a previously planned composition, or combine figures that one has done separately so that they give rise to a composition? It seems to me that it probably comes down to the same thing, *provided only that one keeps working*.

I conclude with the same thing you said at the end of your letter, that we share a liking for peering behind the scenes, or, in other words, we have a tendency to analyze things. Now I believe that this is precisely the quality one has to have in order to paint - the strength one must exert in painting or drawing. It may be that nature has favoured us to some extent (in any case you and I certainly have it - perhaps we owe it to our boyhood in Brabant and to surroundings that taught us to think more than is usual), but it is really and truly not until later that the artistic sensibility develops and ripens through work. I cannot tell you *how* you might become a very good painter, but that you have it in you and can bring it out is something I really do believe. Goodbye, my dear fellow, thank you for what you sent me and an affectionate handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I have already lit my little stove. My dear fellow, how I wish we could just spend an evening together looking at drawings and sketches and woodcuts, I have some splendid new ones. I hope to get some boys from the orphanage to pose for me this week, I might yet be able to save that drawing of orphans.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 29 October 1882

Amice Rappard,

When I began collecting wood engravings, I was often annoyed by the fact that I could not make out the meaning of the monograms which many English black-and-white artists use.

Even now I don't know what all of them stand for, but at least I am acquainted with some of them, and a list of them will possibly be of some use to you, though perhaps you know them all.

W S Small A. H. Hopkins
C G Charles Green
(there is also a T. Green) H. H. Herkomer
M E E Miss Edwin Edwards G P ?
F. B. Buckmann
(you have his “London Dustyard”) W. B. M. Murray
F. W. L. Lawson F. W. Walker
F. H. Frank Hol M W R Ridley
H F Henry French J. G. Gilbert
L. F. Fildes I M (M) Mahoney (Household Edition Dickens - very beautiful)
R C. Caldecott H F Henry Furness
E J G Gregory S P H Sidney Hall
SEW Waller J D W
J. B.
J. T. Watson
Barnat
Tenniel But often one finds these names in full
A. L. Lançon C. K. Charles Keene
M Morin D. M. du Maurier
J F Jules Ferat

I am sure I've skipped some of them, but these are the ones I remember at the moment.

In Harper's Weekly there are beautiful things by Howard Pyle, Harper, Rogers, Abbey, Alexander and others.

I am sure you know Caton Woodville, Overend, Nash, Dodd, Gregory, Watson, Stamland [Staniland?], Smythe, Hennessy, Emslie from their large drawings in the Graphic and the London News.

I also have a very nice thing by Small; this man is amazingly clever.

I don't know whether you know Scribner's magazine and Harper's Monthly Review; there are always very distinguished things in them.

For the present I have only a few of them, as they are rather expensive and one hardly ever finds secondhand copies.

The British Workman and the Cottage and Artisan, both penny papers of the London Tract Society, sometimes have very tame things, but at other times, robust, beautiful things too.

As soon as you have the time, I should like to hear more particulars about what you have, for you are sure to have some things that I do not possess, and I am interested in everything relating to the subject. I should like to see the portrait of Shakespeare by Menzel sooner or later.

Just tell me, how are your *watercolours* getting on? These last few weeks I have been working hard on mine; also types from the people.

How beautiful it is out-of-doors; sometimes I long for a country where it is always autumn, but then we should not have snow and apple blossoms, and no wheat and fields of stubble.

Please check whether at any time you received from me a large wood engraving, unsigned by the artist, representing ladies and gentlemen on horseback in a park; I think it is the Empress of Austria, in whose honour a hunting party or something of the kind is being given. If you haven't got it - although I believe you received it last summer - I have a duplicate of it here, for I found another one recently.

Also one by Knaus - a hunter giving a piece of bread to his dog.

Speaking of landscapes, I've always liked Birket Forster and Read, even though they're considered old-fashioned. Among the Reads I have an “Autumn Effect” and a “Moonlight Scene” and a “Snow Effect,” which are very beautiful.

English landscape painting is very divergent in conception. Forster is very little like Edwin Edwards, but both styles have their raison d'être. Wyllie and others with him are more especially colourists, or rather they seek more after tone. Particularly in Scribner's magazine and Harper's Monthly there are very fine things rather in Wyllie's manner - little marines, snow effects, etc., nooks of streets and gardens.

In Routledge's Sixpenny Series there is among other things *Oliver Twist,* illustrated by J. Mahoney, which I strongly recommend to you; and also the *Story of a Feather,* illustrated by du Maurier; and *Certain Lectures,* with drawings by Ch. Keene - but he has nicer ones in *Punch.* Du Maurier is rather like Menzel, especially in some of his large compositions.

At one time Félicien Rops and De Groux did among other things some beautiful types in Belgium, in a magazine called Uilenspiegel [Owlglass], which I used to have, which I should be extremely glad to have again, but which, alas, I can't find. There were things in it by De Groux particularly, which were as beautiful as Israëls.

Well, old fellow, I must get back to my work; I wanted to send you the list of monograms before I lost it again. Adieu, write again soon, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 29 October 1882

Dear Theo,
It's Sunday again, and rainy as usual. We have had a gale too this week, and there are few leaves left on the trees. I can tell you, I'm glad the stove is burning. When I happened to arrange my drawings this morning, namely, the studies from the model which have been done since your visit (not counting the older studies or those I drew in my sketchbook), I counted about a hundred.

I mention the number because I remember that you asked me during your visit if I had even more studies than the drawings you saw then. I do not know whether all painters, even those who look down on my work so much that they think it beneath their dignity to take the slightest notice of it, work harder than I do. Nor do I know if they know a better way than to work from the model, though, in my opinion, they do it too little; as I wrote you before, I cannot understand why they do not take more models. (Of course I do not mean people like Mauve and Israëls - though the latter, in my opinion, sets a splendid example of always working with a model - but I mean more especially people like De Bock or Breitner.) I haven't seen the latter since I visited him in the hospital during his illness. By chance I heard a rumour that he had become a teacher of drawing at a high school; from himself I did not hear a single word.

This week I had a letter from Rappard, who is also astonished at the behaviour of many painters here, and whose picture was refused for the Arti [a society of painters in Amsterdam] exhibition. I ask you, is it just that he and I are counted for nothing?

For I assure you that he works hard. This summer he was in Drenthe, and after that he worked quite a while in the hospital for the blind in Utrecht. It was curious to hear him tell of some experiences which were almost the same as mine.

Well, I often long for you, as I already wrote you. If I saw you more often, and if I could speak to you about my work, I should make more things, which I am sure might proceed from the studies I have. But you remember that not long ago I wrote you (when sending you a sketch in colour of a potato market), “I must try to paint the bustle of the streets again.” The result if this is about twelve watercolours which I am doing right now, so I do *not* want to say that I cannot do anything with my studies or that I make them without a definite purpose, but only that I believe I could do *more* with them and make them more directly effective if I could sometimes consult you about it.

But however that may be, I work with great pleasure these days, and I hope there will be some things among my pictures which will please you too when you come.

I believe that if one wants to make figures, one must have a warm feeling, what Punch calls in its Christmas picture, Good will to all - that means one must have real love for one's fellow creatures. I for one hope to try my best to be in such a mood as much as possible.

It is for just this reason that I am sorry not to have any intercourse with painters, and that, as I wrote you before, one cannot sit cosily together round a fire on a rainy day like today, looking at drawings or engravings and stimulating each other in this way.

I must ask you something: Are there any cheap Daumier prints to be had, and, if so, which ones? I always found him very clever, but it is only recently that I have begun to have the impression that he is more important than I thought. If you know any particulars about him or if you have seen any of his important drawings, please tell me about it.

I had seen some caricatures of his before now, and perhaps for that very reason had the wrong idea about him. His figures always impressed me, but I think I know only a very small portion of his work, and that, for instance, the caricatures are not at all the most representative or most important part of it.

I remember we spoke about it last year on the road to Prinsenhage, and you said then that you liked Daumier better than Gavarni, and I took Gavarni's part, and told you about the book I had read about Gavarni which you have now. But I must say that since then, though I have not come to like Gavarni less, I begin to suspect that I know but a very small portion of Daumier's work and that the very things which would interest me most are *in the portion of his work which I do not know* (though I already greatly appreciate what I know of him). And I have a vague recollection, but I may be mistaken, that you spoke about large drawings, types or heads of people, and I am very curious to see them. If there were more things of his as beautiful as a print I found recently, “Les 5 ages d'un buveur [the five ages of a drinker], or like that figure of an old man under a chestnut tree which I mentioned to you before - yes, then he would perhaps be the greatest of all. Can you perhaps give me some information about it?

Do you remember the figures by De Groux from the “Uilenspiegel,” which I used to have but have lost, alas. Well, those two prints by Daumier just mentioned are like them, and if you can find more of them, those are what I mean (I care much less for the caricatures).

I am awfully sorry that I don't have those De Groux and Ropses any more. I gave them away in England with some other things to Richardson, the travelling representative for Goupil & Co.

Well, my boy, one thing I can promise you against the time of your arrival, besides the watercolours and painted studies, I shall beg you to take the trouble of looking through a portfolio with a hundred drawings, all studies of figures. I already have them now, if I count some old ones in. But in the time between now and your arrival, I will try to make some better ones instead of those which are not good enough, and I will try to put some more variety into them. Goodbye, with all my heart I wish you some prosperity and happiness. Believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 31 October 1882

Amice Rappard,

I received your letter, and want to thank you very much for it. How eager I am sometimes to see something of your work. As regards “Arti,” I think that these gentlemen are up to their usual tricks again - one of those things that won't change, which used to be and will always be what they are now. I congratulate you on their refusal. I cannot tell you anything about a similar experience of my own, for the simple reason that I don't even dream of exhibiting my work. The idea leaves me absolutely cold. Now and then I wish some friend could have a look at what I have in my studio - which happens very seldom; but I have never felt the wish and I think I never shall - to invite the general public to look at my work. I am not indifferent to appreciation of my work, but this too must be something silent - and I think a certain popularity the least desirable thing of all.

A short while ago I collected all the studies I have done since the time of your visit or thereabouts. I found about a hundred figure drawings of men, women and children, not counting what I have drawn in my sketchbook. Although the number does not matter so much, I just mention it to show you that I am trying to push on energetically, and yet I am looked down upon, and considered a nonentity, by fellows who are certainly working less hard than I am - which by the way leaves me pretty cold - and nobody here pays the slightest attention to my work.

And from this you will see that, though what is happening to me is not exactly the same as your experience, it is after all tweedledum and tweedledee.

On the other hand I am of the opinion that whoever wants to do figures must first have what is printed on the Christmas number of Punch: “Good Will to All” - and this to a high degree. One must have a warm sympathy with human beings, and go on having it, or the drawings will remain cold and insipid. I consider it very necessary for us to watch ourselves, and to take care that we do not become disenchanted in this respect, and I therefore think it of little importance to meddle in what I will call “painters' intrigues” and to assume any attitude toward them other than defensive. I always think of the old proverb, “One does not gather figs from thorns,” as soon as I realize that some people believe they will be stimulated by their intercourse with artists. I believe Thomas a Kempis says somewhere, “I never mingled with human beings without feeling less human.”

In the same way I think one feels weaker as an artist (and rightly too) the more one associates with artists. Only when artists seriously combine to cooperate on a task that is too much for only one man (for instance Erckmann-Chatrian in their works - or the artists of the *Graphic for* the *Graphic*) do I think it an excellent thing. But in most cases it turns out to be much ado about nothing.

If I said just now that at times I wish I could see your work, on the other hand I often wish you could see mine too. The reason is that I think I could profit by your opinion, and also that you would see that the separate drawings are gradually beginning to form a whole, and also that we might talk things over and try to find a way of making some money out of them.

Not without some trouble I have at last discovered how the miners' wives in the Borinage carry their sacks. You may remember that when I was there I did some drawings of it - but they were not yet the real thing [F 994, JH 253]. Now I have made 12 studies of the same subject.

Look, the opening of the sack is tied up and hangs down. The points at the bottom are joined together, and in this way you get a very funny-looking sort of monk's hood. (At the points I and 2 the hands grasp it.) I often made a woman with such a sack pose for me, but it never turned out right. Now a man who was loading coal at the Rhine railway junction has shown me.

This week I came across a volume of Punch for 1855 and also one for 1862. In the former there is a cartoon by old Swains which is indescribably noble in character. The Czar of Russia of that time had, I think, in a “speech from the throne” referring to the Crimean War that was then going on, declared that Russia had two generals on whom she could depend, namely the winter months January and February. Now it happened that in the month of February of that same year his Majesty the Emperor fell ill, having caught a cold, and died.

Now you see in this cartoon, probably drawn by Tenniel, the old emperor on his deathbed, and General February turned a traitor is standing near this deathbed - in the shape of a skeleton dressed in general's uniform; the deathbed as well as the phantom near it are covered with snow and glazed frost. It is glorious, and, if such a thing is possible, I think its sentiment even more profound and serious than that of Holbein's “Death Dance.”

C. R. [Robinson], whose beautiful cartoon I sent you, is rather uneven in his work, by which I mean that his figures, though they are always well drawn, do not always move one. But now I have found another cartoon that is nearly as beautiful as Caldecott's “Afternoon in Kings Road” - a long row of figures looking over a low fence at a collapsed bridge.

Do you have the Dagnan and the Montbard about which I wrote you - “Charmeur au Jardin des Tuileries” and “Arab Beggars” - you know they are at your disposal. I have found another beautiful sheet by Emslie, “The Rising of the Waters,” a peasant woman with two children on a half-flooded meadow with pollard willows.

I assure you, every time I feel a little out of sorts, I find in my collection of wood engravings a stimulus to set to work with renewed zest. In all these fellows I see an energy, a determination and a free, healthy, cheerful spirit that animate me. And in their work there is something lofty and dignified - even when they draw a dunghill. When you read in that book about Gavarni, with reference to his drawings, that “il sabra jusqu'à 6 par jour” [he dispatched up to six a day], and you think of the enormous productivity of most of those men who make these “little illustrations” - “those things you find on the reading table of the South Holland Cafe,” you know - you can't help thinking that there must be an extraordinary amount of ardour and fire in them. And I think, having this fire within oneself and stirring it up continually is better than having the arrogance of those artists who disdain looking at it. I think that bit of reasoning of your friend, or rather your critically critical (how can one express it?) visitor, about the “*impermissible* line” highly curious and characteristic. Will you be so kind as to convey to him, at the first opportunity, my profound respect for his wisdom and competence, although I have neither the privilege nor the pleasure of knowing his Honor, for I am not wholly unacquainted with men of that ilk, and so…

Just ask your friend of the impermissible line whether he wants to object to the “Bénédicité” by De Groux or the “Last Supper” by Leonardo da Vinci - in which compositions the heads are also placed in a nearly straight line.

Do you know “Midsummer Night's Dream” by Harry Furniss, showing some people - an old man, a street urchin, a drunk - spending the night on a bench under a chestnut tree in the park? This sheet is as beautiful as the most beautiful Daumier.

Don't you think Andersen's Fairy Tales are glorious? - he is surely an illustrator too!

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 1 November 1882

Amice Rappard,
That article by Herkomer interests me very much indeed; many thanks for it. My mind has been full of it since it came, and I hope I shall profit by what he says.

But I doubt whether his discourse will be generally understood. I'm afraid that he'll be misapprehended by most people, and that many will draw inferences from his words which he himself did not mean.

What he says is in my opinion thoroughly apt and to the point and serious, but I repeat, one must have some knowledge of the matter - more than most - not to draw entirely false conclusions from his reasoning. Many might infer wrongly from what he says that he rejects and condemns the Americans and the school of Small, but this is not at all the case. He is speaking only of decadence - and not without cause.

He points out that the merit of many wood engravings belongs mainly to the engraver and not to the artist. Thus, he argues, the powers of the artist are dwindling - an insufferable and disastrous state of affairs. I think this is perfectly true - for instance, compare that sheet of Ridley's, “The Miners,” which you say you found recently, with the full-page Types of Beauty that the Graphic published at a later date. Or take another sheet of Ridley's which I have, engraved soberly and austerely by Swain - “The Children's Ward in a Hospital” - there I feel the justification for what I've heard people who are supposed to be first-rate connoisseurs contemptuously refer to in these terms, “Oh well, that's the old-fashioned style.” And then we remember what Herkomer wanted to say - that old style of engraving, that elaborate, honest, unembellished drawing, is by far the best.

Herkomer says, Take care lest it be lost. When art has lost it, then art will have spinal meningitis or consumption. Yet I don't believe he condemns Small himself, for instance, or Chr. Green and others - I know reproductions of drawings by Herkomer, *e.g.* the “Bavarian Sketches,” which are done in the same style.

But Herkomer will not disapprove of Caton Woodville's “The Distribution of Peat Tickets in Ireland” or Howard Pyle's “Xmas in Olden Times,” although Caton Woodville and H. Pyle have both worked for a newer style of illustration, and have overstepped “*the marginline.*”

As regards this C. Woodville, I am sorry that he has done those enormously large military things, however clever they may be; and I prefer his sheets in the style of “The Peat Market.”

That diatribe against Harper's and the Americans, moreover, reminds me of Charles Dickens, who denounced them too - see Chuzzlewit, *etc.* - but later on, when he saw that people were misinterpreting his words, as if he thought nothing American could be good, he inserted a preface in the later editions of Chuzzlewit in which he reveals his other impressions of America and his experiences on a second trip there. Look at Forster's Life of Charles Dickens, if you have it, and you will see more clearly what I mean.

So with regard to the Americans and the wood engravers of the present day, let us not judge prematurely, and let us remember the old saying, “Beware of pulling out the good wheat along with the chaff.” The reproaches he directs against the Graphic and against publishers in general are not uncalled for, as a matter of fact. I abhor words like “pleasing” and “saleable” - they are as bad as the plague - yet I've never met a dealer who wasn't saturated with them. Art has no worse enemies, despite the fact that the managers of the big art-dealing establishments reputedly deserve high praise for their protection of artists.

They don't do the right thing - yet because the public turns to them and not to the artists themselves, the latter are forced to turn to them too - but there isn't a single artist who does not resent them, openly or secretly. They flatter the public, encouraging its worst, most barbaric inclinations and taste. But enough of this! The conclusion that you and I should draw from H. H.'s reasoning is, Draw austerely, be serious, be honest.

Listen, this last letter of yours, and the impression that H. H.'s energetic words made on you as well as me, make me wish all the more that we could see more of each other's work.

At that last splendid exhibition of “Pictura” I was struck by the fact that, although Israëls, Mauve, Mans, Neuhuys, Weissenbruch and many others have remained themselves, one sees signs of decadence among their followers too, and no indication of progress - at least, if one does not look at them individually but rather compares them with an exhibition of that bygone era when the artists who are prominent today were the “rising men.” Those “rising men” of today are not what the “rising men” of the previous generation were - more effect and less quality nowadays. I have written about this more than once. I also see a difference between the personalities of the respective “rising men.” You know yourself, and you yourself suffer under it, that they look upon you and me as unpleasant, quarrelsome nonentities, and that above all they consider us ponderous and boring in our work and in our persons.

And believe me - whoever has seen the prominent artists of today ten years ago, both as men and as artists, when all of them were much poorer - they have made an enormous amount of money these last ten years - regrets those days ten years ago.

Which induces me to repeat my congratulations for your having been refused by Arti. If you made a great hit under the present circumstances, I should feel less respect and sympathy for you than I do now. I certainly see very clearly that you and I will undoubtedly produce much better work than we do now, and that our present work is not bad. Our attitude toward ourselves must remain stern, and we must be energetic, but there isn't a single reason why we should let ourselves be discouraged or put out by what is said of our work by people who believe they know a better style than the one we have adopted, namely drawing, or trying to draw, what strikes us in domestic life, in the street, or in a hospital, *etc.* If you knew, for instance, what De Groux has suffered from criticism and ill will, it would stagger you. We must not have any illusions about ourselves, but be prepared to be misunderstood, despised and slandered, and yet - even if things become worse than they are now - we shall have to keep up our courage and enthusiasm. I believe it would be a good thing for us to focus our attention on the men and works of former days, say some twenty or thirty years ago, as otherwise it will be justly said of us afterward, “Rappard and Vincent may also be reckoned among the decadent fellows.” This is a harsh dictum, but I mean every bit of it, and I shall go my own way without paying much attention to the present school.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 1 November 1882

Dear Theo,

For the last few days I have been very much preoccupied by something which may possibly interest you, and I think it quite worth while to write you about it in detail. In a letter from Rappard, I received the summary of a discourse by Herkomer on modern wood engravings. I cannot tell you the whole in detail; perhaps you have read the article yourself (it appeared in an English art magazine, perhaps the Art Journal). It dealt particularly with the drawings in the Graphic. Herkomer tells how he himself worked on it with great zeal and enthusiasm, and recalls especially the splendid pages of the first series. He can hardly find words to express how strongly he feels the importance of the work of those original artists. He surveys the progress in technique and process and the difference between the old and the modern wood engravings, etc., *etc.*

Then he talks about the present time, and comes to the real point of his discourse. He says that the wood engravers are more clever than ever, but I for my part see a decadence when I think of the time when the Graphic started. And he continues: “In my opinion, the fault lies in two things, against which I protest. One concerns the managers and the other concerns the artists.

“Both make mistakes, and these will spoil the thing if they are not corrected.”

The managers, he says, ask for things that are done for effect; correct and honest drawing is no longer wanted, complete designs are no longer in demand: all that is requested is a “bit” to cover an awkward corner of a page.

The managers declare that the public requires the representation of a public event or two, and is satisfied if it is correct and entertaining, caring nothing for the artistic qualities of the work.

I do not believe what they say. The only excuse that can be accepted is “a shortage of good draughtsmen.”…

Then he comes to the artists, and says how he regrets that nowadays it is all too often the wood engraver and not the draughtsman who makes the pages beautiful. He urges the artists not to permit this, to draw soberly and vigorously, so that the engraver remains what he should be: the interpreter of the draughtsman's work, not his master.

Then his conclusion follows, a strong admonition to all to put their hearts into the job, and not to allow themselves to weaken. There is a note of reproach in his voice, and he speaks with a certain melancholy, as if fighting against what he thinks unbearable indifference.

“To you - the public - art offers infinite pleasure and edification. It is really done for you. Therefore insist on good work, and you will be sure to get it,” he concludes.

The whole thing is thoroughly sound, strong, honest. His manner of speaking impresses me the same way as some of Millet's letters. To me it is an inspiration, and it does my heart good to hear someone talk this way.

I say that it is a great pity there is little or no enthusiasm here for the art which is most suitable for the general public.

If the painters combined to see that their work (which in my opinion is, after all, made for the people - at least I think this is the highest, noblest calling for any artist to pursue) could indeed come into the public's hands and was brought within everybody's reach, it could produce the same results as those achieved during the Graphic's first years.

This year Neuhuys, Van der Velden and a few others made drawings for The Swallow, a monthly magazine which costs 7½ cents. There are some good ones among them, but one can see that most of them are done sloppily (not the origional drawings but the way of popularizing them) and I hear that this magazine cannot keep going any more than its predecessors. Why not? The booksellers say there is no profit in it, and instead of trying to increase the circulation, they keep it down.

And I think that the painters, for their part, do not take the matter strongly enough to heart.

The answer that many a painter here in Holland gives to the question “What is a wood engraving?” is, “They are those things you find in the South Holland Café.”

So they class them with the drinks. And those who make them, perhaps with the drunkards.

And what do the dealers say? Suppose I took a hundred sketches which I happen to have collected to any dealer here; I fear that the only answer I should get would be, “Did you really expect *these things* to have any market value?”

My love and respect for the great draughtsmen, those of Gavarni's time as well as those of the present, increases the more I come to know their work, and especially since I myself try to make something of what one sees on the street every day.

What I appreciate in Herkomer, Fildes, Holl and the other founders of the Graphic, the reason why they still mean more to me than Gavarni and Daumier, and will continue to, is that while the latter seem to look on society with malice, the former - as well as men like Millet, Breton, De Groux, Israëls - chose subjects which are as true as Gavarni's or Daumier's, but have something noble and a more serious sentiment. That sentiment especially must remain, I think. An artist needn't be a clergyman or a churchwarden, but he certainly must have a warm heart for his fellow men. I think it very noble, for instance, that no winter passed without the Graphic doing something to arouse sympathy for the poor. For example, I have a page by Woodville representing a distribution of peat tickets in Ireland; another by Staniland called “Help the Helpers,” representing various scenes in a hospital which was short of money; “Christmas in the Workhouse” by Herkomer; “Homeless and Hungry” by Fildes, *etc.* I like them better than the drawings by Bertall, or the like, for the Vie Elégante.

Perhaps you think this letter tedious - but it all came fresh into my thoughts again. I had collected and mounted my hundred studies, and when I had finished the job, a rather melancholy feeling of “what's the use?” came over me. But then those energetic words of Herkomer's, urging the public not to flag and saying that it is more necessary than ever to keep the hand to the plough, comforted me so, and I thought I would give you a short summary of what he said. A handshake in thought, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I hope to hear from you soon. I had a good letter from home.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 2 or 3 November 1882

Dear Theo,

Your letter and its contents were very welcome to me. The question you refer to will perhaps become more and more urgent. People will be obliged to acknowledge that many a new thing in which one at first thought to find progress proves in fact to be less sound than the old ones, and in consequence the need for strong men to redress things will manifest itself. As arguing about this can do little good, I think it rather superfluous to write more about it.

But I can hardly say that I share your thought which you express in the following words: “To me it seems quite natural that the desired change will occur.” Just think how many great men are dead or will not be with us for long - Millet, Brion, Troyon, Rousseau, Daubigny, Corot - so many others are no longer among the living; think further back, Leys, Gavarni, de Groux (I name only a few), still further back, Ingres, Delacroix and Géricault, think how old *modern art* already is, add many others as well who have already reached old age.

Up to Millet and Jules Breton, however, there was always in my opinion progress, but to surpass these two - don't even mention it.

Their genius may be equalled in former, present or later times, but to surpass it is not possible. In that high range there is an equality of genius, but higher than the top of the mountain one cannot climb. Israëls, for instance, may equal Millet, but among genius superiority or inferiority is out of the question.

Now in the realm of art the summit has been reached. Certainly we shall still see beautiful things in the years to come, but anything more sublime than we have seen already - no. And I for my part am afraid that perhaps in a few years there will be a kind of *panic* in this regard. Since *Millet* we have greatly deteriorated; the word decadence, now whispered or pronounced in covert terms, (*see* Herkomer) will then sound as an alarm bell. Many an one, for instance I myself, keeps quiet now because one is already labelled as a *mauvais coucheur*, and to speak about it doesn't help. Speaking about it, that is to say, is not what one ought to do, one must work, even if it be with a sorrowful heart; those who will subsequently cry the hardest about decadence will be the most decadent themselves. I repeat - “ By these fruits ye shall know them,” by their work, nor will it be the most eloquent who will say the truest things, look at Millet himself, look at Herkomer; they are indeed no orators and they speak almost *à contre cœur*.

Enough of this, I find in you someone who understands many of the great men, and I think it delightful to hear now and then things about them which I did not know; for instance, what you tell me about Daumier. The series of portraits of deputies, etc., the pictures “Third Class Railway Carriage,” “The Revolution,” I know none of them. It is true that your writing doesn't make me see them myself, but in my imagination Daumier's personality becomes more important as a result of it. I prefer to hear about such men more than, for instance, about the last Salon.

Now what you write about the *Vie Moderne,* or rather about the kind of paper that Buhot promised you, - this is something which interests me very much. Do I understand rightly that this paper is such that when one makes a drawing on it (I suppose with autographic ink) this drawing *just as it is*, without the intermediary of a second draughtsman or engraver or lithographer, can be transferred on to a stone, or a cliché can be made of it, so that an indefinite number of copies can be pulled? - the latter then being facsimiles of the original drawing. If this is so, be so kind then as to give me all information you can pick up about the way in which one has to work on this paper, and try to get me some of it, so that I can give it a trial.

If I could have a trial before you come, we might on that occasion consult about what we can do with it.

I think it possible that within a relatively short time there will perhaps be a greater demand for illustrators than there is at present.

As for me, if I fill my portfolios with studies from every model I can get hold of, I will have enough of a skill to hope to get employment. *To keep* illustrating, as did for instance Morin, Lançon, Renouard, Jules Ferat, Worms in their times, one needs quite a lot of ammunition, in the form of different studies of all kinds of subjects.

Those I try to get together, as you know, and as you will see when you come.

By the by, I have not so far received the package of studies, which according to your letter you returned to me via the Rue Chaptal. Do you think they have already arrived at the Plaats? If you think so I will send for them, as they will be of use to me in connection with things which I have recently produced.

Do you know whose portrait I drew this morning? Blok, the Jewish book dealer - not David, but the little one who stands on the Binnenhof.

I wish I could draw more members of that family, for they are real good types.

It's awfully difficult to get the types that one likes best; meanwhile I think I'm right in working on *those I can get*, without losing sight of those I would draw if only I could get them.

I am very glad about Blok, he reminds me of things from many years ago. I hope he will come again some Sunday morning.

Of course one always feels, and one must feel, when at work, a kind of dissatisfaction with oneself, a longing to do it much better; but still it is delightful and comforting little by little to get a collection of all kinds of figures together, though the more one makes the more one wants to make.

One cannot do everything at once, but it will be absolutely necessary for me to make a number of horse studies, not only just scratches made in the street, but to take a model for them. I know an old white horse, just the poorest nag imaginable (at the gas-works); but the man, who lets the poor beast do the hardest possible jobs, and draws from it what he can get, asked me a lot for it, namely, three guilders a morning to come to me and one guilder and a half at least to come to him, but then it must be on a Sunday.

And when you consider that to get what I need, about thirty large studies for instance, I should have to work many a morning, it would prove to be too expensive. But I shall get a better chance some time.

I can get a horse here and there easily enough for a *very short* time, people are willing enough for that occasionally; but one *cannot* in a very short time do what really must be done, so that does not help me much.

I try to work quickly, for that is necessary, but a study that is of any use requires at least half an hour, on average, so one always falls back on to real posing. At Scheveningen, for instance, on the beach, I have had a boy or man standing for me for a moment, as they call it; the result was always a great longing in me for a longer pose, and the mere standing still of a man or a horse doesn't satisfy me.

If I am properly informed, the draughtsmen for the Graphic could always turn by turn find a model at their disposal in a studio at the office. Dickens tells a few good things about the painters of *his* time and their wrong way of working, namely, their following the model servilely, yet only half-way. He says: “Fellows, try to understand that your model is *not* your final aim, but *the means of giving form and strength to your thought and inspiration*. Look at the French (for instance, Ary Scheffer) and see how much better they do it than you do.” It seems the English listened to him; *they* continued working with the model, but they have learned to view the model in a broader, stronger way and to use it for healthier, nobler compositions than those of the painters of Dickens's time.

Two things that in my opinion reinforce one another and remain eternally true are: Do not quench your inspiration and your imagination, do not become the slave of your model; and again: Take the model and study it, otherwise your inspiration will never become plastically concrete.

When your letter came, I immediately had many things to pay for. I hope it will not inconvenience you to send again not later than the 10th of November. That question of the process about which Buhot spoke to you seems very important to me, you know. I shall be very happy to learn it and will try my best to do so.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours,

Vincent

Do you know what effects one sees here at present early in the morning? - it is splendid - the sort that Brion painted in his picture at the Luxembourg: “The End of the Deluge,” namely that streak of red light on the horizon with rain clouds over it. This brings me to the landscape painters. Compare those of the time of Brion with the contemporaries. Is it better now? I doubt it.

I will readily acknowledge that they are more productive now, but though I cannot help admiring what is produced now, the old landscapes done in a more old-fashioned way please me whenever I see them. There was a time for instance when I passed a Schelfhout thinking: that's not worth while.

But the modern way, though it has its attraction, doesn't make that strong, deep, durable impression, and when one has been looking for a long time at new things, one sees again with great pleasure a naive picture like a Schelfhout or a Ségé, a Jules Bakhuysen. It is really not intentionally that I feel rather disenchanted about the progress, on the contrary quite against my will; the feeling involuntarily entered my thoughts, because I feel more and more a kind of void, which I cannot fill with the things of today.

While looking for an example, I happened to think of some old woodcuts by Jacque, which I saw at least ten years ago at Uncle Cor's; it was a series called “The Months,” done in the manner of those etchings which appeared in yearly series, or even more old-fashioned still. There is less of the local tone in it than in his later work, but the drawing and an element of pithiness remind one of Millet. Look here, in the many sketches in today's magazines, it seems to me that a *not* quite unconventional elegance threatens to replace that typical, real rusticity of which the sketches of Jacque, which I mentioned, are an example.

Don't you think the cause of this lies also in the life and personality of the artists? I do not know your experience, but do you find, for instance at present, many people who like to take a lengthy walk in grey weather? You yourself would love it and enjoy it as I do, but for many people it would be unattractive. It also struck me that when one talks with painters, the conversation in most cases *is not* interesting. Mauve has at times the great power of describing a thing in such words that one sees it, and certainly others have that too, when they want to. But that peculiar open-air feeling when you speak to a painter - do you think it is as strong as it used to be?

I read this week in Forster's Life of Charles Dickens all kinds of particulars about long walks on Hampstead Heath, etc., outside London, with the object for instance of eating bacon and eggs in a little old inn far away, well out in the country. Those walks were very pleasant and merry, but for all that it was generally in this way that serious plans were made for books, or discussions were held about what changes Dickens should make in this or that figure. There is nowadays a hurry and bustle in everything that doesn't please me, and it seems as if the joy has gone out of most things. I wish your expectation would come true: “that the desired change will come,” but to me it doesn't seem “quite natural.”

However this may be, it is of very little use to fight back in words, I think, and the thing for everyone to do who has an interest in the matter is to try in his little circle to make something or to help make something.

I worked again on a watercolour of miners' wives carrying bags of coal through the snow. But especially I drew about twelve studies of figures for it and three heads, and I am not ready yet. In the watercolour I think I found the proper effect, but I do not think it broad enough of character. In reality it is something like “The Reapers” by Millet, severe, so you understand that one mustn't make a snow effect of it, which would be merely an impression and would only then have its raison d'être if it were done by way of a landscape. I think I will start afresh, though I believe the studies that I have at the moment will please you, because they succeeded better than many others. It would really be fit for the Vie Moderne, I think. When I get the paper I shall anyhow have *one* of the figures to try out, but it must become a group of women, a small caravan.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5 November 1882

Dear Theo,
On Sundays I usually feel like writing you, and so I do today. The last few days I have been reading Le Nabab by Daudet, and I think it a masterpiece - for instance, that walk of Le Nabab and Heinerlingue, the banker, on Pére-Lachaise in the twilight, while the bust of Balzac, a dark silhouette against the sky, looks down on them ironically. That is exactly like a drawing by Daumier. You wrote me about Daumier that he had done “La Revolution - Denis Dessoubs.” When you wrote this, I didn't know who Denis Dessoubs was; now I have read about him in Histoire d'un Crime by Victor Hugo. He is a noble figure, I wish I knew the drawing by Daumier. Of course, I can't read any book about Paris without thinking at once of you. Nor can I read a book about Paris without finding in it something of The Hague, which is indeed much smaller than Paris, but is nevertheless a royal residence too, with its appropriate morals and manners.

When you say in your last letter, “What a mystery nature is,” I quite agree with you. Life in the abstract is already an enigma; reality makes it an enigma within an enigma. And who are we to solve it? However, we ourselves are an atom of that universe which makes us wonder: Where does it go, to the devil or to God ?

Pourtant le soleil se leve [yet the sun rises], says Victor Hugo. Long, long ago I read in L'Ami Fritz by Erckmann-Chatrian a saying of the old rabbi's, which I have always remembered: “Nous ne sommes pas dans la vie pour etre heureux, mais nous devons tacher de meriter le bonheur.” [We are not in life to be happy, but we must try to deserve happiness.] Taken separately, there is something pedantic in this thought - at least, one *might* take it as such - but in the context in which the words occurred, that is, from the mouth of that sympathetic figure of the old rabbi, David Sechel, they touched me deeply, and I often think of them. Similarly in drawing, one must not count on selling one's drawings, but it is one's duty to make them so that they have a certain value and are serious; one must not become careless or indifferent even though disappointed by circumstances. In regard to my plan for the lithographs, I have often thought it over; if I hadn't done more than that, I fear it wouldn't have advanced me much, so why think about it? Therefore I have made a few drawings for it again, a woman with a bag of coals on her head, with a yard in the background - a silhouette of roofs and chimneys and a woman at the washtub.

You needn't be afraid of my taking any other steps for the present apart from doing the drawings themselves. I must wait till I have some cash before I try any more experiments in lithography. But I think there is something in it.

At times I feel a great desire to be in London again. I should so much love to know more about printing and wood engravings.

I feel a power in me which I must develop, a fire that I may not quench, but must keep ablaze, though I do not know to what end it will lead me, and shouldn't be surprised if it were a gloomy one. In times like these, what should one wish for?

What is relatively the happiest fate?

In some circumstances it is better to be the conquered than to be the conqueror - for instance, better to be Prometheus than Jupiter. Well, it is an old saying, “Let come what may.”

To change the subject, do you know whose work has impressed me deeply? I saw reproductions after *Julien* Dupré (is he a son of Jules Dupré?). One represented two mowers; the other, a beautiful large wood engraving from Monde Illustré, a peasant woman taking a cow into the meadow. It seemed to me excellent work, very energetic and faithfully done. It resembles, for instance, Pierre Billet perhaps, or Butin.

I also saw a number of figures by Dagnan Bouveret, a beggar, a wedding, “The Accident,” “The Garden of the Tuileries.”

I think these two are fellows who wrestle man to man with nature, fellows who do not weaken and who have an iron grip. You wrote me about “The Accident” some time ago; now I know it and think it very beautiful. Perhaps they do not possess Millet's sublime, almost religious, emotion - at least not in the same degree as Millet himself - perhaps they do not feel the same full warm love as he, but still, how excellent they are! It is true I know them only from the reproductions, but I think there can be nothing in them that was not in the original work. By the way, it took a long time before I could admire Thomas Faed's work, but now I do not hesitate about it any more; for instance, “Sunday in the Backwoods of Canada Home and the Homeless,” “Worn Out,” “The Poor Man's Friend” - in short, you know the series published by Graves.

Today I have been working on old drawings from Etten, because in the fields I saw the pollard willows in the same leafless condition again, and it reminded me of what I saw last year. Sometimes I have such a longing to do landscape, just as I crave a long walk to refresh myself; and in all nature, for instance in trees, I see expression and soul, so to speak. A row of pollard willows sometimes resembles a procession of almshouse men. Young corn has something inexpressibly pure and tender about it, which awakens the same emotion as the expression of a sleeping baby, for instance. The trodden grass at the roadside looks tired and dusty like the people of the slums. A few days ago, when it had been snowing, I saw a group of Savoy cabbages standing frozen and benumbed, and it reminded me of a group of women in their thin petticoats and old shawls which I had seen standing in a little hot water-and-coal shop early in the morning.

In regard to those figures I have mentioned which I should like to lithograph, I think the greatest difficulty will be to find about thirty which will fit together to make a whole. One must draw a great many more than thirty to get them.

If first I have those, reproduction is a second step, which I suppose will be easier than if one starts to reproduce before the whole is finished. Perhaps, or rather certainly, you will have been here before I have them all, and then we can talk about it some more.

Something like it has been done here for the primary schools, namely twenty-four lithographs by Schmidt Crans, which I saw recently. A few of them are good, but knowing the person who made them you will understand that the whole is rather insipid. It seems, however, that *they* are eagerly used at the schools, but what a pity that they content themselves with such things, particularly for educational purposes. Well, it's the same with that as it is with everything else.

But, boy, don't forget to read Le Nabab, it is splendid. One might call that figure a *virtuous scoundrel*. Do they really exist? I certainly think so. There is much heart in those books by Daudet - for instance, in Les Rois en Exil, that figure of the queen, “aux yeux d'aigue-marine” [with eyes of aquamarine].

Write again soon.

How much good walking out to the desolate seashore and gazing out at the grey-green sea with the long white crests on its waves can do for a man who is downcast and dejected! But if one should have a need for something great, something infinite, something one can perceive God in, there is no need to go far in quest; it seems to me that I have seen something deeper, more infinite, more eternal than the ocean in the expression in a small child's eyes when it awakens early in the morning and yells or laughs on finding the dear sun shining upon it's cradle. If ever a “rayon d'en haut,” [a beam shines down from above] that may be where it is to be found.

Adieu, boy, with a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 6-8 November 1882

Dear Theo,

While waiting for more information on the process, I have, with the help of Smulder's printer, made a lithograph of which I have the pleasure of sending you the very first print. I drew this lithograph on a piece of prepared paper, probably the same as that which Buhot mentioned to you.

Meanwhile, I long very much to compare the paper of the Vie Moderne with that which I bought from Smulders. S.'s is very expensive, 1.75 guilders a sheet, but it is pleasant to work on.

You see, I scratched this sheet as simply as possible. I shall be quite satisfied if there is something in it which reminds you of the old lithographs from the period when there was in general more enthusiasm for this branch of art than there is now.

I can get a hundred prints for 5 guilders, and for a little more the stone becomes my property.

Is this worth while, do you think? I should love to make more of them. For instance, a series of about thirty figures.

But in the matter of printing, I must first know your opinion.

But this is what I should like: if we could show, without a third party's intermediary, a series of about thirty pages, not too elaborate, but vigorously done, which we had got printed at our own expense. This would give us more prestige in the eyes of the people whom we shall need later, namely the editors of the magazines. But in business matters you see more clearly than I, and sometime we shall talk it over together.

Do try to give me all the information you can about the process. On what must one work with autographic ink? Can everything be printed that is drawn with autographic ink? *Etc.*

Here is my model, a sweeper from the Bezuidenhout , so with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

If at all possible, do not send me the money later than the tenth, for I have had some extra expenses because of one thing and another.

I want to add a few words to this letter.

I think Buhot, for instance, will be able to tell you something constructive about the technique more clearly with this sheet in hand.

Wouldn't it be great if this proved a success? But for me, what is a hundred times more important than the process is the drawings themselves. I work with the model as much as my purse allows. For you understand one must have ammunition in the form of studies once one starts illustrating if one wants to continue it for any length of time. And more important things will follow from it. So I cannot stress this enough: it is of *more* importance to me to have a supply of drawings on hand than to hurry to get employment, though such would be quite welcome to me.

But if they do not readily accept them, well, nothing's lost, and I think that later I shall get better results with the larger stock of drawings. Also because I shouldn't wonder if the need for draughtsmen became more and more manifest.

I am very sorry that I did not know this process before. When I was in Brussels, I tried to find employment with some lithographer, but was rebuffed everywhere. I asked there for any kind of work, as I only wanted to see something of lithography and especially to learn. But they didn't want people like that.

Simmonneau and Fouvey were the least unwilling. They said that the young men they had tried to instruct had given them little satisfaction, and business was so slack that they had enough employees. I went on and mentioned De Groux's and Rop's lithographs, but they said, Yes, but such draughtsmen do not exist any more. The impression I received there and in other establishments was that lithography was definitely dying out.

However, this new invention proves that they are trying to revive it.

What beautiful things have been lithographed - Charlet, Raffet, Lemud, besides the others whom we talked about recently.

Last night I looked over the Gavarnis with renewed pleasure.

I hope you see from this specimen that I am very eager to try my best to make something.

I wrote you, didn't I, how I came to make this as a result of my telling Smulders what you wrote me about that paper, and his saying that he still had some of it in stock?

He seemed rather astonished when I came back with a drawing a few hours after I had bought it.

Do you want another copy with a wider margin?

I have just finished drawing two diggers.

If this size is too large (but I hardly think so, as it is rather vigorously drawn) I could - but first I must know how to erase something on that paper - reduce them by a half or a third without losing accuracy, namely by means of quadrangles.

Well, we'll see about this.

At the same time you see on this sheet one of the studies which I have several of and which I wrote you about.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 14 November 1882

Dear Theo,

Just a word to ask you whether you have received my last letter as well as a little roll, also sent by mail, containing a proof of a lithograph.

The reason why I can't help suspecting that it didn't reach you but got lost, or that the letter got lost, is that I haven't heard from you since then; and besides, today is already November 14. For the last five or six days I have been literally without money, and consequently I cannot go on with my work, at least not as I should wish.

I think the reason is that you want to send me, along with your letter and the money, the information I asked you for about the lithographic process and the autographic ink, and that you had to wait for it. And I hope that perhaps today it will be explained this way.

But on the other hand, I'm always nervous when something like this happens and I feel anxious, and then I am afraid of having written or done something which you do not approve of. So last night I worried about it: perhaps you didn't approve of my having had my lithograph printed; perhaps you would conclude from my letter that I intended to publish my work, or something like that. Well, I was anxious, thinking something had happened. But probably nothing is wrong. For safety's sake, however, I will tell you that you must not confuse publications with experiments made to learn a process.

The former, namely publications, are things which I would certainly not undertake without consulting you, and for the present, I do not think of it; and besides, as you know, I only busy myself with the drawings and the artistic side of the work, that's all. These experiments I make are certainly part of this, however, and it is quite natural that I work on them.

Some time ago Rappard, for instance, made similar experiments with etchings, which also had to be printed; but the printing an artist does is not publishing - it has nothing to do with business, being quite a private affair. This seems to me as clear as daylight, but, as I told you, last night (as I had not received a letter from you) I was worrying about it, lest you take it for quite a different kind of action.

Well, I hope it will soon become apparent that I had no need to worry. I hope, on the contrary, that you succeeded in getting information about the same matter, namely that you can tell me something about the processes.

On what was left of the printing paper, I made another trial last week with the little figure “Sorrow.” Just now when I said that I was afraid you would suspect from my last letter something that was not my intention, I was remembering that I said something like: “This is what I should like: to have some of these sheets printed at our own expense, which would give us more prestige with the editors of the magazines.”

Now, my idea is by no means that either you or I should handle the business part if we undertook the printing at our own expense. I did not and should not think of that for a moment. I just think that when one applies for a job, it is well to have some work to show. It saves words and is more practical.

I don't think it improbable that some time I shall make things which will come into the public's hands, but it leaves me rather cold, and I don't consider it a pleasure at all.

Two reasons would force me to it. In the first place, if I became employed by a magazine, then of course I should have to do what is required. In the second place - something which may come later, but which I have certainly thought about already - if sooner or later I should have something which forms a whole and has a purpose and expresses something, I would certainly publish it; but never without consulting you or letting you know, and only if I could not find anyone else to do it for me.

Such a thing would probably cost me money rather than bring money in; it would be for art's sake, not primarily for profit. If I ever did it, I should let you know everything, and in no respect, neither as to the work nor as to the publication, would it be dishonest - otherwise, of course, I would never do it.

So, if there were anything that you might consider as my undertaking a step toward publication (I don't suppose there is, but in my nervousness, as I could find no other reason, I thought of that sentence in my letter), rest assured that this means nothing more than experiments which anyone who etches or lithographs, or reproduces his drawings in some way or another, *must* make in order to learn the process and the effect of black and white. If some sheet or other succeeds and the maker prints a certain number of copies, it would be - at least for me, and for most artists who do such a thing - something of an absolutely artistic nature, without any relation to commercial publication. If I didn't know from experience that misunderstandings may arise about matters such as showing drawings (and showing printed copies is similar), and it is often considered presumptuous, it would never have entered my head. Now as to the non-arrival of your letter, I must tell you that, when I think of all your faithfulness, I am sure it probably has nothing to do with this matter, and there must be some other reason for it.

When I used the above-quoted sentence in my last letter, what I meant was that someday you will see my intentions more clearly in my drawings. In print (because of the lithographic crayon) they are all, especially “Sorrow,” much stronger than in the drawing. And just because the originals are kept grey and sober, I have only to follow my study to get vigour into my lithograph. And this is something which I should have to point out to the people with whom I might get in touch if I could get some work for a magazine. Well, if you have not written, do so at once when you receive this. For I am rather hard up. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 16 November 1882

Dear Theo,

Today I received your letter, for which many thanks. Bitterly though I regret that your letter of November 9 and the enclosed banknote got lost, I was glad there was no other reason for your letter's failure to arrive. For I can assure you, I was awfully anxious. I at once notified the post office of the loss of the letter, but they could give little hope, and the inquiries must be made in Paris. Meanwhile, they will also investigate. Let us hope it will be found, but I dare not count on it, and I fear the 50 francs are damn well lost, just at the moment when they are almost indispensable to me. In the first place, to make progress in the experiments with lithography. I am very glad that you liked those which I sent first; by the same mail you will receive the *very first* print of “Sorrow.” I added another one with a larger margin for Heyerdahl, and another one for Buhot, but as they are larger, I do not know if the post office will accept them.

You can of course take the one you like best and get as many copies as you like, but I marked the very first one: first impression.

Tomorrow I shall go to Smulders to get the stones from him. I can tell you I should like it enormously if I could succeed in making a fine series.

I am now busy drawing diggers, which I hope will lead to something.

It's very cold here, snow and frost, but very beautiful.

In the roll of lithographs you will find a little drawing made with neutral tint on Whatman. What I want to ask you about is, Would a drawing made in this way be fit for reproduction? And then, would such drawings made with autographic ink be acceptable to the Vie Moderne?

I should like to ask you to send me some numbers of the Vie Moderne, for I have only a very few loose sheets (I believe just three from a very old issue) and I should like to form a better and more complete idea of what the magazine really is. I looked for them here in town, but could not find a single copy. The sooner I receive them, the better it would be, as just now I am trying to find the different processes, and the reproductions in the Vie Moderne will perhaps help me to understand better what one can do with it. But I think I have to ask your pardon for all the trouble I'm causing you over it.

This week Father was here just for a moment when he was in town for a meeting.

Rappard had written me about the new series of drawings (of miners) by Paul Renouard in L'Illustration. I haven't seen them yet, but if you find them at some newsstand where they sell “those things you find in the South Holland Café,” please get them for me, as I think they must be extremely beautiful.

I do not know whether you will think me conceited when I tell you that the following pleased me very much. Smulder's workmen at the other store on the Laan saw the stone of the old man from the almshouse, and asked the printer if they could have a copy to hang on the wall. No result of my work could please me more than when ordinary working people hang such prints in their room or workshop.

I think what Herkomer said, It is really done for you - the public, is true. Of course a drawing must have artistic value, but in my opinion this doesn't prevent the man in the street from finding something in it.

Well, this very first print doesn't count yet, but certainly I hope it will lead to something more serious.

The loss of those 50 francs (for I fear they are gone) thwarts you as well as me in making those experiments, but let's not be discouraged.

How I wish you could see the drawings I am doing just now. I assure you, I was very melancholy when your letter didn't come and I didn't know what the cause was. I shall be pleased to hear, at your earliest convenience, something about what I'm sending you today. Further, I must remind you that you promised to tell me more about Daumier, also at your earliest convenience, for I perfectly understand that you do not always have time to write.

Adieu, boy, once more thanks for your letter, and believe me with a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Tonight I shall start reading Zola's Pot-Bouille.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 16 November 1882

Amice Rappard,

My heartfelt thanks for your money order, no less for your letter. The reason for my disappointment over the money I expected, about which I wrote, has now been established. A letter containing money (especially intended to pay for lithographs) got lost, and there is little hope of its turning up again, though the matter is being investigated. But I would rather have it this way than to find that they were not appreciated at all, as was the case last summer with my drawings. It is very annoying not to be able to press on with my work as vigorously as I could have if the money had not been lost, but things will be straightened out eventually, and in the meantime I am trying to continue working anyway.

I have little time to write, but all the same I want to tell you that I think your remarks on the faulty drawing in the lithograph in question are correct in principle - and that I now notice it myself.

I should like to write at greater length about your statement, “One should only put something before the world if that something fulfills the strictest demands of technique.” That is what the art dealers say too, and *I do not believe what they say. Think it over a little* - that would save me the trouble of writing about it - and ask yourself whether it is not just as permissible to put a drawing like this one, just as is drawn from the model without any subsequent retouching, before the world (although I admit that there is some faulty drawing in it), as it is for me to go out into the street in my work clothes if I think it convenient, and without having to plant myself before a mirror to see if there's something the matter with my attire before I leave the house. If you admit that these things are similar, though you yourself would do neither, then the question remains whether it is not often more advisable during a campaign to march quickly than to smarten oneself up.

Further, I *cannot* agree with what you say about the way the public looks at things, namely being struck by faulty drawing before seeing the character. I do believe, however, that a relatively small part of the public looks at pictures in exactly the way you describe, but not the big crowd to whom Herkomer says, “*For you, the public, it is really done*” - at least that's what I think.

So much for that - if I can find time and words for it, I shall try to make my meaning clearer to you someday.

As I happen to be writing about matters on which I am not entirely in agreement with you (your remarks about my faulty drawing do not belong to them; I found every one of them correct), I want to speak to you about your “big decoration” and “menu,” and I will say only this, Old fellow, you'd better do something else; it's dangerous navigation. You know where you begin, but you don't know whether you'll have the power to stop. Once you have got the reputation of being able to do something for “festive occasions,” there will never be a “festive occasion” without your being the victim. Look it up in De Oude Heer Smits, who wrote a very witty and practical little essay about this which will explain it to you more clearly than I can. This is the time for campaigning; at least a time when a campaign can be undertaken.

I am not speaking about the nude in itself, but of the “big decoration.”

I know Boughton's “The Heir” as a painting; I saw it at the Royal Academy and later at Goupil's. At the time I admired it so much that I made a little sketch of it for an acquaintance in Holland, to give him an idea of it. I do not know the wood engraving.

I cannot get Renouard's “The Miners” here. I have gone to all kinds of places to get the last issues of L'Illustration; and they either did not have any or had issues in which these prints do not occur.

On condition that you will let me pay for it - not otherwise - I should like to ask you to look up the issues and to order them for me, at least if you intend to order them for yourself.

If they should not be able to do it in Utrecht, I can order them here, *but only if I know the numbers in which they occur and the dates.* One must always hurry when ordering separate issues, as the orders are often ignored, or that particular issue sold out. Thus, because time is of the essence, it might be more practical if you ordered them in Utrecht.

I once got Renouard's “Enfants assistés” in this way.

Yes - and now you must not take it amiss if I state my meaning somewhat more forcibly: the more you make menus and decorations for festive occasions - however nice or well done they may be - the less you will remain at peace with your conscience as an artist. And the more you devote yourself to serious toiling and moiling, such as the “Asylum for the Blind,” the “Tile Painters,” the “Girl Knitting” the more you will feel that though this toiling and moiling may not score an immediate success, it has its raison d'être.

The Society Kunstliefde [Love of Art] is more in need of your serious work than of a decoration, however well it might turn out.

Now it seems to me that I have a daalder [1.50 guilders] of yours in my possession with which to buy wood engravings, or something like that, as the opportunity occurs, and on this condition I won't return the surplus of your money order, which is at the moment doubly welcome, for it will be a tremendous disappointment if the letter is not found. Once again, many thanks for the early remittance, and be assured that if I say something about that decoration or other things in which my opinion differs from yours, I speak that frankly just because I appreciate your intentions and your work and consider them important.

However harsh it may sound, I really believe that you will have the greatest and best influence, *e.g.* in the Society Kunstliefde, if you decline all posts of honour and do not occupy yourself with being of “service” on festive occasions - from which I do not expect any good anyway, either for the artists or for the public, and which I do not consider proofs of prosperity of the societies which celebrate them.

Adieu, believe me, with a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 22 November 1882

Wednesday morning
Dear Theo,
Along with this letter you will receive the first proofs of a lithograph, “A Digger,” and of a lithograph of a “Man Drinking Coffee.” I should like to hear as soon as possible what you think of them. I still intend to retouch them on the stone, but I want your opinion about them first.

The drawings were better. I had worked hard on them, especially on the digger; now several things have been lost in transferring them to the stone and in the printing. But I think there is something rough and audacious in these prints that I wanted there, and this partially reconciles me to losing things which were in the drawing.

The drawing was not done with lithographic crayon only, but was touched up with autographic ink. Now the stone has only partly caught that autographic ink, and we do not know what to ascribe it to, probably my diluting it with water.

At all events, it shows that the ink gave strong black tones where it caught; I hope to get better results with it later. Then when the printer has more time, we shall make experiments by bringing a kind of wash over it during the printing, and we will try different kinds of paper and different kinds of printing ink.

I hope these two stones will improve even more by retouching in accordance with the two studies made directly from the model, which I still have.

At last a painter has come to see me, namely Van der Weele, who stopped me on the street, and I have also been to see him. I hope he will also try this process of lithography. I wish he would try it with two ploughs which he has - painted studies (a morning and evening effect) and an oxcart on the heath.

That fellow has many fine things in his studio.

He wanted me to make a composition of my many studies of old men, but I feel I am not ready yet.

You know, I wrote you about the series of diggers; now you can see a print of them, too.

No news about the letter. Here at the post office they know nothing about it, and put all the blame on Paris.

When your last letter came, after having had to wait so long, I had to pay so much at once that little was left. However, I have made those two experiments in lithography again, notwithstanding the expense, because especially in hard times I see in work the only safety, and I will fight to get ahead.

But today or tomorrow all my money will be gone. If it is possible for you to send something, do so, if not, it is neither your fault nor mine - but the days will be hard. Well, quand même, we must keep heart as long as we can, and not give away to melancholy or weakness.

There is a popular paper here called The Swallow, published by Elsevier in Rotterdam, backed by the Society for General Welfare. I have been wondering whether they could use such a digger, for instance. An edition is published monthly. But it would cost me a trip to Rotterdam, and I am so afraid I should have to go home with the answer: Business is too slack, we cannot take anything, *etc.* Besides, I should prefer not doing so - I would much rather work longer, until I have put a good series together. But as I am so frequently hard up for money, I often think of trying to earn something. Que faire?

Even if you don't have the money, boy, do write, for I need your sympathy, which is not worth less to me than the money. I hope you received the roll with lithographs containing “Sorrow” and the letter which accompanied it. I mention it again to make sure, not because I had already expected an answer.

The weather has been very cold here; today it is quite dark, grey and gloomy, but it gives a rough aspect of non ébarbé to everything.

Adieu, with best wishes and a handshake in thought, believe me,

Always yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 24 November 1882

Dear Theo,

I received your registered letter of November 20 in good order and thank you very much for sending it; from my letter, which must have crossed yours, you will already have gathered how welcome it was.

But you wrote that you sent Buhot's paper at the same time as your letter; however, it did not come then, and up till today, Friday, I have not received it. Have they made a mistake at the post office again, or did you perhaps forget to send it?

I waited until today to answer your letter in order to see whether the postman had delayed delivering it.

I hope you have also received the roll containing the “Digger.”

Today and yesterday I drew two figures of an old man sitting with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. Long ago Schuitemaker sat for me, and I kept the drawing because I wanted to make a better one someday. Perhaps I will also make a lithograph of it. How beautiful such an old workman is, with his patched fustian clothes and his bald head.

I finished Zola's Pot-Bouille, the strongest passage I think is the confinement of Adèle, the cook (Bretonne *pouilleuse*), in the dark attic. Josserand is also drawn confoundedly well and with sentiment, like the rest of the figures; but those two sombre ones, Josserand writing his addresses in the nighttime and that servant's attic, impressed me most.

How well constructed the book is, and how bitter the words it closes with: “Aujourd'hui toutes les maisons se valent, l'une ou l'autre c'est le même chose, c'est partout Cochon et Cie.” [Nowadays all firms are worth the same, the one is equal to the other, everywhere it is Swine and Co.] Don't you think Octave Mouret, really the principal figure, can be considered typical of those persons whom you recently wrote about, if you remember? In many respects he is much better than most of them; however, he will satisfy neither you nor me, and I feel a shallowness in him. Could he have done otherwise? - perhaps not, but you and I can and must act differently, I think. For we have our roots in a different kind of family life than Mouret, and besides, I hope there will always remain in us something of the Brabant fields and heath, which years of city life will not be able to wipe out, especially as it is renewed and strengthened by art.

He - Octave Mouret - is satisfied when he can readily sell his bales of “nouveautés” (déballer des ballots de marchandises sur les trottoirs de Paris) [unloading his bales of goods on the sidewalks of Paris]; he doesn't seem to have any other aspiration except the conquest of women, and yet he does not really love them, for Zola perceives correctly, I think, when he says, “où percait son mépris pour la femme” [where his contempt for women broke through].

Well, I do not know what to think of him. He seems to be a product of his time - in reality more passive than active, notwithstanding his activity.

But after Zola's book, I at last read Quatre-Vingt-Treize [`93] by Victor Hugo. Here we are in quite a different field. It is painted - I mean written - like Decamps or Jules Dupré, with expressions like the ones in the old pictures by Ary Scheffer, for instance “Le Larmoyeur” [The Mute] and “Le Coupeur de Nappe” [The Man Who Cut the Tablecloth] - or the figures in the background of the “Christus Consolator.” I would strongly advise you to read it if you haven't already, for the sentiment in which this book is written becomes more and more rare, and among the new things, I really have not found anything nobler.

It is easier to say, as Mesdag did of a certain picture by Heyerdahl, painted with the same sentiment as that of Murillo or Rembrandt, which he didn't want to buy from you, “Oh, that's the old style - we don't need that any more,” than it is to replace that old style by something as good, let alone something superior.

And as many people these days argue the same way as Mesdag, without thinking much about it, it can do no harm if others reflect whether we are in this world to tear down instead of build up. The expression “We don't need that any more” - how readily it is used, and what a stupid and ugly phrase it is. In one of his fairy tales Andersen puts it, I think, not in a human being's mouth, but in an old pig's. People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

This week I saw with great pleasure a picture by De Bock in Goupil's show window; it seemed to me much, much better than the one he was working on this spring. It represents a cottage in the dunes with an avenue of trees in front, the background sombre and full of tone, with a beautiful light sky over it. There was something grand and cheerful in it.

I said just now that he who lives in a glass house shouldn't throw stones. I'm afraid, Theo, that many who have sacrificed the old for the sake of the new will be very sorry for it in the end. Especially in the realm of art.

In short, there used to be a body of painters, authors, artists, who were united, notwithstanding their differences, and they were a force. They did not walk in the dark but were enlightened: they certainly knew what they wanted, and they did not waver. I'm talking about the time when Corot, Millet, Daubigny, Jacque, Breton, were young; in Holland, Israëls, Mauve, Maris, *etc.*

One supported the other, there was something strong and noble in it. The art galleries were smaller then; in the studios there was perhaps a greater abundance than now - as the beautiful things are soon snapped up. Those crammed studios, those smaller show windows, but above all, la foi de charbonnier of the artists - their warmth, their fire, their enthusiasm - how sublime they were. Neither you nor I witnessed it exactly, but our love for that period brings us nearer to it. Let's not forget it, it may be of use, especially if one continues to say so readily, “We don't need that any more.”

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 26 November 1882

Amice Rappard,
I had just gone out to the printer's when I met the postman, who gave me your letter. My heartfelt thanks for your proposal, which I shall write about in a minute. First I want to tell you that I am working on my fourth stone, and am sending you herewith the impressions of the three you don't have. I shall have to retouch two of them, namely the “Digger” [F 1656, JH 262] and the “Coffee Drinker.” The latter was much more striking as a drawing; in the lithograph I have used autographic ink, which did not transfer very well, and the “quickness” of the drawing has to a great extent gone out of it. There was also more animation in the black parts, as the hatching expressed the direction and form of the folds much more strongly. Well, the same is true of the “Digger,” but this sheet has in general acquired a certain vigour and ruggedness which corresponds with the character of the figure, though I should have liked a greater diversity of tone. I am now trying to find a way to combine the new method (transferring the drawing on paper) with the old (working directly on the stone).

You may remember the drawing “Worn out” [F 864, JH 051]; I did it all over again the other day - actually three separate times, with two models - and I am going to toil on it a lot more. For the present I have *one* which will be the subject of the fifth stone; it shows an old workman sitting lost in thought, his elbows on his knees, and his hands clasping his head (this time with a bald crown). [F 997, JH 267; F 1662, JH 268; F 998, JH 269]. I'm telling you all this about the lithographs in order to show you that I'm very keen on it, and consequently that your proposal about the money that was lost is most welcome.

The letter has not been found yet, and it contained a 50-franc note. But let's wait a bit for the present; the matter is being investigated. I told the man at the printer's of this catastrophe, and so far he has been sufficiently well disposed toward me not to press me for payment of the cost of the stones. For that matter, the stones are in his possession, so he isn't running any risk, or hardly any.

So about your offer - in case of need I shall gladly accept; it means a backing for me, and I can now venture to take a few more steps, but perhaps it will not be necessary, because the letter may still turn up. But it is most certainly an incitement to redouble my efforts, and to prove to you that I am working away at it rather strenuously. I drew the Digger in twelve different poses, and I am still trying to find something better. He is a marvellously fine model, a true veteran digger.

Last Sunday Van der Weele, the painter who teaches drawing at the secondary school here, came to see me; he saw the various drawings of the *orphan*-men and urgently advised me to make a large composition of them - which I think premature, however. I want to make still more studies; the “Coffee Drinker” is one of them.

Enclosed is a wood engraving after Frank Hol. That reminds me of the lot of magazines you have bought. I congratulate you on getting them; `70 - `72 is exactly - at least primarily - the great period of the English artists. At the time Black and White was flourishing and in its full vigour. I think there must be splendid things among them.

I'll tell you why it means so much to me to push on with the lithographs so vigorously. If I can manage to get a number of good stones together (there is sure to be a failure once in a while), I will be able to apply for work - for instance, in England too. It stands to reason that one has a better chance to succeed if one can show some work at the same time - for instance, by sending copies of lithographs - than if one tries to get results with words alone.

Sending drawings is inadvisable, as they can easily be lost. This new process enables me to work for a lithographic printing office at a distance without having to send the stones themselves. I bought a new kind of ink and a new kind of crayon [Kopal crayon], today. My present address is 136**,** Schenkweg. I shall be glad to have your opinion of the copies I'm sending you. If it is possible for me to correct any faults, I shall be glad to do so. Yet one must be careful once it is drawn, for then one no longer has full control. I think you'll rather like the new “Worn Out” - tomorrow I hope to attack the lithograph of it.

Well, my page is full now - although I have written only about professional matters, don't think that I'm not concerned about your illness. On the contrary, I worry all the more when I remember how I caught cold too last summer, and had a rather high fever, and - and - however, I hope with all my heart that it isn't the same with you. However this may be, I most sincerely wish you a speedy recovery, and believe me, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 26 and 27 November 1882

Sunday
Dear Theo,
Yesterday I happened to read a book by Murger, namely, Les Buveurs d'Eau [The Water Drinkers]. I find something in it of the same charm there is, for instance, in the drawings by Nanteuil, Baron, Roqueplan, Tony Johannot, something witty, something bright.

Still, it is very conventional, at least this book is, I think. I haven't read other books of his as yet, and I think there is the same difference between him and, for instance, Alphonse Karr and Souvestre as there is between a Henri Monnier and a Comte-Calix and the above-mentioned artists. I try to choose the persons I compare all from the same period. It has a fragrance of the era of the Bohemian (though the reality of that time is suppressed in the book), and for that reason it interests me, but in my opinion it lacks originality and sincerity of sentiment. However, perhaps his books in which no artist types occur are better than this one; authors seem to be always unlucky with their types of painters. Balzac, among others (his painters are rather uninteresting), Zola, even though his Claude Lantier is real - there certainly are Claude Lantiers, but, after all, one would like to see another kind of painter depicted by Zola than Lantier, who seems to be drawn from life after somebody who certainly was not the worst example of that school, which I think is called impressionist. And it is not they who form the nucleus of the artistic corps.

On the other hand, I know very few well-drawn or well-painted types of authors; painters on that point generally fall into the conventional and make of an author a man who sits before a table full of papers, that's all, or they do not even go as far as that, and the result is a gentleman with a collar and a face devoid of expression.

There is a painting by Meissonier which I think beautiful, it is a figure seen from behind, stooping over, with his feet I think on the rung of the easel; one sees nothing but a pair of up-drawn knees, a back, a neck, and the back of a head, and just the glimpse of a fist holding a pencil or something similar. But the fellow is there, and one feels the action of strained attention just as in a certain figure by Rembrandt, a little fellow shown reading, who also stoops with his head leaning on his fist, and one feels at once that he is absolutely lost in his book.

Take Bonnat's Victor Hugo, fine, very fine, but I still prefer the Victor Hugo described in words by Victor Hugo himself, nothing but this: “Et moi je me taisais, tel que l'on voit se taire un coq sur la bruyère.” [And as for me, I was silent, like a cock seen keeping silence on the heath.] Isn't it splendid, that little figure on the heath? Isn't it just as vivid as a little general of `93 by Meissonier - of about the size of one centimetre.

There is a portrait of Millet by Millet himself which I love, nothing but a head with a kind of shepherd's cap, but the look-from half-closed eyes, the intense look of a painter - how beautiful it is - also that piercing gleam as in a cock's eye, if I may call it so.

It is Sunday again. This morning I took a walk on the Rijswijk road, the meadows are partly flooded, so that there was an effect of tonal green and silver with the rough black and grey and green trunks and branches of the old trees distorted -by the wind in the foreground, a silhouette of the little village with its pointed spire against the clear sky in the background there and there a gate or a dungheap on which a flock of crows sat pecking. How you would like such a thing, how well you would paint it if you tried.

It was extraordinarily beautiful this morning, and it did me good to take a long walk, for what with drawing and the lithography I had scarcely been outdoors this week.

As to the lithography, I hope to get a proof tomorrow of a little old man. I hope it will turn out well. I made it with a kind of chalk especially patterned for this process, but I am afraid that after all the common lithographic crayon will prove to be the best, and that I shall be sorry I did not use it.

Well, we must see how it turns out.

Tomorrow I hope I shall learn several things about printing which the printer will show me. I should love to learn the printer's craft itself. I think it quite possible that this new method will bring new life into the art of lithography. I think there might be a way of combining the advantages of the new with the old way, one cannot tell for certain, but perhaps it may be the cause of new magazines being published.

Monday

I wrote this far last night, this morning I had to go to the printing office with my little old man, now I have witnessed everything, the transfer on to the stone, the preparation of the stone and the printing itself. And I have a better idea now of what changes I can still make by retouching. Enclosed you will find the first print, not counting one spoiled proof. After a time I hope to do better, this doesn't satisfy me at all, but well, the progress must come by work and trying. It seems to me the duty of a painter to try to put an idea into his work. In this print I have tried to express (but I cannot do it well, or so strikingly as it is in reality, of which this is but a weak reflection in a dark mirror) what seems to me one of the strongest proofs of the existence of "quelque chose là-haut" [something on high] in which Millet believed, namely, the existence of God and eternity - certainly in the infinitely touching expression of such a little old man, of which he himself is perhaps unconscious, when he is sitting quietly in his corner by the fire.

At the same time there is something noble, something great that cannot be destined for the worms. Israëls has painted it so beautifully. In Uncle Tom's Cabin, the most beautiful passage is perhaps the one in which the poor slave, knowing that he must die, and sitting for the last time with his wife, remembers the words,

Let cares like a wild deluge come,
And storms of sorrow fall,
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my Heaven, my all.

This is far from theology, simply the fact that the poorest little wood-cutter or peasant on the heath or miner can have moments of emotion and inspiration which give him a feeling of an eternal home to which he is near.

Returning from the printing office, I find your letter; I think your Montmartre splendid, and I certainly would have shared your emotion, in fact I think that Jules Dupré and Daubigny have often tried to conjure up these thoughts by their work. There is at times something indescribable in those aspects, all nature seems to speak, and on going home one has a feeling of the same sort as when one has finished a book by Victor Hugo, for instance. As for me, I cannot understand that not everybody sees it and feels it, nature or God does it for everyone who has eyes and ears and a heart to understand. For this reason I think a painter is happy because he is in harmony with nature as soon as he can express a little of what he sees.

And that's a great thing, one knows what one has to do, there are subjects in abundance, as Carlyle rightly says, "Blessed is he who has found his work."

If that work like that of Millet, Dupré, Israëls, etc., strives to bring peace, *sursum corda*, lift up your heart to Heaven, then it is doubly stimulating - one is then less alone also, because one thinks. It's true I'm sitting here lonely, but whilst I am sitting here in silence, my work perhaps speaks to my friend, and whoever sees it will not suspect me of being heartless.

But I tell you that dissatisfaction about bad work, the failure of things, the difficulties of technique can make one dreadfully melancholy. I can assure you that I am sometimes terribly discouraged when I think of Millet, Israëls, Breton, de Groux, so many others, Herkomer for instance; one only knows what these fellows are worth when one is oneself at work. And then to swallow that despair and that melancholy, to hear with oneself as one is, not in order to sit down and rest but to struggle on notwithstanding thousands of shortcomings and faults and the doubtfulness of conquering them, all these things are the reason why a painter is not happy either.

The struggle with oneself, the trying to better oneself, the renewal of one's energy, all this is complicated by material difficulties.

That picture by Daumier must be beautiful. It is a mystery why a thing that speaks as clearly as that picture, for instance, is not understood, at least that the situation is such that you are not sure of finding a buyer for it even at a low price.

This is for many a painter also something unbearable, or at least almost unbearable. One wants to be an honest man, one is so, one works as hard as a slave, but still one cannot make both ends meet; one must give up the work, there is no chance of carrying it out without spending more on it than one gets back for it, one gets a feeling of guilt, of shortcoming, of not keeping one's promises, one is not honest as one would be if the work were paid for at its natural reasonable price. One is afraid of making friends, one is afraid of moving, like one of the old lepers, one would like to call from afar to the people: Don't come too near me, for intercourse with me brings you sorrow and loss; with all that great load of care on one's heart, one must set to work with a calm, everyday face, without moving a muscle, live one's ordinary life, get along with the models, with the man who comes for the rent, with everybody in fact. With a cool head, one must keep one hand on the rudder to continue the work, and with the other hand try to do no harm to others.

And then storms arise, things one had not foreseen, one doesn't know what to do, and one has a feeling that one may strike a rock at any moment.

One cannot present oneself as somebody who comes to propose a good business transaction or who has a plan which will bring great profit. On the contrary, it is clear that it will end with a deficit, and still one feels a power surging within, one has work to do and it must be done.

One would like to speak like the people of `93: this and that must be done, first these have to die, then those, then the last ones, it is duty, so it is unarguable, and nothing more need be said.

But is it the time to combine and to speak out?

Or is it better, as so many have fallen asleep and do not like to be aroused, to try to stick to things one can do alone, for which one is alone liable and responsible, so that those who sleep may go on sleeping and resting.

Well, you see that for this once I express more intimate thoughts than usual, you yourself are responsible for it as you did the same.

About you I think this, you are certainly one of the watchers, not one of the sleepers - wouldn't you rather watch while painting than while selling pictures? I say this in all coolness without adding what in my opinion would be preferable, and with full confidence in your own insight into things. That there is a great chance of going under in the struggle, that a painter is something like a “lost sentinel,” these and other things need no saying. You must not think of me as so readily scared - for instance, to paint the Borinage would be something so difficult, so relatively dangerous as to make life a thing far removed from any rest or pleasure. Yet I would undertake it if I could, that is, if I didn't know sure, as I do now, that the expenses would surpass my means. If I could find people who would interest themselves in such an enterprise, I would risk it. But just because you are really the only one for the moment who has a concern over what I do, the thing has to he put on the shelf for the present and must remain there, and meanwhile I will find other things to do. But I do not give it up to spare myself.

I hope you will be able to send the money not later than the 1st of December. Well, boy, hearty thanks for your letter and a warm handshake in thought, believe me,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 1 December 1882

Dear Theo,

A few days ago I received a letter from Rappard, with whom I have been corresponding about the experiments in lithography, and who is also making some experiments himself.

I had incidentally written him, “I have had another obstacle, a letter with money which was especially intended for the experiments got lost.”

In answer to this, he wrote: “Don't let this trouble you, and count on me if you cannot continue or if you need something.” I had not written it to him because I expected him to say such a thing, but because I wanted him, for his part, to make a few more experiments. Still, it pleased me, because such proofs of sympathy are rare. I answered him, For the moment there is no need of it, but if it really became a question of my not being able to continue, I would accept your aid. And I told him how much I appreciated it. You see now that this is one of the cases which I wrote you about in my last letter.

Of course the drawing, the stone, the printing, the paper, cause expenses, but, relatively speaking, they are small. Sheets such as the last one I sent you, for instance, as well as a new one I finished last night and which is ready, would, I think, be perfectly suitable for a popular publication, which is so very, very necessary, here in Holland even more than anywhere else.

Now, an enterprise such as the drawing and printing of a series of, for instance, thirty sheets of workmen types - a sower, a digger, a woodcutter, a ploughman, a washerwoman, then also a child's cradle or a man from the almshouse - well, the whole immeasurable field lies open, there are plenty of beautiful subjects - can one undertake it or not? The question goes even deeper: it is a duty, and is it right or is it wrong? That's the question.

If I were a man of means, I shouldn't hesitate to decide, I should say, “En avant et plus vite que ça. [Quick march, and hurry up.]

But here it is different - may one, must one, can one involve and carry along others whom one needs, without whom one cannot accomplish it, in an enterprise doubtful of success? I wouldn't spare myself. By helping me, you have shown that you do not spare yourself either. But others think it both wrong and foolish of you to have anything to do with me, and they think my own actions even more foolish; and many who at first were full of good will changed their opinion, and their courage and enthusiasm were as short-lived as a straw-fire.

In my opinion they are indeed quite wrong, for neither you nor I act foolishly in this matter. The whole thing started a short time ago with a word from you, “I met Buhot, who knows a certain way of lithographing which I will tell you more about later; you ought to make some experiments with the paper he is going to send you.” This matter, with its relatively insignificant beginning at first, has in a short time assumed more important proportions to me.

I see that with persistence and perseverance it might become something not at all unnecessary, but definitely good and useful.

It has always been said that in Holland we cannot make prints for the people - I have never been able to believe it, I see now that it *can* be done

The Society for General Welfare has bolstered up Elsevier in Rotterdam with thousands of guilders for the publication of *The Swallow*. Did The Swallow become a good thing? *No*, though it had a few beautiful sheets, it was too uninteresting, not serious, not powerful, not strong enough; an imitation of what the English do, not original enough.

There are two systems: How not to do it and How to do it. How not to do it was, I'm afraid, Elsevier's underlying motive, otherwise he *would have done* it, even if he had had to pay for it himself. How-not-to-do-it argues thus: The Society gave me so and so much; I get so and so much from the sale; I must have so and so much of this *for my own pocket*. I must follow my colleagues' custom, otherwise they will call me a mauvais coucheur or a spoil-sport, *etc*.

So, instead of saying what was written under a picture by Millais, “*It might be done, and if so, we should do it*,” Elsevier and thousands like him say it can't be done, or they do it sloppily and without enough energy. I do not know the publishers of The Swallow well enough to be able to say exactly whose fault it is; however, I know their magazine well enough to take it upon myself to say, “You have not made it what it might have been, it should and might have been better.”

And in addition to this I say, whatever the case may be now, at all times there have been clever, true, brave, honest Dutchmen - even during times when everything was generally slack and enervated and wrong, the fire was found burning here and there in some hidden corner. How much more so during those periods when the Dutch people were ranked among the first and best.

So what is needed is courage and self-sacrifice and risking something, not for gain, but because it is useful and good; one must retain one's trust in one's fellow creatures and fellow countrymen in general.

Before I go further, however, I want to state this: I personally will have nothing to do with this business of prints for the people, except for making them if such a thing is undertaken. It must be a public service, not a publishing venture. However, as it is necessary to come into some contact with the “book trade,” if only about the printing or such, for once I speak to you about it, not to ask, “Do you think it would be a success?” from their point of view, but only to discuss, how to do it.

I should think the following would be the best way:

As it is useful and necessary that Dutch drawings be made, printed and distributed which are destined for workmen's houses and for farms, in a word, for every working man, a number of persons should unite in order to use their full strength toward this end.

This combination must try to operate as practically and well as possible, and should not disperse before the work is finished.

The price of the prints must not be more than ten, at the most fifteen cents.

The publication should start when a series of thirty sheets has been made and printed and when the expenses for stones, wages and paper have been paid

Those thirty sheets would be published together, but could be bought separately; they would form a whole in a linen cover with a short text, not referring to the drawings - which speak for themselves - but explaining in a few concise, vigorous words how and why they are made, *etc.*

The reason for this combination is the following. If the draughtsmen undertook it alone, they would be saddled with everything, the work as well as the expenses, and the undertaking would be a failure before it was half finished. Therefore the burden must be equally divided, so that everyone has his share to carry and the thing can be brought off.

The profits from the sale would serve first to pay back the money to those who furnished it, and second, to pay each draughtsman an equal amount to be fixed later.

Once these things have been settled, the rest would be used for new publications to continue the work.

Those who begin this work will consider it a duty. Self-interest *not* being their aim, if the undertaking doesn't pay, and the deposits are lost, neither the money-lenders nor the draughtsmen nor anyone who might have contributed may retrieve what they have put into it; neither may they claim more than they furnished if the undertaking should succeed beyond all expectation.

In the latter case, the surplus would be used for the continuation of the work; in the former case, the original group would keep the stones, from which at all events the first 700 copies would be reserved not for the combination but for the public: if the combination fails, those copies must be spread free of charge. Immediately after the publication of the first series of thirty, a consultation must be held, and it must be decided whether to continue or not; and then, but not before, whoever wants to withdraw from the combination may do so.

This is the idea I've formulated, and now I am telling you how to do it. Will you join?

I haven't spoken to others about it because the idea only became clear to me while at work. But I have already been discussing the question of prints for the people for a long time with Rappard, with the result that both he and I are interested in it; so that, as I already told you, he voluntarily said to me, I will give you a helping hand.

However, Rappard does not view the matter as I wish he would - that is, he doesn't agree with me on questions of technique. As to his proposal to lend me money, I resolved to refuse it for myself personally, because I should only want it if a combination such as the one I wrote you about could not be established: then I should try to carry out the idea myself. Once as far as that, I should have to see what more I could do. For the present I tell him my ideas about the matter, and ask him as I do you: couldn't we take such a thing in hand?

And for myself, I should wish that in this combination everybody should be quite equal, no rules or president or any such thing, only a memorandum regulating the matter, which could only be changed by a unanimous vote once it had been definitely drawn up and signed by the founders; further, the names of those who pledged themselves (*but these are not to be made public, the whole thing being an artistic, a private enterprise*), listing in what way they are contributing. *A* pledges himself to make this or that, *B* gives so much, etc., that's all.

Meanwhile it is December 1. If you have not written already, do so as soon as possible, for I haven't a cent left.

Adieu, believe me with a warm handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

It ought to be a combination which *acts*, not deliberates, acts quickly and resolutely and without loss of time, considering the whole thing a matter of public service, not a publisher's speculation.

Another thing. One must calculate the expenses beforehand; thirty stones, printing wages, paper, how much would it be? I do not know exactly, but I think that 300 guilders would cover a great deal. The drawings would be contributed by members who could not give any money. I will take them all upon myself if there is nobody else. But I would rather that artists better than myself undertook it.

In any case I think it is desirable to bring the first thirty sheets before the public, and I should like to see this through, even if for the present no other contributors should present themselves to make the drawings. Because artists who could do it better than I may hope to might perhaps be induced to join if they were shown the series. Many people will begin only when they know for sure that the undertaking is serious, and will refuse to have anything to do with it as long as the first steps have not been taken.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 2 or 3 December 1882

Dear Theo,
My warm thanks for your registered letter as well as for the little roll. I found Buhot's paper in it, but I should like to have had some explanation along with it, for instance, *with what* must one draw on this paper? Perhaps you will tell me that later.

Renouard's “Enfants Assistés” are splendid, also his new drawing, “Banc des Accusés,” though the latter is less important than, for instance, his large prints of the “Prison Mazas.”' I am very glad to have them and thank you heartily.

You will have received a copy of a lithograph by now. Frankly, it was a misprint, but I sent it to you because a few parts were exactly the way I intended the whole to be.

This time the autographic ink blotted badly and it had to be fixed later, and black spots were everywhere. But look, for instance, at that left leg with the muddy shoe. This proves that this process can express material and can give characteristic effects. The hands and the head are bad, but in the print of the other old man they were the parts which were best. I *again* witnessed the transferring to the stone and the printing and I must tell you that I think great things can be done with this process.

Today I was at Van der Weele's, who was rather pleased with the little old man with his head in his hands; he intends to try it himself. Sometimes he does wonderful things. He gave me four of his etchings, a sheepfold, calves in the underbrush, two sand carts and an ox plough, and I hope to get some more later when he has new prints made of them.

He does not seem to have a great liking for Tersteeg, for without my telling him anything about the man, and while we were discussing the studies by V. d. W. himself, he said, Oh well, as soon as I do this or that and go to Tersteeg, he will make this or that unpleasant remark. I think this is true, and I really regret very much that this is the way things are. I would much rather have been mistaken in my opinion of Tersteeg, but I am afraid he is accustomed to discouraging many persons who deserve better. How tiresome such matters are.

Yesterday I received a letter, not from Rappard but from his father, who tells me R. is sick. I do not know what ails him - perhaps, perhaps, it is what you and I know also.

I infer this from some expressions in his last letter when he told me to continue the experiments in lithography, and said that he himself felt so low that he couldn't do anything. What a pity, isn't it? It is so hard when one has to give up work for such a foolish reason as indisposition.

If I do not get news of his recovery soon, I have a good mind to go and see him. Recently we have corresponded rather frequently about our work; he has become quite enthusiastic about collecting wood engravings, for instance, and I think it quite possible that we shall become more and more interested in each other.

At Van der Weele's I saw an excellent sketch of Breitner's, an unfinished drawing - perhaps it cannot be finished; it represents officers in front of an open window, bent over and deliberating about some map or battle plan. Breitner really has got a job at the high school in Rotterdam - a lucky thing for him. But l think after all it is preferable if one *can* manage to do without such jobs and give all one's time to one's work. There seems to be something fatal in occupying such positions; perhaps it is the very cares, the very dark, shadowy side of an artist's life which is the best of it. It is risky to say so, and there are moments when one speaks differently; many are drowned by too heavy cares, but those who struggle through will profit by it later.

You write about the question of making drawings in a smaller size. I appreciate your speaking of that matter more calmly than others, who have said the same thing to me in quite a different way, and told me, If you don't work in a smaller size, this and that will happen. I think it preposterous and superficial to talk that way, and I can't believe what they say is true.

Do you know what I think? All sizes have their advantages and disadvantages; in general, for my own study I decidedly need the figure with rather large proportions, so that the head, hands and feet will not be too small and one can draw them vigorously.

So for my own practice I use the size of Exercices au Fusain by Bargue as an example; one can easily take that size in with one glance, and yet the details are not too small. But most artists use a smaller size. I have done it this way from the very beginning - sometimes a little smaller, sometimes a little larger; and as far as my own study is concerned, I should be acting contrary to my conviction if I changed.

But though my attention centers on drawing the human figure on a good large scale - a thing which is exceedingly difficult, I assure you - this doesn't mean that I am absolutely bound to it. And so in answer to what you write, I shall ask you a question, Have you a particular work in mind? Has anybody told you something, for instance, like, If those figures were half the size, these drawings might be used for this or that? And if you know something or other about such a thing, for my part I should take the trouble either to reduce the figures I already have to half-size or draw new ones on a smaller scale.

Without a definite reason I should think it less important than with one.

If I send you a few figures, for instance, half the size of the former ones, and you should try to show them, though unable quite to tell me yet to whom or to what end, that would be reason enough for me to make them.

What I said just now is only to show you how I have tried to keep some system in my work from the very beginning; I have set a kind of rule for myself - not to become the slave of that rule, but because it helps one to think more clearly.

It is not at all difficult, for instance, to reduce a certain figure to half-size; sometimes, however, it loses something essential - sometimes the figure gains by it, too. At all events, I'll send you a few before long, but if you have something particular in mind, tell me what it is - it may help me in choosing my figures.

Once more, thanks for what you sent. What I wrote in my last letter about the plan of publishing prints for the people is a thing I hope you will consider sometime. I myself have no fixed plan yet, seeing that in order to have it clearly before me, I have to do things in connection with the drawings themselves and with the process of reproduction. But I have no doubt of the possibility of doing such a thing, nor of its usefulness; nor can I doubt the possibility of finding people who would be sympathetic to it. Well, I think it might be done in such a way that no one would regret having contributed to it.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

While I am writing to you, I read your last letter once more, especially what you say about the size; I will give you an example of an artist whom you know, Théophile Schuler, who illustrated the works of Erckmann-Chatrian. One sees clearly from those small illustrations that he could work very well in a small size, though one can see it even better from the things he made at the time for L'Illustration and Magasin Pittoresque, among others, the Album des Vosges, to which Brion and Jundt also contributed.

I think, however, that one would be very much mistaken in believing that such a thing as, for instance, the print “Le Bénédicité” [Grace before Meat] (a family of woodcutters and farmers at table) was made in one fell swoop. No, in most cases the solidity and pith of the small size is only acquired after much more serious study than those who think lightly of illustration work would suppose. Oh, boy, you are one of the best informed of the art dealers I know, and you speak about it with so much more truth and feeling than most of them; but if you knew the drudgery those little things have cost - as, for instance, the prints in the Album des Vosges or those first things in the Graphic - I think you would be awed by it.

With me, at least, it is such that whenever I learn more about the life and works of people like Schuler, Lançon, Renouard and so many others, I perceive that what is seen of them is only a little wisp of smoke coming out of their chimneys, and that within their hearts and studios there is a big blaze. It is the same with an artist's illustration work as it is with a little church spire in the distance, it looks small and insignificant, but when one gets nearer, it proves to be quite an imposing edifice - I mean, only a small part of their work comes before the public.

Well, some pictures make a big splash in their enormous frames, and later one is astonished because they leave such an empty, unsatisfied feeling; in contrast to this, some simple wood engraving or lithograph or etching is sometimes overlooked, but one comes back to it and becomes more and more attached to it, and feels something grand in it.

I know a drawing by Tenniel representing “Two Dominies” (of course this is not the English title, but it is the subject): one is a city dominie, large, pompous and imposing; the other is rather shabby, a simple village curate, apparently the father of a large and poor family. I often think that one also finds those two types among painters; many illustrators belong to the village clergymen group of painters, whereas perhaps persons like Bouguereau and Makart and many others belong rather to the former type.

Whether I personally have to work on a large or a small scale is immaterial to me, but what the illustrations demand is only part of what I ask of myself. Of myself I decidedly demand that I can draw the figure of a size such that head, hands and feet do not become too small and the details remain distinct. I cannot do this nearly as well as I have set myself to do it, and for that very reason I must not relax on this point. If I exact this, I demand no more of myself than many others do. So, for instance, about that series of drawings I am now working on, I do not know what the definite form or size will be. After long reflection I decided on the size of that little old man with his head in his hands, but when it comes to printing, I can of course reduce the size of these cartoons.

And the practical reason for drawing the figures on a rather large scale is proved, for instance, by the Exercices au Fusain, de Modèles d'après les Maîtres, published by Goupil and Co. I started with them, and up to now I have found no better guide to studies from the living model. This publication was intended to bring healthy ideas about study into the schools as well as and especially into the studio. I have listened to what Bargue says in his examples; though my work is far from being as beautiful as his, I believe the examples indicate a straight road in keeping with what other artists, including Leonardo da Vinci, have taught before. At all events, it gave a certain method to my ideas about drawing, which makes the work more systematic than it would be if one put no method into one's work. You see, this is a thing which I may not let go of, but I repeat, I can reduce the size of any figure among my studies if it's desirable.

I must say, I am very eager for you to see all the things which I've made since last summer together. How about those drawings which you wrote me you sent via the Rue Chaptal? I have not received them yet, but I suppose they are still with you, because very shortly after that you wrote me that Buhot had seen some of them. Of course I am in no immediate hurry for them, and only ask in case they were left behind somewhere. And if you think it better to keep them with you so you can show them to someone some time or other, I have nothing against it, but I wish you could make a new choice out of the whole collection.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 3-5 December 1882

Dear Theo,

You have received my letter in which I wrote you how the idea of making figures *from the people for the people* developed of its own accord while I was working. How it seemed to me that it would be a good thing - not commercially but as a matter of public service and duty - if a few persons combined to do it.

Since I wrote you this I have been thinking - not, of course, Who will do this or that? - but, What am I doing toward it? For the simple reason that I am not responsible for the former, but I certainly am for the latter. But this much I can tell you, all the time I was drawing with that purpose in mind the idea got more of a hold on me. That it would be useful to bring about such a thing and that it is not at all necessary to fall into a kind of imitation of other publications for the people, but, on the contrary, that the existence of such papers as the British Workman, for instance, can be a guide in showing how to do it and how not to do it.

I do not know if you have read Dickens's Little Dorrit and if you remember in it the figure of Doyce, the man one could take as a type of those whose principle is How to do it. Even if you do not know that splendid workman's figure from the book, you will understand the fellow's character from this one phrase. When the thing he wanted to bring about was blocked by indifference and worse things, and he couldn't go on, he simply said, “This misfortune alters nothing; the thing is just as true *now* (after the failure) as it was *then* (before the failure).” And what had failed in England he started again on the Continent, and succeeded there.

What I wanted to say is this. The idea of drawing types of workmen from the people for the people, distributing them in a popular edition and taking the whole as a matter of duty and public service - that and nothing but that - look here, that idea is enough to convince me that even if it didn't succeed at once, one might suppose, “The thing is as true today as it was yesterday, and it will be as true tomorrow.”

And so it is a thing which one can begin and continue with serenity, a thing the good success of which one need not doubt or despair of - if only one doesn't relax or lose courage.

I have said to myself that my first duty is to try my very best on the drawings.

So that I have now made a few new ones since my last letter on the subject. In the first place, a Sower. A big old fellow, a tall dark silhouette against a dark ground. Far away in the distance a little cottage with a moss-covered roof and a bit of sky with a lark. The man is a kind of cock type, a clean-shaven face, rather a sharp nose and chin, small eyes and sunken mouth. Long legs with jack boots.

Then a second Sower, with a light brown fustian jacket and trousers, so this figure stands out light against the black field, bordered by a little row of pollard willows. This is quite a different type, with a clipped beard, broad shoulders, rather thick-set, somewhat like an ox, in that his whole frame has been shaped by his labour in the fields. Perhaps more of an Eskimo type, thick lips, broad nose.

Then a Mower with a large scythe on a meadow. The head with a brown woolen cap stands out against the clear sky.

Then one of those little old fellows in a short jacket and big old top hat, which one sometimes meets in the dunes. He is carrying home a basketful of peat.

Now in these drawings I have tried to show my meaning even more clearly than in the old man with his head in his hands. These fellows are all in action, and this fact especially must be kept in mind in the choice of subjects, I think. You know yourself how beautiful the numerous figures in repose, which are done so very, very often, are. They are done more often than figures in action.

It is always very tempting to draw a figure at rest; it is very difficult to express action, and in many people's eyes the former effect is more “pleasant” than anything else. But this “pleasant” aspect must not detract from the truth, and the truth is that there is more drudgery than rest in life. So you see my main idea about all this is - that for my part I try to work for the truth.

It seems to me that the drawings themselves are even more urgent than their reproduction.

I will also be chary of speaking about the matter, as I believe that a small circle of persons often acts more practically than when too many meddle with it. Too many cooks spoil the broth.

How I wish we could be together more. Do you know why I have no doubt that I should be able to do it? You know the physical law that tells us that an object immersed in a liquid loses as much in weight as the specific weight of the volume of liquid displaced by the object. That is the reason why some objects float and why those which sink are lighter under water than in the air. Something like this - a kind of fixed law of nature - seems to exist in regard to the work, by which I mean that, once well into it, one feels more energy and power than one was aware of, or rather, than one in fact possesses.

You would also experience this if you took up painting. At first it seems something unattainable, hopeless, but later things clear up, and I think you would see this in my work too.

But something which I already wrote you about has proved true, namely Rappard is seriously ill. I have again heard from his father, who doesn't explain what it really is. I want to have as many drawings ready as possible against the time of his recovery, for I should like Rappard to do the same as soon as he takes up his work again. Rappard has something which not everybody possesses, he reflects and he cultivates his sentiment. He can make a plan, he can grasp a scheme in its entirety, he can stick to an idea.

Many others call reflection and concentration inartistic because they at least are not fit for sustained labour. It is a question of both dexterity and quickness, and of perseverance and calm patience besides. Then Rappard possesses another quality which in my opinion makes him quite valuable for such an enterprise. He studies the figure carefully, not just as a touch of colour in a watercolour, but more seriously in its shape and structure.

I often think that I should like to be able to spend more time on the real landscape!

I often see things which I think splendid and which make me say involuntarily, I have never seen such a thing painted that way. But in order to paint it - how to do it - I should have to neglect other things. I should like to know if you agree with me in this, that in landscape much has been neglected - that Émile Breton, for instance, has painted effects (and has continued to work in this direction) which are the beginnings of something new, which seems to me not to have reached its full strength, is understood by few and practiced by even fewer. Many landscape painters do not possess the same intimate knowledge of nature as those who have looked lovingly at the fields from childhood on. Many landscape painters give something which (though we appreciate them as artists) satisfies neither you nor me as human beings. They call Émile Breton's work superficial - that's not true: his sentiment is superior to that of many others, he knows much more, and his work holds true.

Indeed, in the field of landscape painting enormous gaps are beginning to show themselves, and I should like to apply Herkomer's words to it: the interpreters allow their cleverness to mar the dignity of their calling. And I believe the public will begin to say: deliver us from artistic compositions, give us back the simple field.

How much good it does one to see a beautiful Rousseau on which he has drudged to keep it true and honest. How much good it does to think of people like Van Goyen, Old Crome and Michel. How beautiful an Isaac Ostade or a Ruysdael is.

Do I want them back or do I want people to imitate them? No, but I want the honesty, the naïveté, the truth, to remain.

I know old lithographs by Jules Dupré, either by himself or facsimiles of his sketches, but what pith and love is in them, yet how freely and easily they are done.

The real thing is not an absolute copy of nature, but to know nature so well that what one makes is fresh and true - that is what so many lack.

Do you suppose, for instance, that De Bock knows what you know? No, decidedly not. You will say that everybody has seen landscapes and figures from childhood on. The question is, Has everybody also been thoughtful as a child, has everybody who has seen them really *loved* the heath, fields, meadows, woods, and the snow and the rain and the storm? *Not* everybody has done this the way you and I have: a peculiar kind of surroundings and circumstances must contribute to it, and a peculiar kind of temperament and character must help it take root.

I remember letters from you, when you were still in Brussels, with descriptions of landscapes like the one in your last one. *Do you know that it is so very, very necessary for honest people to remain in art?* I do not mean to say that there are none, but you feel what I mean, and know as well as I how many painters are inveterate liars.

“Honesty is the best policy” is applicable here, too, as well as the fable of the tortoise and the hare and Andersen's ugly duckling.

Edwin Edwards, the etcher, for instance, why is his work so splendid, why is he justly ranked among England's best? Because what he aims at is faithfulness and truth. I would rather be Jules Dupré than Edwin Edwards, but, you see, we must have great respect for sincerity: it lasts where other things are proved to be dry chaff. For me Bernier's “The Fields in Winter” in the Luxembourg is ideal.

There is Lavieille, the wood engraver and painter - I just remembered having seen “A Winter Night” by him with a true Christmas sentiment.

There is Mme Collard - for instance, that picture of an apple orchard with an old white horse.

There is Chintreuil and Goethals (I have often tried to think of somebody whose work can be compared with Goethal's beautiful things - I think it is Chintreuil), but in reality I haven't seen much of Chintreuil's work, or of Goethal's, for that matter.

To a great extent the cause of the evil lies in the fact that the intentions of the great landscape painters have been misconstrued. Hardly anyone knows that the secret of beautiful work lies mainly in truth and sincere sentiment.

Many people cannot help their lack of depth, and they act in good faith as far as they have good faith. But I believe you will agree with me on the fact (the more so because this is a question of something which, though it concerns you, has no direct relation to you) that if many a landscape painter who now has quite a reputation had half the sound ideas about nature which seem to come naturally to you, he would produce much better and more sincere work. Think it over, and put this and many other things besides into the balance when, weighing yourself, you say such things as “I should only be mediocre” - unless you use *mediocre* in its right and noble sense.

Smartness, as they call it here, the word is used so much - I myself do not know its real meaning, and have heard it applied to very insignificant things - is smartness what must save art? I should have better hope of things going all right if there were more people like Ed. Frère or Émile Breton, for instance, than if there were many smart people like Boldini or Fortuny. Frère and Breton will be missed and mourned. Boldini, Fortuny - one may respect them as *men*, but their influence has been fatal. A fellow like Gustave Brion has left something good - De Groux, for instance, also; if many people were like them the world would be the better for it, art would be a blessing. But Boldini, Fortuny, even Regnault - how did they help us, what progress did they bring? What you say is quite true, “Earnestness is better than irony, no matter how sharp and witty it is.” In other words, I should say, “Bonté vaut mieux que malice” [Goodness is worth more than malice], that is self-evident; but many people say, “No, malice, that is *it*.” Well, they will have to reap what they sow.

Adieu, boy, I wanted to write you about those drawings, namely that I hope that idea of prints for the people will help me make some progress. While I am writing you, news has come from Rappard that there is a little change for the better, but he seems to be very ill. I know for sure that he, as well as his father, is interested in those types from the people. As soon as Rappard is up and around again, or at least as soon as his eyes are normal again, I hope to go to see him.

I shall write soon again, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 11 December 1882

Dear Theo,

I just received your registered letter and thank you warmly for it. I want to begin with the following. I enclose a copy of the Graphic, Christmas, 1882.

Read it carefully, it is worth while.

What a colossal institution, isn't it, what an enormous circulation. This much stated, what else?…Among other things, that Hubert Herkomer's words contrast strangely with those of the Graphic editors. The latter say: “Checking our books, we find that besides our professional artists, we have no less than 2730 friends scattered all over the world, sending us sketches or elaborate drawings.”

H. Herkomer speaks of a “shortage of good draughtsmen.”

And in general his words are exactly the opposite of those of the editors of the Christmas issue in question, the result being something like this:

The Graphic editors say, “All right.”

H. Herkomer says, “All wrong.”

Now you will find something striking on page four of the copy I sent: When strong enough to stand on its own feet, the Graphic rented a house and began to print with six machines.

I have full respect for this; here I feel something holy, something noble, something sublime. Then look at that group of great artists, and think of foggy London and the bustle in that small workshop. Moreover, I see in my imagination the draughtsmen in their several studios, starting their work with the best enthusiasm.

I see Millais running to Charles Dickens with the first issue of the Graphic. Dickens was then in the evening of his life, he had a paralyzed foot and walked with a kind of crutch. Millais says that while showing him Luke Fildes's drawing “Homeless and Hungry,” of poor people and tramps in front of a free overnight shelter, Millais said to Dickens, “Give him your Edwin Drood to illustrate,” and Dickens said, “Very well.”

Edwin Drood was Dickens's last work, and Luke Fildes, brought into contact with Dickens through those small illustrations, entered his room on the day of his death, and saw his empty chair; and so it happened that one of the old numbers of the Graphic contained that touching drawing, “The Empty Chair.”

Empty chairs - there are many of them, there will be even more, and sooner or later there will be nothing but empty chairs in place of Herkomer, Luke Fildes, Frank Holl, William Small, *etc.* And yet the publishers and dealers, not listening to a prophecy like that of H. Herkomer's, will continue to assure us, in the same terms as in the enclosed number, that everything is all right, that we are getting on famously.

But how hard-hearted they are, how mistaken they are, if they think they can make everybody believe that material grandeur outweighs moral grandeur, and that any good can be accomplished without the latter.

It is the same with the Graphic as it is with many other things in the realm of art. Moral grandeur dwindles, material grandeur supersedes. But will the much-desired change come? I think that everybody must find that out for himself, but the old parable mentions a broad way which leads to destruction, and a narrow path which leads to another result

The Graphic started on the narrow path, has now passed to the broad one. This morning I saw the last number, there wasn't a *single* good thing in it; this morning I took an old, dirty torn number of 1873 from a bundle of waste-paper at a bookstall, and *almost everything* in it is worth keeping.

But as to me - que faire?

A few years ago Rappard and I walked outside Brussels on a spot which they call la Vallé Josaphat, in the neighborhood where Roelofs, among others, lives. At that time there was a sand quarry where diggers were at work, there were women looking for dandelion leaves, a farmer was sowing; we looked at all that, and I was almost in despair then: “Shall I ever succeed in painting what I admire so much?” Now I no longer despair, now I can capture those farmers and women better; and working on with patience, I can now succeed to a certain extent. But I am sorely oppressed by the way things are going and can no longer think of those magazines with pleasure and enthusiasm. The Graphic neglects to say that many in the group of artists refuse to give their work, and withdraw more and more. Why? because a painter paints to do some good and has some sincerity in his heart which despises all that grandeur. What more shall I say?… I can only repeat, “Que faire!”

Of course, continue to work, but conscious of a dark future.

Here in The Hague there are clever, great men, I readily admit it; but in many respects what a miserable state of affairs - what intrigues, what quarrels, what jealousy. And in the personality of the successful artists who, with Mesdag at their head, set the tone, material grandeur is unmistakably substituted for moral grandeur.

I am beginning to feel that if I went, for instance, to England, if I made every effort, I should certainly have a chance of finding a job.

My ideal was to achieve this, and, after all, it still is; this was what enabled me to surmount the enormous difficulties in the beginning. But my heart gets heavy at times when I think of the way things are going, it's not so much fun any more. Of course, I love to do my best on the drawings, but to present myself at all those publishers' offices - oh, I hate the thought of it!

You ask about my health - last summer's trouble is really quite gone, but I feel rather depressed at present, whereas at other moments, when my work progresses well, I am quite cheerful, and feel kind of like a soldier who isn't at home in the guardhouse, and argues thus to himself, “Why must I be in prison here, when I should be much better off among the rank and file where I belong?”

I mean, I feel depressed because I have a strength in me which circumstances prevent from developing as well as it could; the result is that I often feel miserable. A kind of internal struggle about what I must do - which is not as easy to solve as might seem at first.

I wish I had a job which would help me make progress. Many jobs which might possibly be within my reach would lead me to things quite different from those I aim at. These jobs are out of my reach, for though I might be accepted at first, they would not be satisfied with me in the long run; they would fire me or I would leave of my own accord, as at Goupil's.

I mean, they would demand current events, topics of the day, which people like Adrien, Marie, or Godefroid Durand make to perfection. I begin to see more and more clearly that the magazines drift with the superficial tide, and I think they do not try to be as good as they ought to be. No, to fill the magazines with things which cost neither time nor trouble, to give a good thing now and then, but reproduced in a cheap, mechanical way, further, to make as much money as possible - this is what they do.

I do not think this method wise. I think it will make them go bankrupt, and they will bitterly regret it in the end, which may still be far away, but nevertheless, things are as they are. They do not think of renewing themselves. Suppose the Graphic, Illustration, or Vie Moderne published an issue full of dull, insignificant things - they'd still sell it by the carload, and by the boatload; the managers would rub their hands and say, “It sells just as well this way; who's the wiser - they swallow it anyhow.”

Yes, but if their lordships the managers could follow their publications and see how thousands take the paper up greedily, and then, when they put it down, involuntarily have a feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment, perhaps their frenzy for current events would abate somewhat.

However, this is by no means the case; as you see from the report in the Graphic, they do not lack self-confidence.

In the meantime, people intrude themselves, as employees, who would never have been accepted in the difficult but noble days. It is what Zola calls “triomphe de la médiocrité.” Snobs, nobodies, take the place of workers, thinkers, artists; and it isn't even noticed.

The public, yes, one part of it is dissatisfied, but material grandeur also finds applause; however, do not forget that this is merely a straw-fire, and that those who applaud generally do so only because it has become the fashion. But on the day after the banquet, there will be a void - a silence and indifference after all that noise.

The Graphic will give “Types of Beauty” (large heads of women), as this prospectus says - I dare say to take the place of “Heads of the People” by Herkomer, Small and Ridley.

All right, but some people will not admire the “Types of Beauty” and will remember the old “Heads of the People” with sadness (this series has been stopped).

The Graphic says they will make *chromos*!!! Give us back Swain's studio.

Look here, Theo boy, it cuts me to the heart, things are going wrong. You know I would have counted it the highest honour - an ideal, in fact - to contribute to what the Graphic started. The sublime beginning of the Graphic was something like what Dickens was as an author, what the Household Edition of his work was as a publication.

And now everything is gone - once again materialism instead of moral principle. Do you know what I think of the copy I'm sending you? It is just like Obach's kind of talk, for instance, the manager of Goupil and Co. in London. And it has success, *yes, that has success, yes, that is listened to and that is admired*. Do you know, boy, what I think of this number of the Graphic? It is something like Mesdag's talk about his panorama. I respect all kinds of work, I despise neither Obach nor Mesdag, but there are things which I rank infinitely higher than that kind of energy.

I want something more concise, more simple, more serious; I want more soul and more love and more heart.

But you may be sure that I will not and cannot cry out against it, that I will not *rebel* against it. But it makes me sad, it takes away my pleasure, it upsets me, and personally I am absolutely at a loss about what to do. What sometimes makes me sad is this: formerly, when I started, I used to think, If only I make so or so much progress, I shall get a job somewhere, and I shall be on a straight road and find my way through life.

But now something else occurs, and I fear, or rather expect, instead of a job, a kind of jail - I expect such things as, Yes, some things in your work are rather good (I doubt if they really mean it), but, you see, we have no use for work like yours, we need current events (for example, the Graphic - we print on *Saturday* what happened on *Thursday*).

Look here, Theo boy, I cannot make `Types of Beauty'; I do try my best to make `Heads of the People.' You know, I would like to do the kind of work those who started the Graphic did, though I do not count myself their equal; I would take a fellow or woman or child from the street, and draw them in my studio. But no, they would ask me, “Can you make chromos by electric light?” In short, instead of meeting with an opinion, a sentiment, an aim like Dickens's (for such the Graphic originally stood for), one is confronted with a philosophy like Obach's. It makes me sad, and then I feel helpless. One can only undertake a thing if one has sympathy and co-operation.

Now this brings me to another matter. Do not take offense when I write you my thoughts, and continue to do so. If you have no time to write and cannot answer at once, at all events when we meet again, you will know what I have in mind, and perhaps we shall find a practical way.

This number of the Graphic is a fact which speaks clearly for itself, and that's why I am sending it to you.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 12-18 December 1882

Dear Theo,

Though I have nothing particular to tell you, I want to write you again. In contrast to what I wrote you - that I often feel heavy-hearted about many things, that I cannot consider everything progress, *etc.* - what I said on another occasion is still true, too - that there are things which are worth doing one's utmost for, because whether people like them or not, they have in themselves a raison d'être. Blessed is he who has found his work, says Carlyle, and that is decidedly true.

As for myself, when I say I want to make types of the people for the people, of course the state of affairs influences me only indirectly, in so far as to make my work harder or easier, but making the drawings themselves is what preoccupies me the most. And so, in contrast to a feeling of depression, there is the delightful sense of working at something which becomes more and more interesting the deeper one gets into it.

When I told you in my last letter that I sometimes feel as if I were in some kind of prison, I meant only that I cannot do many things which I should like to do - which would only be possible if I had the money - but I certainly did not mean to say that I do not appreciate the present or that I am discontented, far from it. It is just by doing what is within our reach that we have a chance of making progress, so be assured that whenever you find work for me on the magazines yonder, I shall gladly try my best.

Although you write, I do not think the illustrated magazines take a straight road, it needn't be a reason for my being unwilling to work for them. I am only afraid that they wouldn't like my work: if this were because of real faults, I should try to correct them; but if it were because of the conception or sentiment in general, I could do very little to change that.

You will have received the drawing on a smaller scale, and I repeat once more, If you wish it, I will make a series in that size, just as a trial.

I have two new drawings now, one of a man reading his Bible, and the other of a man saying grace before his dinner, which is on the table. Both are certainly done in what you may call an old-fashioned sentiment - they are figures like the little old man with his head in his hands. The “Bénédicité” [Grace] is, I think, the best, but they complement each other. In one there is a view of the snowy fields through the window. My intention in these two, and in the first little old man, is one and the same, namely to express the peculiar sentiment of Christmas and New Years Eve. Both in Holland and England this is always more or less religious, in fact, it is that way everywhere, at least in Brittany, and in the Alsace, too. Now one need not agree exactly with the form of that religious sentiment, but if it is sincere, it is a feeling one must respect. And personally, I can fully share it and even need it, at least to a certain extent, just the way I have a feeling for such a little old man and a belief in quelque chose là-haut, even though I am not exactly sure *how* or *what* it may be. I think it a splendid saying of Victor Hugo's, "*les religions* passent, mais Dieu demure" [religions pass away, but God remains]; and another beautiful saying of Gavarni's is "il s'agit de saisir ce qui ne passe pas, dans ce qui passe" [what matters is to grasp what does not pass away in what passes away.]

One of the things "qui ne passeront pas" is the quelque chose là-haut" [something on high] and the belief in God, too, thought the forms may change - a change which is just as necessary as the renewal of the leaves in spring. But you understand from this that it was not my intention to pay homage to the form in this drawing, but to show that I highly respect the Christmas and New Year's sentiment.

And if it has any sentiment or expression, it is because I feel it myself.

The one thing which is increasingly difficult to decide on is the best working method. There is so much beauty on one side as well as on the other - and at the same time so many things wrong - that sometimes one doesn't know which path to choose. But at all events, one must work on. But I myself do not think I cannot make mistakes - I am too conscious of my many errors to be able to say this or that is the right manner and this or that, the wrong one. That goes without saying. But I am not indifferent, I think it wrong to be so. I think it one's duty to try to do the right thing, even knowing that one cannot go through life without making mistakes, without regret or sorrow. Somewhere I read, *Some* good *must* come by clinging to the right.

How can I know whether I shall reach some goal - how can I know beforehand whether the difficulties will or will not be overcome?

One must go on working silently, leaving the result to the future. If one prospect is closed, perhaps another will open itself - there *must* be some prospect, and a future too, even if we do not know its geography. Conscience is a man's compass, and though the needle sometimes deviates, though one often perceives irregularities when directing one's course by it, one must still try to follow its direction.

I just want to copy for you something which I had in mind when drawing that little old man, though it is not literally applicable to it - for instance, it is not night in the drawing.

THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS

Oft in the stilly night
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me.
The smiles, the tears,
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimm'd and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus in the stilly night
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad memory brings the light
Of other days around me.
When I remember all
The friends, so link'd together,
I've seen around me fall,
Like leaves in wintry weather,
I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!
Then in the stilly night
Ere slumber's chain has bound me
Sad memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

THOMAS MOORE

Well, I hope you will enjoy nature somewhat these days, either in the aspect of the short wintry days, or of the wintry figures. What different people one sees on the streets in winter than in summer.

I read your information about Buhot's paper which you sent. If you think it advisable for me to work on it, I should have several sheets, and I think they are made in the right size, so that I could adjust my work to them. I cannot get that paper here, otherwise I should have tried it already. Having read your information, the question also remains, If one takes a photograph of the drawing, which photograph is later transferred to zinc, are only those drawings which have been made on the paper in question suitable for it - can't one reproduce all drawings in black and white, even though they are made on ordinary paper? Further, Can the photographer reduce the size, in case the drawing is too large for the page? I should infer the latter from some American reproductions in Scribner's Magazine.

Well, adieu, I hope you will write by the twentieth. With a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 21 December 1882

Dear Theo,

Your registered letter arrived in good order, many thanks. From your letter I gathered that you are very busy with the inventory; good luck with it, it will be a tough job.

How I wish we could be together these two Christmas days - I should so love to see you in the studio again.

I too have been working hard lately, just because I was full of that Christmas sentiment; the feeling is not enough, one must express it in one's work.

So I am now working on two large heads of an old man from the workhouse, with his wide beard and his shabby old-fashioned top hat. The old fellow has the kind of wrinkled, witty face that one should like to have near a cozy Christmas fire.

Harper published a Christmas issue illustrated by some painters who call themselves the “Tile Club.” Boughton is one of them. The best of the drawings are by Abbey - they are mainly scenes from long ago, when the Dutch founded New York under the name of New Amsterdam.

I think these drawings have been reproduced by the process you described on the paper which Buhot sent a sample of. I must compare these American drawings again with the pictures in Vie Moderne.

I trust I shall be able to learn it, and who knows, maybe next year we shall be able to make a trial.

While you are so busy just now, I'll try my utmost to make some drawings for that purpose. When you are less busy after a while, I shall have to ask you or Buhot some more about it.

But I see clearly enough that the process is very *satisfactory,* that, if the drawing is good, one is almost sure of a good reproduction. So working on the drawings is the main thing.

As to lithography, as I have assisted a few times at the printing and the preparation of the stone, I think I shall try to make some lithographs without having recourse to paper, *etc.* - simply by drawing on the stone itself. For much as I like those drawings in Harper's Christmas Number or in Vie Moderne, still there is always something mechanical in them, something of a photograph or photogravure, and I prefer an ordinary lithograph by Daumier or Gavarni or

Lemud. Well, a firm hand for drawing is needed for one as well as for the other, that's the main thing.

I am afraid that a new process is one of those things which cannot quite satisfy one, that it is in fact rather too smooth. I mean that an ordinary etching, an ordinary wood engraving, or an ordinary lithograph has a charm which cannot be replaced by anything mechanical.

The same can be said of engraving - the photogravure reproduction of the “Sewing Class” by Israëls, for instance, or of the picture by Blommers or Artz is superb - the way they are published by Goupil and Co. But if this process should entirely replace the real engraving, I think in the long run one would miss the ordinary engraving, with all its difficulties and imperfections.

Rappard is still sick, though the crisis is past; he is very weak, his father writes.

What is it? I don't know - perhaps brain fever or inflammation? His father doesn't give particulars.

Well, I hope your Christmas will be pleasant after all - that you will be able to take a nice long walk, and that you will have a good time - but I am afraid you will be up to your ears in the inventory. Well, work is always cheering, even the kind of work which isn't very pleasant in itself.

My very best wishes, write again if you can, but if you are too busy, I'll understand perfectly, and then you will make up for it later by a few descriptions of Montmartre or so. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 28-30 December 1882

Dear Theo,

Before the year is up, I feel I have to thank you again for all your help and friendship.

I haven't sent you anything for a long time, but I am saving up for the time when you will come here.

I am sorry that I haven't succeeded in making a saleable drawing this year. I really do not know where the fault lies.

I wish you could come to the studio sometime. I think I wrote you in my last letter that I am at present drawing large heads because I felt the need of a more intimate study of the structure of the skull and the interpretation of the physiognomy. The work absorbs me greatly, and I found a few things lately for which I had been seeking for a long time. Well, whenever you come, you will see everything.

These days I am troubled with a bad toothache which sometimes affects my right eye and ear; however, it may be partly due to nerves. If one has toothache, one becomes indifferent to many things, but it is curious that, for instance, Daumier's drawings are so true that they almost make one forget the toothache. I have two new prints of his, “Un Train de Plaisir” [Excursion Train], travellers with pale faces and black coats in rough weather arriving on the platform too late, among them women with crying babies.

Do you know the little book Croquis à la Plume [Pen-and-ink Drawings], written by the draughtsman Henri Monnier (who created Mr. Prudhomme)? In it I read the “Journey by Coach,” amazingly real.

I suppose you are still busy with your inventory, and I will not keep you from your work.

My very best wishes for a Happy New Year.

In the New Year shall I succeed better in making saleable drawings? or in getting some work from an illustrated paper? Of one thing I am sure, wrestling with nature is no idle work, and though I do not know what the result will be, there must be some result.

I wish you could come to the studio again - not because I can't go on or don't know what to do, but mainly because I am so afraid you will think I am not making progress. And though I cannot show you any definite result, you would see that it is slowly developing, and you would see that I am aiming high.

I perfectly agree with what you wrote recently, “There comes a time when one has mastered drawing so well that the size makes no difference and one knows the proportions by heart, so that one can work as well on a large as on a small scale.” Not only do I absolutely agree with you in this, but, besides that, I believe that one must, and can, work till one is master of composition and the effects of light and shadow, so that in the sphere one has chosen, one can conquer the most diverse subjects: for instance, draw a first-class waiting room today, a rainy day in a poor quarter tomorrow, another time a workhouse, then again a saloon or a soup kitchen. I am not yet that far - but perhaps it takes a long time just because I look for the common root or origin of so many things.

Thanks for all your faithful friendship, boy, which has again upheld me for a whole year. I wish that for my part I could give you some pleasure, too. *Sometime I shall succeed in this*.

A handshake in thought. Write me again if you have a moment. Once more best wishes.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 31 and 2 Dec-Jan 1882

Dear Theo,
It is New Year's Eve and I want another chat with you.
When I wrote my last letter, I spoke of some large heads I was working on. At that time I was busy making an experiment of which I can tell you the initial outcome, as I had models for two drawings the day before yesterday, yesterday and today.

When I made the lithographs, it struck me that the lithographic crayon was very pleasant material, and l thought, I'll make drawings with it.

However, there is one drawback which you will understand - as it is greasy, it cannot be erased in the usual way; working with it on paper, one even loses the only thing with which one can erase on the stone itself, namely the scraper - which cannot be used strongly enough on the paper because it cuts through it.

But it occurred to me to make a drawing first with carpenter's pencil and then to work in and over it with lithographic crayon, which (because of the greasiness of the material) fixes the pencil, a thing ordinary crayon does not do, or, at least, does very badly. After doing a sketch in this way, one can, with a firm hand, use the lithographic crayon where it is necessary, without much hesitation or erasing. So I finished my drawings pretty well in pencil, indeed, as much as possible. Then I fixed them, and dulled them with milk. And then I worked it up again with lithographic crayon where the deepest tones were, retouched them here and there with a brush or pen, with lampblack, and worked in the lighter parts with white body colour.

In this way I made a drawing of an old man sitting reading, with the light falling on his bald head, on his hand and the book. And the second one, the bandaged head of an injured man. The model who sat for this really had a head injury and a bandage over his left eye. Just like a head, for instance, of a soldier, of the old guard in the retreat from Russia.

Now when I compare these two heads with the others I have done, there is a great difference in the power of effect. So I hope that the drawings done this way will lend themselves to reproduction by the process which you described to me. Especially if the paper you sent is not absolutely necessary for the reproduction.

And if it is, I should be more apt to get a better than a worse effect on this grey paper with the same ingredients. When I looked at what Buhot had scratched on one of the samples, I saw at once that the black was of a very deep tone, and I can understand that this is a real necessity for the reproduction where photography and galvanography are used. So I at once began to try to find what kind of black to use and still stick to my usual way of sketching.

First I tried it with ink, but that didn't satisfy me; however, I think that with the lithographic-crayon method the results will be better.

Well, I am not writing about it to worry you during your busy days; I am in no hurry for it, and am even very glad to have a little time for additional experiments.

But I am writing you about it so that you may know I am working heart and soul on it to get a good and useful result. What is called Black and White is in fact *painting in black*, meaning that one gives the same depth of effect, the same richness of tone value in a drawing that ought to be in a painting.

Some time ago you rightly said that every colourist has his own characteristic scale of colours.

This is also the case with Black and White, it is the same after all - one must be able to go from the highest light to the deepest shadow, and this with only a few simple ingredients. Some artists have a nervous hand at drawing, which gives their technique something of the sound peculiar to a violin, for instance, Lemud, Daumier, Lançon - others, for example, Gavarni and Bodmer, remind one more of piano playing. Do you feel this too? - Millet is perhaps a stately organ.

2 January

This is as far as I got on New Year's Eve, I had hoped your letter would come. If you haven't written already, do so now, for I haven't a cent left. But you are very busy, I suppose.

Since then I have again done a few sketches with the lithographic crayon - it makes drawing almost as delightful as painting, and it gives a great vigour and depth of tone.

I long very much indeed to see you again. I have so many plans - not all of which will be realized, I suppose, nor will they all be failures - and I want so badly to talk them over with you because I have so little time to think them over and I am so little in touch with what is in demand that I cannot judge what is practicable. Please do not let my having done nothing saleable this year worry you; you once said the same thing to me, and if I say so now, it is because I see a few things within my reach in the future which I couldn't see before.

I sometimes think of the time, a year ago, when I came here to The Hague. I had imagined that the painters formed a kind of circle or society in which warmth and cordiality and a certain kind of harmony reigned. This seemed to me quite natural, and I didn't suppose it *could* be different.

Nor should I want to lose the ideas I had about it then, though I must modify them and distinguish between what is and what might be. I cannot believe so much coolness and disharmony is natural.

What's the reason??? I don't know and it's not my business to find out, but it's a matter of principle with me that I personally must avoid two things. First, one must not quarrel but, instead of that, try to promote peace - for others as well as for oneself. And second, my opinion is that if one is a painter, one must not try to be something other than a painter in society; as a painter, one must avoid other social ambitions and not try to keep up with the people who live in the Voorhout, Willemspark, *etc.* For in the old dark, smoky studios there was a good fellowship and genuineness which was infinitely better than what threatens to replace it.

If you should find some progress in my work when you come here again, I should have no other desire than to go on in the same way I have - that is, to continue my work quietly without mixing with anybody else. When there is bread in the house and I have some money in my pocket to pay the models, what more can I want? My pleasure lies in the progress of my work, and that absorbs me more and more.

Well, boy, if you haven't written already, do so soon, for I am rather hard up. Once more, my best wishes for the New Year. I had a nice letter from home. Adieu. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

1883

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3 January 1883

Dear Theo,
I wrote you yesterday, but I am doing so again today to acknowledge receipt of your letter and to thank you for it and to tell you that it cheered me. I was rather worried that you might think I had begun to slacken because you had seen so little of my work recently.

On the contrary, I have been working very hard lately, and am still absorbed in all kinds of things in which I am beginning to see a light, but which I do not quite have within my grasp yet. In my last letter I told you I was making experiments in Black and White with lithographic crayon.

You speak too well of me in your letter, but your thinking well of me is all the more reason for me to try not to be quite unworthy of it. And as to what I said about having made some progress by the experiments in question, perhaps I do not see my own work clearly. Perhaps it is a step forward, perhaps not - will you tell me your opinion of it in reference to the two studies I sent you, which I did recently along with a few others?

In seeking a more vigorous process than the one I have used up to now, I am trying to follow somewhat the English reproductions made by the process you described; and as to the value of black, I am also guided by the black sketches which Buhot made on the sample paper. And if you have an opportunity, please talk it over with an expert and ask him if reproduction of drawings like these, for instance, would be possible (aside from the secondary question of whether these or similar ones would be to their particular taste).

As to the sentiment of the drawings, I should like to know *your* opinion because, as I have already said, I myself cannot judge what is or isn't in them.

Or rather, it is because I myself prefer studies like these - even though they are not quite finished and many things in them have been neglected - to drawings with a definite subject: they remind me more vividly of nature itself You will understand what I mean: there is something of life itself in the real studies, and the person who makes them will not think of himself, but of nature, and so prefer the study to what he may perhaps make of it later - unless something quite different should finally result from the many studies, namely the *type* distilled from many *individuals*.

That's the highest thing in art, and *there* art sometimes rises above nature - in

Millet's “Sower,” for instance, there is more *soul* than in an ordinary sower in the field.

But what I want you to tell me is whether you think that this process would eliminate some of your objections to pencil. They are a few “Heads of the People.”

And I intend to try to form a collection of many such things, which wouldn't be quite unworthy of the title “Heads of the People.”

By working hard, boy, I hope to succeed in making something good. It isn't there yet, but I aim at it and struggle for it. I want something serious - something Fresh - something with soul in it! Forward - forward.

From what I have just said you will see clearly enough that I want to do some serious work for reproduction rather than be contented with having one little drawing printed.

But all information and hints about processes are very welcome to me.

In Goupil & Co.'s show window I saw a large etching by Fortuny, “Un Anachoréte,” as well as his two beautiful etchings, “Kabyle Mort” and “La Garde du Mort.” I was very sorry then that I had told you some time ago that I didn't like Fortuny - I like *this* very much. But of course you understand this, too.

It's the same with Boldini.

But Fortuny's seriousness in those three etchings, for instance, is just the thing many of his imitators lack: they settle down into the style for which Fortuny set the fashion, for instance, in “Le Choix d'un Modèle,” *etc.*

And that is diametrically opposed to the sombre, noble art of Brion, De Groux, Israëls, *etc.*

If possible, please send me a recent issue of the Vie Moderne, choosing one with reproductions such as those which you wrote about. The magazine is nowhere to be found here (and the few numbers I have are years old).

When you come sooner or later, I can show you more, and then we can talk about the future. You know well enough how unfit I am to cope with either dealers or art lovers, and how contrary it is to my nature. I should like it so much if we could always continue as we are now, but it often makes me sad to think that I must always be a burden to you. But who knows, in time you may be able to find someone who takes an interest in my work, who will take from your shoulders the burden which you took upon yourself at the most difficult time. This can only happen when it is quite evident that my work is serious, when it speaks more clearly for itself than it does now.

I myself am too fond of a very simple life to wish to change it, but later on, in order to do greater things, I shall have greater expenses, too. I think I shall always work with a model - always and always. And I must try to arrange matters so that the whole burden doesn't always fall on you.

This is only a beginning - later you will get better things from me, my boy. In the meantime, let me know whether you think that some of the objections to the use of pencil alone may have been taken care of somewhat by this crayon. Don't you also think that by making such drawings, I perhaps indirectly learn things useful for the actual lithographing?

Adieu. Once more many thanks for your letter.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5 or 6 January 1883

Dear brother,

I am sending you some more studies by the same mail. And this is a thought which came to me recently:

If you don't get tired of seeing such sketches, I think it would be a good thing to send you, for instance, about sixty sketches in a small portfolio. You could look them over in your room at your ease, and the advantage would be that against the time of your coming here, sooner or later, you would have seen some of the things I did last year. Otherwise we should have to look them over in such a hurry if you were only here for a short time. But if you approve of looking them over beforehand, and if I send them now, then I hope I may count on your bringing them back with you this summer, for instance, for I shall have to work from those studies later on.

My next work partly depends on keeping the studies together. Well, maybe they will amuse you - for instance, perhaps some of those old almshouse men are very typical. Well, let me know what you think of them.

As I had to pay some bills after the New Year, I am practically already without money now - at least, very little is left. You will greatly oblige me if you try to send rather before than after the tenth.

Adieu, boy, I hope the sketches will be more or less to your liking.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

The drawings I should like to send you are like the figures of the lithographs, all kinds of types - men, women, children.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 11 January 1883

Dear Theo,

When I read your letter this morning, I was greatly touched by what you wrote. This is one of those things of which the world sometimes says, “Why should he meddle with it?” And yet it is not so much our own will as circumstances which drive us to do it. And once we understand the situation, such a deep, fathomless pity is roused in us that we can no longer hesitate. And this is the case with you, I think…what else can I say? but that it seems to me that in such cases we must follow our impulses.

Victor Hugo says: “Par-dessus la raison il y a la conscience.” [Above the intellect there is conscience]; there are things which we feel to be good and true, though many things remain incomprehensible and dark in the cold light of reason and calculation. And though the society in which we live considers such actions thoughtless, or reckless, or foolish, or I don't know what else - what can we say once the hidden forces of sympathy and love have been aroused in us? And though it may be that we cannot argue against the reasoning which society usually employs, against those who allow themselves to be led by sentiment and to act from impulse - arguing is not the principal thing, and he who has kept his faith in God sometimes hears the soft voice of conscience; then one does well to follow it with the naïveté of a child, without saying more about it to others than can be helped.

If one has such an encounter, one must expect it to cause a struggle, especially a struggle with oneself, because sometimes one literally does not know what to do or what not to do. But isn't this struggle - and even the mistakes one may make - better, and doesn't it develop us more than if we systematically avoid emotions? The latter thing is, in my opinion, what makes many so-called strong spirits into nothing but weaklings in reality.

You have my full sympathy in this matter, and as I myself am standing in the midst of realities and can tell you my experience since we spoke about it last, if you wish to hear something about it, or wish to speak about the future, or consult about whatever it may be, I am always entirely at your disposal.

And your writing that you will come to Holland before long is very welcome news indeed.

Perseverance is the great thing in love, once it has taken hold of us. That is, if the love is returned, for if it is decidedly not returned, one is literally absolutely helpless.

Well, I thank you for your confidence, and when I think it over, I am relatively confident of the result. Such a feeling is not “passion,” for a deep, fathomless pity is at the root of it. Nor do I believe that such a thing makes you unfit for thinking about other things; on the contrary, it has a serious character which rouses and strengthens all your faculties and augments rather than diminishes your energy.

So after this you will not object to my saying a few more things about the drawings. I am very glad you think the old man's head typical - the *model* is really *typical,* I assure you. I did some more of him. Today I drew one with lithographic crayon. Then I threw a pail of water on the drawing, and in that moistness I began to model with pencil. If it succeeds, one gets very delicate tones; but it is a dangerous method, which may turn out badly. But if it succeeds, the result is quite “non ébarbé” - delicate tones of black which most resemble an etching. I also did a woman's head this way, standing out against the light, so the whole is in tone, with highlights on the profile, *etc.*

Did you receive the second roll with five heads sent from here, I think, on the fifth or sixth of January? It was the third roll mailed to you.

When you have looked at them for some time, I think you will find the same thing in them as in the first two, for there *must be* something of nature in them, as I literally wrested them from nature and worked after the model from beginning to end. I am very anxious to show you the studies - not because I am satisfied with my own work, but because, though I am not satisfied with it, I see that it is progressing, and that something is developing in it which will have some character.

When I came here to this town, what struck me most was, for instance, the Geest and those neighbourhoods. And slowly it is taking shape - but - what a struggle to bring such a thing to an end.

Today I saw photos of drawings by Barnard, figures from Dickens; at the time I saw the original drawings in London. There is a force in them as in Nicolaes Maes, for instance, but quite a modern sentiment and conception. Such things warm my heart so much, and are so cheering, because I think of the models here, how they would look if they were drawn in that way, and then of course I say to myself, “Forward!” Work on till we have quite mastered the Black and White. There is a similarity between art and love, it is like swinging between “je l'ai depuis longtemps” and “je ne l'aurais jamais” [I have had it for a long time, *and* I shall never have it], as Michelet expresses it, and one passes from melancholy to animation and enthusiasm; and this will always remain so - only the oscillations become stronger. Victor Hugo speaks of “comme un phare à éclipse” [like an occluding light], and that's also a good comparison.

If you have received my letter of the fifth or sixth of January, with the second roll of drawings, you will remember that then I was already quite out of cash. Now today I had to pay the rent and the three models whom I hadn't been able to pay before, and I also absolutely needed various drawing materials. I am working very hard at present, and I must not stop, but really the models eat me out of house and home.

Well, it would certainly be good if I could have something extra - would it be possible? I hesitate to ask it because of what you just wrote me about yourself, and I understand perfectly that it brings you cares, which I respect and with which I sympathize. But the thing with me is that I got somewhat in arrears by working so hard, and when I receive the money, I at once have to pay out more than half of it. I *cannot* live more economically than we do, I have economized wherever possible; but the work is developing, especially these last weeks, and I can hardly control it any longer - that is, the expenses it causes. Would it be possible for you to send me a little more? I think you will understand it when you see the studies. Well, forgive me for mentioning it, but I cannot do otherwise, I am in arrears for the daily expenses, and that is why I am absolutely penniless before the tenth day.

At all events, write me soon, and be assured of my full sympathy in regard to what you wrote me. Adieu, boy. A handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 13 January 1883

Dear Theo,

Since I received your letter, what you wrote has literally filled all my thoughts. And I write once more because I am so full of it. In cases like this one is involved with a patient who is ill in body *and* in soul, so it is doubly serious; and financial help for the necessities of life is not enough to bring about complete recovery - the best and most efficacious remedy is love and a home. At least I felt this way last winter, and since then - now, for instance, I feel it even more, just because experience taught me what sentiment had already told me. To save a life is a great and beautiful thing, but it is also very difficult and requires great care.

To make a home for the homeless, yes, it must be a good thing, whatever the world may say, it *cannot* be wrong, and yet it is often considered a crime.

Involuntarily I have thought it over and said to myself - What will people say about it? Will it bring you into conflict with the world? This is also a question in my mind which I cannot answer, as I do not know enough about the circumstances yet. And there is another thing which is the real motive for this letter, which I want you to consider - though perhaps it has already occurred to you.

A thing like this takes a long time - of course I think it possible that you will soon see the effects of your good care, but the complete recovery in body and soul of such a severely tried constitution will take years. At this moment the woman and the children are sitting with me. When I think of last year, there is a great difference. The woman is stronger and stouter, has lost very, very much of her agitated air; the baby is the prettiest, healthiest, merriest little fellow you can imagine - he crows like a cock, and is fat and chubby even though he gets nothing but the breast.

And the poor little girl, you see from the drawing that the old deep misery has not been erased, and I often feel anxious about her, but still she is quite different from last year; then it was very, very bad, now she already is looking more childlike.

Well, though not exactly entirely normal, the situation is much better than I dared to hope last year. And when I think it over, would it have been better if the mother had had a miscarriage or if the baby had withered or pined away through lack of milk, if the little girl had become more and more dirty and neglected, and the woman herself had sunk into an almost indescribably miserable condition? -

Well, when I see all this, I cannot doubt any more, and I say, Forward, full of good courage. Something simple, really motherly, shows itself in the woman - and as this gets stronger, she is saved. And how is this progress brought about??? Not by physicians, nor by extraordinary measures. By having the feeling of a home of her own, by a regular useful life. Not by sparing herself too much, for she *cannot* do that, but because the anxious heart finds more rest now, even under hard and tiresome work. With this thoroughly familiar case in front of my eyes, I come back to what I want to say, It seems to me that if you want to see good results, you must pay special attention to the surroundings of the woman whom you write about. It would be desirable for her to be elsewhere than in a dreary hotel room - she ought to have more homelike surroundings. You must consider this, for I think it's important; she must be diverted by very ordinary commonplace things which keep her occupied. Not isolated in a room, without intercourse with people - for her own good, and not because you want to keep her in the background or hide her. But it is necessary for her to avoid emotion and shocks as much as possible, and the sooner she returns to ordinary everyday activities and surroundings, the better.

Certainly, if you could take her into your house at once - I should not mention it. But I am afraid it is impossible, and you yourself could not approve of doing so all at once.

Loneliness or idleness is fatal; she must have a chance to talk with good people. I think that it would be delightful for her to be in a homelike atmosphere - for instance, if she could occupy herself with children. I think it rather a pity she has no child. I think it makes the case even more critical. Yes, in my opinion the most practical thing you can do is bring her into some homelike atmosphere. I think that your main thought at present is - This life must be saved - and that you unselfishly think more of her than of yourself.

Last year I could think of only one home for her, namely my own, and had I been able to act differently, I shouldn't have taken the woman into my house at once, in order to avoid the difficulties which could not be avoided now. But it's different with you, and perhaps you can temporarily take her (namely, the person whom you write about) somewhere where she is safe and quiet, till she has completely recovered. I am afraid her recovery will take a long time - besides, one need not trespass against the world's prejudices *if it can be avoided. If it cannot be avoided*, one should do what one knows is right: last summer I should have sinned against all possible prejudices - whatever their number - rather than leave the woman without home or shelter. But in your case I think it can and must be done more discreetly, and if I were you, I should try to find a suitable home for her - not leave her alone in a room without intercourse with people - for her own good, the sooner she gets normal, ordinary activities and surroundings, the better.

My heart is full, and I think of you all the time; just now I made another drawing for which the woman posed.

I can tell you, boy, my experience of this year is that though there are hard, very hard moments of care and difficulty, it is infinitely better to live with wife and children than without - but it is always wiser to get to know each other first, it is more sensible and prudent. And I should have done the same if it could have been arranged, but there was no other home for her than mine. Well, one has to take the circumstances into account, and sometimes giving offence cannot be avoided. So I do not in the least want to advise you to give it up, but I do think we agree that it is better to be cautious with reference to the world, otherwise it may spoil things. So be careful. For the moment the recovery is the main thing, and the rest will follow.

Wouldn't there be some one of your friends who would be willing to assist you and take her into his house for a time?

Perhaps a kind of hospital would be preferable - the ordinary or a private one, where she could have company. Perhaps all this is already settled, and I write about it just because I do not know anything definite. So if you should stick to your opinion that this person is the woman whom you want to devote your life to, I consider it a fortunate thing for you. And then it will be precisely this constant love which will make her bloom again.

I wish I knew when you were coming - if possible, bring the old studies with you. As to what I wrote you about sending me a little more money - yes, I am rather hard up and wish it were possible, but do not deprive her for my sake, and know well that because of what you wrote, I will try twice as hard to make progress, so that the burden may become somewhat lighter for you. But the difficulty is that hard work costs more money because of the greater outlay.

Write soon, for I long to hear from you. Rappard is recovering; I had a letter from him. I am very hard at work, always at all kinds of heads. Adieu. A handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 15 January 1883

Amice Rappard,

Is your health still improving? I am eager for news from you. The other day I bought twenty-one volumes of the Graphic, namely 1870-1880. What do you think of that? I hope to receive them this week. I got them very cheap, you understand, or else I couldn't have afforded it. But I heard that they were for sale, and I strongly recommended them to someone who is also interested in them.

I have been working hard since your illness on black-and-white drawings, and I hope to learn a few more things about the forces of black and white from these *Graphics*. I wish we could have a talk again, for, my dear fellow, there is such a lot to do!

What I have been working at especially of late is *heads* - *heads of the people* - fishermen's heads with sou'westers, among other things.

As soon as I have looked through the Graphics, I shall write you again, and then in more detail. Of course I shall get a lot of duplicates in this way.

Now you will oblige me greatly by giving me more particulars about the lot you bought - I mean not only by telling me whether there are duplicates, but also what interesting prints you have found in general.

I have found a “Head of a Little Girl” by Percy Macquoid which is splendid; it is a wood engraving *after a picture* of his. Other beautiful sheets that I have found are, to mention only some of them:

B. Constant	“Sick Fellahs on the Bank of the Nile”
Julien Dupré	“Female Cowherd”
Smith	“A Street in South Lambeth”
Ridley	“Boat Race”
Robinson	“ “
Green	“Street in Whitechapel”
Régamey	“Prison in New York”
Thulstrup	“Workroom in Sailors' Hospital or Home”
Abbey	“Winter Girl”
“	“Peter Stuyvesandt”
Reinhardt	“Fishermen”
Barnard	Six sheets
Ed. Frère	“Woodgatherers”

Buckmann “Renkeys on Hampstead Heath”
“ “Gathering Poppies”
Waller “Tip Girls” (Miners)

I did not get these Graphics without trouble. For instance, the Jew I bought them from forced me to do two portraits of his father and mother (i.e. two of each!)

But isn't it a lucky find!

But it's so funny that they're already my property and that I haven't even seen them. The fact is that they are stored in an auction room together with a big lot of books, but the Jew will get them out this week.

Among the books there is Gavarni's La Mascarade Humaine, which I have, but what about you? And the Jew has a lot of other things besides, some of them probably good.

Well, more soon; I hope your recovery is progressing steadily - in haste!

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 20 January 1883

Amice Rappard,

The Graphics are now in my possession. I have been looking them over until far into the night.

I don't know whether you are acquainted with the volumes for '70-'75 - perhaps you have them yourself among the lot you bought. But if not, I know you will be delighted with the first years, whenever you find an opportunity to look at them.

I hope with all my heart that you have them among your lot; if not, I shall write about them at greater length, in anticipation of your being able to see them yourself, as there are so many important things among them. And at any rate you must try your utmost to add them to your collection.

For instance, there is a series of drawings of the coal mines by Ridley - done in a way that makes one think of the etchings of Whistler or Seymour Haden. There are similar drawings by Boyd Houghton, mostly about America.

Until now I never knew Boyd H[oughton] was *so* interesting. There are also sketches of his from the time of the “Commune”: pétroleuses, a barricade, *etc.*

Herkomer is superb - I have now seen quite a number of large sheets for the first time: “Old Women's Almshouse,” “Old Men's Almshouse,” a “Cobbler,” a “Kegelbahn” [Skittle Alley], “Orphan Men,” “Lodginghouse,” *etc.*

There are also Pinwells and Fred. Walkers in those first volumes. Also Ch. Green, Buckmann, Brentall, Small, H. Woods, Macbeth, Gregory, all kinds of sketches of the slum districts, etc., Frank Hol's “The Foundling” - superb

By the same, “I am the Resurrection and the life” - superb.

By the same, “Railway Station.”

“ “ “ “Sightseeing.”

These are three sheets I have not seen for ten years.

Once again I must mention Boyd Houghton - a Shaker or Mormon church, incredibly full of character.

Also large du Mauriers, sunny, and clear in the shadows.

Enough. You will understand that there are treasures among them.

I am very eager to get further information about your find. If you have the London News of the period '70-'75, I should very much like to know the most important things in them. I shall certainly get duplicates in consequence of my new purchase.

I am at a loss what to do. These Graphic series are neatly bound and in very good condition. It is almost a pity to pull them apart. But on the other hand, being able to arrange the sheets in such a way that the work of each artist is assembled is also important.

Listen, old fellow - if you have these old volumes of the Graphic among your lot, you know all about them. But if you haven't, then you will get one of the strongest impressions when you come here to see them.

While I was looking them over, all my memories of London ten years ago came back to me - when I saw them for the first time; they moved me so deeply that I have been thinking about them ever since, for instance Hol's “The Foundling” and Herkomer's “Old Women”…

But I had a melancholy feeling at the same time when I saw H. Herkomer's words, which you passed on to me some time ago, so clearly confirmed - namely that the later issues of the Graphic, however beautiful occasionally, have fallen off very, very much in general.

But those first ones!

One of the volumes of `70 is missing, but otherwise the whole set `70 - `80 is complete, 21 volumes in all.

But I think I shall find the first volume too.

How are you getting on? Please write either a long or a short letter soon.

And if you should still be feeling weak, and would care to have some volumes of those first years with you, I could send them to you.

There is something stimulating and invigorating like old wine about those striking, powerful, virile drawings.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 21 January 1883

[The first and last part of this letter are missing; probably it was the answer to the remittance of January 20.]

You will say that I write pretty often. I can't help it, for as you have taken me into your confidence, I must tell you that it touched me very deeply. It is curious in such cases, that it is so very difficult to know how far one must go. You, too, will experience this. One asks oneself, “Must I help this woman and, for the rest, see her only as a friend, or must I choose this woman for my wife, with whom I want to live forever - is she or isn't she the one?”

I think you have not been without this struggle, and perhaps are still in the midst of it. It would seem rather unnatural to me if it were otherwise.

I, at least, had that struggle, and it was so difficult that for myself I *could* not answer those questions when circumstances forced me to make a decision.

For I thought, I do not have the means to maintain two separate households, but perhaps I have them for *one*, and so I must tell her how things are, what I might be able to do and what I certainly could not do. Perhaps we'll be able to struggle through together, but I haven't enough unless we live together. Perhaps the struggle is similar for you, but in a different form. I remember a saying of yours last year which I thought very correct and true, “Marriage is such a queer thing.” Yes, indeed, it certainly is. Then you said to me, “Do not marry her,” and I admitted then that circumstances were such that it was better not to talk about it for the time being. And you know that since then I have not mentioned it again, but she and I have remained true to each other. And just because I cannot think you were wrong in saying then, “Do not marry her,” I give you your own words to consider; and besides, you will think of it yourself, for it is not I who say so, but you yourself. And I remind you of it only because I think it was well it didn't take place at once. Don't let that idea go, for it is a good thing for love to ripen, so that marriage becomes subordinate to it. It is safer and it doesn't hurt anybody.

First of all, I want to tell you one thing which will be perfectly obvious to you. Whether it gets you in trouble or not, I respect the noble feeling which prompted you to help her, and because I respect it, I hope you will think me worthy of your confidence even though you may encounter greater or lesser difficulties.

However, I do not take a melancholy view of the matter, but am quite hopeful of a good result - that is, happiness for you and for her. But I repeat - it is probable that sooner or later a crisis will occur, arising from a kind of mutual disappointment - if there were a child, it would be a kind of lightning rod for you both. But in your case there isn't, so especially when the crisis comes - not *now*, but *later* - confide in me and consult me; for there are cliffs on which, alas, many a love is wrecked which might have been saved. When one has got past those rocks, a period of clear sailing follows.

Though I have written you often, I am very hard at work. I cannot tell you how I long to speak with you about many things. Tomorrow I get a sou'wester for the heads. Heads of fishermen, old and young, that's what I have been thinking of for a long time, and I have made one already, then afterward I couldn't get a sou'wester. Now I shall have one of my own, an old one over which many storms and seas have passed.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 25-29 January 1883

Dear Theo,

The more I think of it, the deeper the impression your last letter made on me.

Generally speaking (apart from the difference between the two persons in question), to you and me there appeared on the cold cruel pavement a sad pitiful woman's figure, and neither you nor I passed it by - we both stopped and followed the human impulse of our hearts.

Such an encounter has the quality of an apparition about it, at least when one recalls it; one sees a pale face, a sorrowful look like an Ecce Homo on a dark background - all the rest disappears. That is the sentiment of an Ecce Homo, and there is the same expression in reality, but in this case it is on a woman's face. Later it certainly becomes different - but one never forgets that first expression-

I think it probable that your meeting this woman will take your thoughts back to the period some ten or even twenty years ago, and even further back.

Anyway, what I mean is that you will rediscover in her, a phase of your own life you had nearly forgotten - that is to say, the past - and I do not know whether, after having been with her for a year, you will view the present with the same eyes as, for instance, before you knew her.

Underneath a figure of an English woman (by Paterson) is written the name Dolorosa; that expresses it well.

I was thinking of the two women now, and at the same time I thought of a drawing by Pinwell, “The Sisters,” in which I find that Dolorosa expression. - That drawing represents two women in black, in a dark room; one has just come home and is hanging her coat on the rack. The other is smelling a primrose on the table while picking up some white sewing.

That Pinwell reminds one a little of Feyen-Perrin - in his early work; it also reminds one of Thijs Maris, but with an even purer sentiment.

He was such a poet that he saw the sublime in the most ordinary, commonplace things. His work is rare - I saw very little of it, but that little was so beautiful that now, at least ten years later, I see it as clearly as I did the first time.

At the time they used to say of that club of draughtsmen, “It is too good to last.” Alas, Herkomer's words show that it was true; but it is not dead yet, and in literature as well as in art, it will be difficult to find a better conception of that time than theirs.

I often disliked many things in England, but that Black and White and Dickens are things which make up for it all. I speak from my own experience. It's not that I disapprove of everything in the present, far from it, but still it seems to me that something of the fine spirit of that time which ought to have been preserved is disappearing - in art especially. But also in life itself. Perhaps I express myself too vaguely, but I cannot say it differently - I don't know exactly what it is, but it is not just the Black and White which changed its course and deviated from its healthy, noble beginning. Rather, there is in general a kind of skepticism and indifference and coolness, notwithstanding all the activity. But all this is too vague, too indefinite. I do not think too much about it, because I think of my drawings and have no time to spare.

I am still busy making heads this week, especially women's heads and women with bags, among other things.

Did you ever see anything by Boyd Houghton - he is one of the Graphic's early contributors who, though little known, nevertheless has his own niche (he died young)? I thought of him once when you wrote about Daumier's “Barricade.” At the time be drew the Parisian pétroleuses and barricades too, but later he went to America, and I know drawings of his of Quakers, and a Mormon church and Indian women, etc., and immigrants.

In such a barricade scene, for instance, he had something ghostly, or rather mysterious, like Goya. He also treated the American subjects in that same way, quite Goya-like; but then all at once there are some with a wonderful soberness which reminds one of Méryon. His wood engravings might almost pass for etchings.

The world says, “*Too good to last*,” but for that very reason, because it is rare, the *good lasts*. It is not produced every day, it will never be achieved mechanically, but what is, is; it is not lost, but lasts. And if another good thing turns up later on, the first retains its value so I think one must not regret that such and such doesn't become more common; even though they are uncommon, the good and beautiful things that exist remain.

What about the etchings which Cadart started at that time? Did they also prove to be something “too good to last”?

I know quite well that many beautiful etchings are published nowadays. But I mean the old series, “société des aquafortistes” [etchers' club], in which appeared “Les Deux Freres” by Feyen-Perrin and the “Park à Moutons” by Daubigny and work by Bracquemond and so many others - did they keep their full power or did they slacken?

Then if they slackened, aren't the things they did important enough to endure forever, so that the expression “too good to last” loses its meaning? Daubigny, Millet, Feyen-Perrin, so many others, showed what the etching needle can do, just as the *Graphic*, etc., showed what black and white can do.

And this is a lasting truth, which can give energy to whomever wants it.

The truth is that whenever different people love the same thing and work at it together, their union makes strength; combined, they can do more than if their separate energies were each striving in a different direction. By working together one becomes stronger and a whole is formed, though the personality of each need not be blotted out by working together. And therefore I wish that Rappard were entirely better; we do not really work together, but we have the same thoughts about many things. He is recovering, though, and we are already fussing over our wood engravings again.

But it is my constant hope that we shall become even better friends than we are now, and that perhaps later we shall go and visit the miners together, for instance. But for the moment, I think we must both apply ourselves to a thorough study of the figure; the better we master that, the easier it will become to carry out such plans. He writes that he had a fever, that's all, that he is still very weak; but he writes little about his illness.

We've had snow again, which is thawing just now. That thaw weather is very beautiful. Today, while the snow is melting, one feels spring approaching, as it were, from afar.

I think when you come, sooner or later, we'll have a really good time together. I long for the spring breezes to blow away the weariness from working indoors so long.

I am very glad to have my sou'wester; I wonder if you will find some good in those fishermen's heads. The last one I made this week was of a fellow with white throat whiskers.

I know a drawing by Boyd Houghton which he calls “My Models”; it represents a passage where a few invalids, one with crutches, a blind man, a street urchin, etc., come to visit the painter on Christmas Day.

There is something very pleasant in the intercourse with the models, one learns much from them. This winter I have had some people whom I shall not easily forget. It is a charming saying of Edouard Frère's that he kept the same models so long that “celles qui posaient dans le temps pour les bébés, posent maintenant pour les mères” [those who used to pose for the babies, are now posing for the mothers].

Well, adieu, Theo, write soon, my best wishes, believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 25-30 January 1883

Amice Rappard,

Now it is some days since I started looking through the *Graphics*.

If I were to write you about all that is beautiful in them, and if my description were not to be too superficial, I should really have to write a tome. I cannot refrain, however, from mentioning just a few sheets that are absolutely "*hors ligne*."

Take, for instance, Frank Hol's "The Foundling." It represents some policemen in their waterproof capes who have picked up a baby exposed among the beams and planks of the Thames Embankment. Some inquisitive people are looking on, and in the background one sees the grey silhouette of the town through the mist. Then, also by him, there is a burial - some people entering a churchyard - beautiful of sentiment; he calls this sheet "I am the Resurrection and the life."

There is another burial by Nash, but this time on shipboard. One sees the corpse near the railing, the sailors are standing by, and the captain is reading the liturgy.

You know Hol's "Third Class Waiting Room" from a small reproduction of it that I sent you last summer, but the Graphic contains the large one - infinitely more beautiful.

I have been interested before now in the work of C. Green, but I had no idea that he could do such splendid things as, for instance, "A Bench in the Hospital," patients waiting for the doctor. By the same, "A Quay at Liverpool" and "Land once More," passengers coming ashore, and "Here They Come," spectators at the Derby races (Buckmann has done the same scene under the same title, and his work is also very good). I did not know Gordon Thompson; he also has a "Spectators at the Derby," and there is "Clapham Road" - quite close to the spot where I used to live, incidentally. This sheet is incredibly clever; it resembles Dürer or Matsys, for instance.

You know the work of Percy Macquoid - Heilbuth - Tissot - when you see it, it seems to be the non plus ultra of elegance and mild refined feeling. In a certain sense it really is the non plus ultra.

But compared with them, Pinwell and Fred. Walker are what the nightingale is to the lark. On a page of the Graphic called "The Sisters," for instance, Pinwell draws two women in black in a dark room, a composition of the utmost simplicity, into which he has brought a serious sentiment that I can compare only with the full warble of the nightingale on a spring night. And then there are two more sketches by him in Byley's Home*;* and, among other things by Fred. Walker, a splendid sheet, “The Old Gate,” and also “The Harbor of Refuge.”

Herkomer has in them, among other things (I am not speaking of the sheets I had already), “Divine Service” (pews in a church), “Treat to the Whitechapel Poor,” “Lodginghouse St. Giles,” “The Workhouse (*women*),” “Charcoal Burners,” “Wirtshaus” [Public House], “The Cardinals Walk Rome,” “Kegelbahn,” “Carnival Time,” “Anxious Times,” “The Arrest of a Poacher,” Then (without the large figures occurring in it) the very first sketch of “The Last Muster,” under the title, “Sunday at Chelsea.” In a later issue one can read about this sheet that, when Herkomer showed it for the first time, *not one* of the members of the Graphic board thought the drawing good, with only one exception - the manager, who published the sketch immediately and ordered a more elaborate drawing.

So you see, things may change in the world - for instance, later on the Graphic published a sheet representing the spectators looking at the ultimate painting of “The Last Muster.”

You know Ridley's “Miner's Head.” Now I also have his “Boat Race Spectators”; I already had a “Hospital” by him - both serious, elaborate drawings.

But something new by Ridley is a series of six or seven drawings, “Miners, Pits and Pitmen,” which remind one of etchings of Whistler or Seymour Haden, or Stamland's [Staniland's] “The Rush to the Pit's Mouth,” also from the mining district.

Now a sheet that struck me particularly - Abbey's “Christmas in Old Virginia,” engraved by Swain. This drawing is evidently done wholly with the pen, like Caldecott's and Barnard's, for example, but the figures are large.

Small has a superb drawing, “Claxton [Caxton] Showing Specimens of His Printing to the King.” It makes one think of Leys; there are many beautiful things by Small in the Graphics, of course, but this one and the “Ploughing Match” are the most beautiful drawings of his I know.

His “A Queue in Paris during the Siege” is excellent, and so are several of his “London Sketches” and “Irish Sketches.”

Then Green has “The Girl I Left behind Me,” also uncommonly good - a group of soldiers returning from the war, and the meeting of one of them with the girl who has remained faithful to him. “Irish Churchyard” is no less beautiful.

Boughton's “Waning of the Honeymoon.” Nash's “Laborers' Meeting” and “Lifeboat” and “Sunday Evening at Sea.”

Gregory's “Hospital in Paris during the Siege.” Buckmann's “Hampstead Heath.”

Fildes has a scene in a prison yard where policemen are holding a thief or a murderer whose picture they want to take. The fellow won't submit to it and is struggling. In the opposite corner of the composition, the photographer and the spectators.

There are many more beautiful compositions from America by Boyd Houghton, chiefly smaller ones, which might be etchings, but also larger sheets such as “Paris under the Red Flag,” “Mormon Tabernacle,” “Cabin of Emigrant Ship” - they're not like anything else. His details are emphasized surprisingly, and the aspect is something like an etching by - yes, by whom? - by Fortuny, or perhaps Whistler? Highly curious.

Edwin Edward's “The Foundling,” “Sea Bathing,” “The Meet,” *etc.* Two drawings - I don't know whose - of the Turko-Russian War, “Osman Pasha” and “An Old Battleground,” which are remarkable in their realism.

Stock's “Sermon Time” and “Last Sacrament.”

Hodgson's “Navvies” and “Fishing.”

Gow's “No Surrender.”

Small's “Swan-Upping Game of Polo,” “Boat Race,” “Queen's Ladies Royal Academy,” “Walking Match.”

Green's “An Artist,” “One Stone,” “Outsiders Betting.”

Well, in this matter it's easy to start summing up, but to stop is something else - that is difficult; there is so much more, in fact there is no end of them. For I am speaking almost exclusively of the larger sheets; but, to mention a single example, among the small drawings there are illustrations of Victor Hugo's Quatre-vingt-treize [Ninety-Three] by Herkomer, Green, Small - seldom has a book been illustrated like this one! - fortunately it is *this* book, for it is fully worth it.

But there is one volume missing from the collection, namely the first one. But I got very nice drawings from this volume at one time - among other things, Fildes's “Applicants at a Casual Ward” (from “Home and the Homeless”) and his “The Empty Chair” (Dickens's studio).

Write me again soon - for you are recovered now, aren't you?

Ever yours, Vincent

I got two more volumes (1876) for good measure this week, but I took them anyway, because there are marvelous things in them; indeed I have them, but I want as many duplicates as I can find - *e.g.* Herkomer's “Old Women” - there's a masterpiece for you! Have you got it???

A beautiful “Woman's Figure” and “During the Reign of Terror” by Percy Macquoid; also little sketches: “Cats” - “Chinese” - “Mackerel Fishing.”

Finally a large drawing: a corner of a studio - a lay figure that has fallen over, draperies worried by two playful dogs. There is preciosity in it, but it does not quite satisfy me; I think it somewhat high falutin' and over-refined. There is another magnificent illustration by Fildes (for a novel): two men in a churchyard in the twilight.

You will understand why I am of two minds about the following question. If I cut out the sheets and mount them, they will show up better and I can arrange them according to the artists who did them. But then I mutilate the text, which is useful in many respects if one wants to look something up, for instance about exhibitions, although the “general surveys” of them are very superficial.

And besides, one damages the novels, as e.g. Quatre-vingt-treize by Hugo.

I'd also have to spend a lot on mounting board. But it is certain that the large sheets especially would show up infinitely better mounted than folded in half. And also one gets a better survey of the whole if one arranges them according to the artists.

But isn't it queer that in an artistic town like The Hague a man like me should be the *highest* bidder at a book auction? One would think that other buyers would turn up - but no! I really did not expect to get them.

Before the auction the Jew spoke to me about them; I told him that I should very much like to have them, but that I could not afford to buy something like that. He told me afterward that he had bought them on speculation, because there were hardly any bidders, and if I wanted to have them they were mine. That was quite a different matter, and my brother helped me buy them - dirt cheap - a guilder a volume.

However glad I am to have them, it makes me sad to think that so few take an interest in them. I think it's wonderful to find such a treasure, but I would rather see so lively an interest in them that I should not be able to get hold of them for the time being.

Oh, Rappard - in many respect it's like this - much that has great value nowadays is ignored and looked down upon as worthless rubbish, garbage, wastepaper.

Don't you think there is something very dull about our times? Or am I imagining it? A certain absence of passion and warmth and cordiality - it's true that the “dealers” and such fellows say, “The desired change will come about in the nature of things” (isn't this statement highly satisfactory?), but personally I don't see that “nature of things” so very clearly.

It isn't unpleasant, after all, to study the Graphics; yet I can't help thinking very selfishly while doing so, “What business is it of mine? I don't intend to be bored, even if the times are dull.” But one isn't always selfish, and as soon as one isn't, one may grieve bitterly over it.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3 February 1883

Dear Theo,
I am again anxious for your letter; as it is already February 3 (and the postman for today has passed), I write you as a precaution. If you have written a few days later than usual, it's all right, but remembering what happened with that letter this winter, I'm telling you in case you wrote before the first.

Then you would perhaps do well to inquire.

I have noticed that the postman sometimes gives letters for the Schenkweg to people who live there, instead of delivering them himself. It is sometimes a big detour for the postman; I know it because now and then the man has asked me to deliver a few things for him - which I did, of course, but I couldn't help thinking of the letter that got lost. Well!

The weather has been very stormy here these days, especially last night. It will be very rough at sea.

How is your patient? From what you write, I see things that touch me deeply, that are really noble (for instance, that *she* paid the debts of the man who deceived her).

That not being “at home” of the Deputy reminded me of the name Punch gives to the secretary for home affairs (the “Home Secretary” is his title). Punch always calls this personage the “*seldom-at-home*” secretary. How many of those “seldom-at-home” people there are. And Dickens called the lot of them the “circumlocution office.”

Many people are standing sighing before the door of those “how-not-to-do-it” institutions, and the sighs there are no less deep, perhaps, than they were on the old Bridge of Sighs.

I have been feeling very weak lately. I am afraid I have been overworking myself, and how miserable the “dregs” of the work are, that depression after overexertion. Life is then the colour of dishwater; it becomes something like an ash heap.

On such a day one would like to have the company of a friend. That sometimes clears up the leaden mist.

On such days I am sometimes terribly worried about the future and am melancholy about my work, and feel quite helpless.

But it is dangerous to speak or think too much about it, so enough of it.

In spite of this, I have been working on a watercolour, another sketch of diggers, or rather, road menders, here on the Schenkweg; but it's rotten. I also drew a few figures with crayon which I think are better.

Not just with crayon, but the whole thing sponged, and the shadows softened, the lights intensified.

Maybe I have caught cold - at all events I must get rid of that depression before I can do anything properly.

I am reading Ut mine Festungstid [From the Time of my Detention in a Fortress] by Fritz Reuter; it is very witty. The Germans have their special humour, quite different from that of the English. Herkomer has painted among other things a peasant's carnival, something like Peasant Brueghel, which has this humour very strongly.

Speaking of Herkomer, some time ago I read a kind of biography of him, though rather incomplete. But the following struck me.

For some time he lived and painted in an empty house, or one that wasn't finished perhaps, because he couldn't pay any rent.

Then he came to the Graphic and was relatively free of care. But even when employed there, he was still but little respected. So little that his first sketch of the “Last Muster at Chelsea Hospital” - a drawing which differs relatively little from the final composition, but has a certain rough aspect - was almost rejected.

Nobody in the Graphic administration approved of it except the manager (it would greatly astonish me if this manager were still on the job).

Through his efforts the sketch was published, and he asked Herkomer if he could do it for him again, more elaborately.

So this is the origin of a picture which has since gained the wonder and admiration of the best, in Paris as well as in London.

Now almost everybody would admire the first sketch, too.

The biography also tells that he is *not* a man who works easily; on the contrary, ever since the beginning he has had to struggle with a kind of awkwardness, and no picture is finished without severe mental effort.

I can hardly understand why, even now, many call him rough. I can hardly think of any work more profoundly sensitive than his.

When you come, I will show you the wood engravings of the almshouse for women; it is not so well known, but no less beautiful than that of the old men's. Something like the “Sewing Class at Katwijk” by Israëls.

Well, write soon, if you haven't done so already.

I am anxious to know how your patient is. My best wishes for her and for everything. Also, my congratulations on Father's birthday. I sent Father a drawing which I had done in line with his criticism of the first lithography of the old man. Not because I thought Father was exactly right, but I thought, Now I know how you would like to have it, I will try and make it that way for you. But I'm afraid I didn't succeed. Even though one tries hard, one doesn't always succeed in pleasing other people. Father didn't exactly write that he didn't like it, but it was between the lines. It may be that it wasn't good after all. Well, they will show it to you whenever you go there, but don't mention it to them. Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 4 February 1883

Amice Rappard,
Thanks very much for your letter and the list of the wood engravings you found. I am very eager to see some of them, especially those by *De Groux* and *Lançon.* The news that your health is improving so rapidly delights me. You'll remember that before your illness we carried on a rather brisk correspondence about lithographs, and then we had to stop this correspondence.

Since then I have been working rather hard - not directly on stone, but with lithographic crayon; it is an excellent material.

If my letters bother you somewhat, don't think ill of me; and as for you, do write often, for you will have to make up for lost time - although as far as that goes your illness, and not yourself, is at fault.

I assure you that the Graphics I have now are amazingly interesting. More than ten years ago, when I was in London, I used to go every week to the show windows of the printing offices of the Graphic and the London News to see the new issues. The impressions I got on the spot were so strong that, notwithstanding all that has happened to me since, the drawings are clear in my mind. Sometimes it seems to me that there is no stretch of time between those days and now - at least my enthusiasm for those things is rather stronger than it was even then. I haven't the slightest doubt that you won't regret coming to look at them.

I know that you don't look upon Black and White the way most Dutchmen do; and, although I don't know exactly whether you intend to express yourself in this medium, still I believe that you have no prejudice against it. One need not exclude the other, and in many cases Black and White is a method that makes it possible to put on paper, relatively swiftly, effects that would otherwise lose something of what is called “spontaneity.”

I doubt whether, if the “London Sketches” - for instance, Herkomer's “Low Lodginghouse St. Giles” or Fildes's “Casual Ward” - were to be painted, they would be quite as full of feeling and character as they are now in that unpolished Black and White.

There is something virile in it - something rugged - which attracts me strongly. And there is another thing - perhaps the master of Black and White is someone who neither you nor I knows. In the “General Report” of the exhibitions I see mention of the work of L'Hermite - a Frenchman who is doing scenes of the fisherman's life in Brittany. They say of him that he is “the Millet and Jules Breton of Black and White,” and his name keeps reappearing over and over again. I should like to see something of his work; the other day I wrote about it to my brother, who has provided me with sound information more than once (e.g. about Dau-mier' s paintings).

As for my lithographs - the one of the fellow sitting on a basket cutting his bread is a failure [F 1663, JH 272]. When I transferred it to the stone the upper half got all blurred - I have been able to remedy the worst part with the scraper. Yet you will see that there are things in it which prove one can work vigorously with this process and express the nature of materials, as for instance the basket, the trousers and the muddy boots. And though at first I thought it a sorry abortion, I have become somewhat reconciled to it since then, and if I were to start over again, I should do it in the same vigorous way - with a background.

I remember reading in Herkomer's biography how in his early days (when that incident with the rough sketch of “Sunday at Chelsea Hospital” occurred) he did his utmost to find among the artists of that time men who would be willing to do types from the people too. Then he found Gregory, who started out by doing sketches of the Franco-German War (“Paris under the Red Flag” - I did not know at first that this sheet had been done by him - and also “Ambulance in the Pit of a Theater”), and later on specialized more in shipboard scenes - Gregory and Herkomer have remained friends since then.

Now that you write me about your improving health, I am reminded of when I was recuperating last summer. There is something dating from that time that I want to tell you; perhaps I wrote you about it at the time, but I am not sure. Do you remember the woman we met when you visited me during the summer, whom I said was a model I had found, adding that I had discovered that she was pregnant, for which reason I was trying all the harder to help her.

It was shortly afterward that I fell ill myself. At that point she was in the hospital at Leyden, and I got a letter from her in the clinic where I was, telling me she was in great trouble. Before that time - during the winter, when she was in a very bad way indeed - I had done what I could, and now I had a fierce inner struggle trying to decide what to do. Could I - *should* I help? - I was ill myself, and the future looked so dark. For all that, I got up against the doctor's wishes and went to see her. I visited her in the hospital at Leyden on July 1. The night before, she had given birth to a little boy, who was lying asleep in his little cradle by her bedside, his little turned-up nose just outside the covers - unconscious, of course, of what was going on in the world. At least a poor struggler of a sick painter like myself knows a few things that a tiny baby like that doesn't know.

And what should I do? - I had some hard thinking to do at that moment. The mother, poor creature, had had a very difficult confinement. Aren't there moments in life when it is criminal to remain impassive and say, What business is it of mine?

At any rate I told the woman, “When you have recovered, come to me; whatever I can do for you I shall do.” Well, my dear friend, that woman had another child, a sickly, neglected chit of a girl. It was an undertaking which exceeded my means rather more seriously than buying an issue of the Graphic, for instance - but what was I to do? After all, a man has a heart in his body, and if we did not take a chance now and then we should not deserve to be alive. So she came to me - I moved into a house that was not yet quite finished at the time, and that I could get at a relatively low rent; I am still living there, two doors down from my old studio; the number is 138. So here we are, the only difference being that the baby from the hospital cradle no longer sleeps as much as he did those first days.

He is now about seven or eight months old and has become a charming little fellow, very much alive and kicking. When they moved in, I carried his cradle home from the secondhand shop on my shoulders, and all through the dark winter this little child has been like a light in the house. And though the woman does not have a strong constitution, and though notwithstanding this she has to work hard to keep the house clean, yet she has become stronger. So you see, while I'm trying to penetrate more deeply into art, I'm doing the same with respect to life itself - and the two things go together.

It does not surprise me very much that I had my share of botheration with former friends who did not want to see me any longer. But fortunately this was not the case with my best friend - I mean my brother - for he and I are far more friends than brothers, and he is a man who can understand such things - more than that, who has helped and is still helping many unfortunates. I have lost some friends through it, all the same, but on the other hand I have more light and shade in my own house, although at times, when my worries become too great, I feel as if I were on a ship during a hurricane. But you see, although I well know that the sea has its dangers, and that one can drown in it, still I love the sea; and, notwithstanding all the perils that the future may hold, I have a certain serenity.

Now I am anxious to talk with you again, and I should be delighted if you could see your way to coming to look at the Graphics before long. But I am writing you in advance to tell you of the changes in my household because I do not know exactly what your opinion of such contingencies of life is.

If we were living in the days of the “Bohème,” a painter's family and a studio like mine would be nothing unusual. But nowadays we are very far removed from the original “Bohème,” and among painters one finds considerations of respectability which I personally do not precisely understand, although I do not want to offend those who cling to them.

I repeat, if we were living in the days of the “Bohème,” I should let things slide, but now, my friend Rappard, I will tell you frankly, I am living with a poor woman and two children, and there are many who, for that or some other reason, do not wish to associate with me, which makes it my duty to write you in this way. Won't you come and look at the Graphics one of these days?

To this I must add that, when my father first heard of all these happenings, he was far from pleased - as you may well understand - or rather, not having expected such a thing of me, he did not know what to make of it. But after a while we saw each other again, which had not happened since I came here, as I left home after a lot of trouble. And he changed his original opinion when he knew more about it. The disagreement I had with him when I left home did not last long - we had made it up before I began living with this woman. And then, even though I was living with this woman, my father came to see me once.

But how many misunderstandings there are in life, and how much more smoothly everything would go if people co-operated a bit more instead of quarreling.

Oh, my dear fellow, how I wish that there was something more left of the old “Bohème” in society and particularly among painters.

Don't think that they won't come to see me just because of that woman. It is certainly *one* of the reasons, but it is mostly because of the painting itself, although last summer I *did* paint a number of studies. In short, I am sorely disappointed in my association with painters. Will it improve???

Not long ago a painter here - Boks, a landscapist - was sent to the lunatic asylum. It was very difficult to get help for him before he was sent there, although during his illness he really did get some help, especially through Mauve's intervention. Now that he has been locked up, everybody is speaking of him with great sympathy and calling him very clever.

For instance, a certain person, who repeatedly refused to help him and declined to buy his studies, said the other day that they were “more beautiful than Diaz,” which I think rather exaggerated. The poor fellow himself told me a year ago that he got a medal at one time in England - which he later sold as old silver....

Another painter, Breitner, with whom I occasionally went sketching in the streets at first, and who was also in the hospital about the time I was, has been appointed drawing master at a secondary school, although I know he doesn't care for the job.

Is it a good time for painters??? When I first came to this city I went to all the studios I could visit in order to find intercourse and make friends. Now I have cooled off very much in this respect, being of the opinion that there is a serious drawback to it, in that the painters pretend to be friendly, but are too often inclined to trip you up. That is the fatal thing; we ought to help and trust each other, for there are enough enmities in society, and we should be better off in general if we did not injure each other's interests. It is jealousy that impels many to speak ill systematically of others - and what is the result? Instead of forming a great whole, a corps of painters whose strength is unity, everyone keeps to himself and works all alone, and those who are at the top at present create, by their very jealousy, a kind of desert around themselves, which I think is a very unfortunate thing - for themselves.

Sharp competition in painting and drawing is in a certain sense good, or at any rate justified, but the artists should not become personal enemies and fight each other with other weapons.

Well, anyway, if all this is no obstacle to you, please think over whether you want to come and see those Graphics, for they are splendid. I want to discuss with you what to do with the duplicates, because there are many of them; these are among the *most beautiful* ones - “The Last Muster,” an old women's almshouse, by Herkomer, “Low Lodginghouse St. Giles” by the same, “Emigrants” and “Boarding School” by Frank Hol, “Caxton Printing” and the “Small Old Gate” by Fred. Walker. Well, there are quite a lot, and such important ones that they would form the core of any collection of wood engravings. I know well enough from our previous correspondence that you won't have them for nothing, although if you appreciate them and would really like to have them, I for my part would gladly give them to you unconditionally.

But I feel sure that we shall be able to arrange things so that you'll feel no pangs of conscience about accepting them, and as it is certain that we shall come to some agreement, I think the best thing would be to get together soon, if your health keeps on improving.

And I think it all the more desirable to have you come here, because I have just got together a large number of drawings I did this winter, and I should like to talk them over with you. I would have written you sooner about all the things I am telling you now, but they seemed so strange even to myself, and some unpleasant experiences with others had made me angry besides. And I am writing you now, not because I consider you narrow-minded with regard to the facts of life, nor because I believe you will think what I have done incomprehensible, but because I should think it unstraightforward if I asked you to come and look at my wood engravings again without telling you that there have been rather great changes in my household, and that because of these changes many are avoiding me, and would most certainly not set foot in my house.

The studio is much more spacious than the last one, but I am continually afraid that the landlord will raise the rent or find tenants who can pay more than I. Well, as long as I can keep it, it is a very good studio.

If you consider that I now have duplicates of nearly everything in the Graphic, you'll realize that's quite a lot. And I hope to be able to get sets of the very first years too.

Oh, I have had my illusions of other women as well as my disappointments, but I never thought it would turn out like this. But as for this woman, I thought it so touching that she, a mother, was so alone and forlorn, that I did not hesitate and I think I did nothing wrong then, nor do I think I am doing so now. For when a mother has been deserted, and is in dire distress, one should not avert one's eyes and go on - at least that's what I think. This one is a figure like some that Hol or Fildes have drawn.

If you should come before long, don't let your visit be a short one. The Graphics are so beautiful that I believe looking them over may stimulate and invigorate you even though you are still weak - unless the trip itself should be too fatiguing for you (I live quite close to the Rhine Railway Station, for that matter).

So do as you think best. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5 February 1883

Dear Theo,
Many thanks for your letter and for the money.
When I read and reread your letters about your patient, I am reminded of many things. And I should like to write and ask you much more about it, but as I know the person only from your letters, it is all too vague and undefined, and more than once I have torn up a letter because of this, but believe me, I think of it all the time, and I can very well understand, and perfectly agree with you, that except for the melancholy idea of her suffering, such an encounter is a thing for which you feel grateful, and consider it uncommon good fortune. That *je ne sais quoi* coming from the heath, or whatever it is that reminds you of her native country, that old coast of Brittany, is something which I think will become stronger rather than weaker the longer you are with her. Your expression, “Later on will she be like the dog with the shepherd or something better?” is rather characteristic. Don't you think it probable that one time will differ greatly from another? There are so many different phases or metamorphoses in any one love, *just because of the faithfulness to that one love* - so that it changes all the time.

That operation will be a hard time - if I were you I shouldn't say too much to her about finding a situation later, as the future is so undecided because of her foot - better leave it undecided. For I should be afraid that, for instance, in a crisis of pain she might quite wrongly get the notion fixed in her head, “I must do this or that,” which often happens to sick women. It might make her obstinate, contrary to the feelings of her own heart, which would pain you because you would only have mentioned the idea of a situation out of delicacy, to make her feel that her future was *free and independent*; and she might assume that you felt more indifferent about her than is really the case. Perhaps I express myself too vaguely, but women do not always understand delicacy, any more than they do humour; and though one must certainly act with delicacy, it often gives rise to misunderstandings (though, in my opinion, one isn't responsible for them) which, in short, make life more difficult.

I do not know whether Heyerdahl, for instance, would find anything picturesque in the daily activities of the woman whom I live with. But Daumier certainly would.

I thought of Heyerdahl's saying, “Je n'aime pas qu'une figure soit trop corrumpue” [I don't like a figure to be too misshapen], when I was drawing - not the woman, but an old man with a bandaged eye - and I found it *not* true. There are some ruins of physiognomies which are full of expression, as, for instance, “Malle [Mad] Babbe” by Frans Hals or some heads by Rembrandt.

As to Heyerdahl, I do not doubt that his *intentions* were all right when he made this statement, otherwise I don't think it would hold water.

In the last letter I wrote you I asked casually about Lhermitte's work. In the articles about the Black and White he is nearly always singled out as “the Millet and Jules Breton of Black and White.” There was, for instance, a description of a drawing of old women on the cliffs, and about his technique they said there was none more daring, bold, or strong than he, even astonishingly so, and other drawings couldn't be compared to his, and that his touch was broader than the broadest. They also compared him with Legros, but only with the most extraordinary, most exceptional drawings or etchings by Legros, which are also very strong and broad, for instance, “The Pew.”

Boy, I still feel poorly, and I've had a rather plain warning that I must be careful - my eyes felt so tired sometimes, but I wouldn't pay any attention to it. Now, last night, especially, there was a rather strong secretion of the tear glands, and the lashes stuck together, and my eyes are giving me trouble and my sight is poor.

Ever since the middle of December I have been drudging incessantly, especially on those heads. This last week I have been out-of-doors a good deal to refresh myself. I have taken baths, washed my head often with cold water, etc., *etc.* But one feels so miserable at such a time; I have a large pile of studies, but they don't interest me then, and I find them all bad.

Rappard wrote me again this week; he said he was recovering, but slowly, still feels weak but is beginning to walk a little bit now and then. But he wrote very clearly and plainly about many things concerning the work.

There is a spring feeling in the air already, and it will not be long before the lark sings over the meadows again.

Do you think you will be able to get here this spring???

I am rather afraid not. I am eager to talk this winter's studies over with you, and also with Rappard; he will come here sometime, when he is quite recovered.

I will take a few weeks' rest, and be out-of-doors as much as possible to refresh my thoughts. I want to use my studies for watercolours, for instance, but at present it's no use.

Right now my eyes and my face look as if I had been on a spree, which, of course, has not been the case - on the contrary - but who knows, maybe someone I meet on the street who hasn't seen me for a while will remark that I am obviously on the road to dissipation. Those things are sometimes so absurd that I can't help laughing.

In the evening at sunset there are effects of dark clouds with silver linings that are splendid, for instance, when one is walking in Bezuidenhout or along the edge of the wood. You will remember that from long ago. It is also beautiful outside my studio window, or in the meadows; one feels the spring from afar, and now and then there is something balmy in the air.

Adieu, boy, thanks again for your letter, and best wishes for your patient. I hope that I shall soon find again a drawing or a study that interests me - it is so unpleasant when one must take a rest. One *cannot* rest for the very reason that one *must*. Adieu. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 7 February 1883

Amice Rappard,

Thanks for your letter, which I received this morning. I'm glad to see that you took all that I told you in such a good-natured way. Later when I find an opportunity to tell you more particulars to explain the circumstances more clearly, I hope you will not have to change your opinion that I have acted honestly and in good faith. I have to do with a woman who had one foot in the grave when I met her, and whose mind and nervous system were also upset and unbalanced - whose only chance of staying alive was what that professor at Leyden had prescribed: a regular home life. And even then it will take years before she is *entirely* normal again.

As to her past life, I believe that you condemn “fallen women” no more than I do. Frank Hol once expressed it this way - in a drawing which as far as I know has not yet been reproduced - he called the drawing “Her Poverty but Not Her Will Consents.” Amice, at this very moment I can think of no fewer than four women in this town (mine included) who have either fallen, or have been deceived and deserted, and have illegitimate children, and their fate is so melancholy that it is difficult to think of, especially as three of them have hardly a chance of getting out of their misery - that is, in theory they do, but not in practice, as I see it. And I feel obliged to add that I do not consider my relation with the woman in question as something of a passing nature.

My words about a past disappointment are based on something I won't speak about - at least not now. And yet I think it right to tell you this much. Suppose a man experiences a disappointment through a cruel injury to his love, a disappointment so deep that he is *calmly* desperate and desolate - such a condition is possible, for there is something like the *white* heat of steel or iron. Feeling that he has been disappointed irrevocably and absolutely, and carrying within himself the consciousness of it as a deadly, at least an incurable, wound, and yet going about his ordinary affairs with an unruffled countenance... would it be inexplicable to you that a man in this condition should feel a singular sympathy, involuntary and unintentional, for somebody he meets who is deeply unhappy, oh, perhaps unhappy beyond redress? And that, notwithstanding this, that sympathy or love or tie should be and remain strong? When *Love* is dead, is it impossible for *Charity* to be alive and awake still?

And now allow me to start talking about the wood engravings. Thc daily work is something that does not change, and it is less dangerous to be absorbed in it than to stare into the unfathomable.

I have found another beautiful Jacque, “Woodcutters” - unfortunately covered with colours from a child's paintbox - but I have washed most of it off. It is a very lovely sheet.

Two Daumiers: “Those who have seen a drama meeting those who have seen a vaudeville” - “Lovers of Pictures.”

Two females (one with a child), sitting and chatting, by Oberländer, and by the same, two old men who seem to be discussing abstruse official business. Both of them uncommonly typical.

Fine Edmond Morins, especially the “Chestnut Trees in the Champs Elysées,” a “Race” and a “Wine Harvest.” John Lewis Brown's “Hunters in the Wood.” “The Fall of the Leaf” by G. Doré - a very old Doré, roughly done but excellent in sentiment. “Gypsies” by Valerio; Renouard's “Beggars on New Year's Day.”

These are some of the new sheets I have.

I am glad you have taken Harper's Christmas Papers; perhaps this publication is also *too good to last*. How beautiful Abbey's “Winter Girl” and “Dutch Patrol” are.

Judging from these, you can imagine how excellent his big sheet “Christmas in Old Virginia” is. Swain has engraved it in such a way that it has remained exactly like the pen-and-ink drawing - “*it does not look cut at all”* - as little as Caldecott's “Brighton Promenade,” which I think you have.

I know Harper's magazine from some old issues in my possession; I am considering subscribing for this year, but perhaps there will be a chance of getting it secondhand by the end of the year.

Do you know that I am carrying on a correspondence just at present about the way such sheets - those in the Christmas Papers, for instance - are done? I have samples of the paper and also some information about the varying forces of Black and White and the way they can be produced. The paper is very curious; sometimes the grain has a sort of ground colour, which is already like a grey haze - it is especially suitable, for snow effects, for instance. There is also paper with hatchings.

I am still keeping a beautiful sheet by Dagnan for you, “Jardin des Tuileries,” and one by Montbard, “Arab Beggars,” and certainly some smaller ones besides the duplicates from the *Graphic.*

Before your illness you wrote me that you had a duplicate of Heilbuth's “Two Ladies in a Boat.” This is the one that is missing from my collection, although I have other large Heilbuths, so I wish to remind you of it.

I don't remember whether I wrote you about the Caldecott illustrations for Washington Irving's Sketch Book - “Old Christmas” and “Bracebridge Hall.”

Two sixpenny books, published by Macmillan & Co., London - in each of them a hundred little drawings by Caldecott, but sometimes they are so beautiful that they remind you of Menzel.

I should like to know sometime what the theme of De Groux's “Winter in Brussels” is.

Have I written you about Lhermitte? He seems to be the Master of Black and White drawing; they say of him, “He is the Millet and Jules Breton of Black and White.” In a “general survey” there is mention, among other things, of women saying their prayers on the Brittany cliffs, a “Banc des Pauvres,” and an “Old Market.”

Although in consequence of having taken the woman and her two children into my house I have had some unpleasant experiences - some of them very nasty indeed - still the encounter has given me a certain calm and serenity. And I worked hard this winter. I had some very striking models.

At the moment I am not working so very hard, for after working - especially on heads - for some months practically without rest or interruption, I have been feeling a kind of weakness or exhaustion which I find I can't overcome. The same thing happened to my eyes, so that even simply looking at things bothered me. But I have walked a good deal in the country these last days, and my eyes are normal again.

I think I have at least 150 drawings that you have not seen yet.

The changes in my household, instead of causing me to work less, have caused me to work more; I worked even with a sort of fury, but a quiet fury, if you will allow me to use the expression. I also started reading again, which I had neglected for some time.

I think you will be delighted with the baby - those who abandon a woman when she is pregnant know not what they do - such a baby can be said to bring a rayon d'en haut - a ray from heaven - into the house. As for the woman herself, do you remember what Gavarni said? - “Il y a une creature, insupportable, bête, méchante, c'est la jeune fille; il y a une creature sublime et dévouée c'est cette fille devenue mère.” [A young girl is an unbearable, stupid, vicious creature: a sublime and devoted creature is that same girl as a mother.] I don't think these words are meant to stigmatize all young women or girls absolutely - of course not - but they are meant to show that something vain in a woman before she has become a mother is replaced by something sublime later on, when she is working hard for her children.

I saw a little figure by Paterson in the Graphic, an illustration for Hugo's

Quatre-vingt-treize called “Dolorosa.” It struck me because it resembles the woman at the time I found her. In the same book there is a scene of a proud, hard-hearted man who is suddenly softened by seeing two children in danger - he forgets his own danger and saves the children, even though he is selfish by nature. One never finds an exact likeness of oneself in a book - but one occasionally finds things taken from nature in general which are in one's own heart in a vague and indeterminate way.

I find much that is true in Dickens's The Haunted Man. Do you know it? Neither in Quatre-vingt-treize nor in The Haunted Man do I find my own self - everything is different, occasionally even quite the opposite - but much that has gone on in my mind is reawakened when I read such books.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 8 February 1883

Dear Theo,

My hearty congratulations for Father's birthday, and thanks for your letter, which I was very glad to receive just now. I congratulate you especially on the operation being over. Such things as you describe make one shudder! May the worst be over now, at least the crisis is past! Poor woman! If women do not always show in their thoughts the energy and elasticity of men, who are disposed towards reflection and analysis, we cannot blame them, at least in my opinion, because in general they have to spend so much more strength than we in suffering pain. They suffer more and are more sensitive.

And though they do not always understand our thoughts, they are sometimes truly capable of understanding when one is good to them. Not always, though, but “the spirit is willing,” and there is in women sometimes a curious kind of goodness.

There must be a great load off your mind now that the operation is over.

What a mystery life is, and love is a mystery within a mystery. It certainly never remains the same in a literal sense, but the changes are like the ebb and flow of the tide and leave the sea unchanged.

Since I wrote to you last, I have given my eyes some rest and it has done me good, though they still ache now and then.

Do you know what has come into my mind, that in the first period of a painter's life one unconsciously makes it very hard for oneself - a feeling of not being able to master the work - by an uncertainty as to whether one will ever master it - by a great ambition to make progress, by a lack of self-confidence - one cannot banish a certain feeling of agitation, and one hurries oneself though one doesn't like to be hurried.

This cannot be helped, and it is a time which one must go through, and which in my opinion cannot and should not be otherwise.

In the studies, too, one is conscious of a nervousness and a certain dryness which is the exact opposite of the calm, broad touch one strives for, and yet it doesn't work well if one applies oneself too much to acquiring that broadness of touch.

This gives one a feeling of nervous unrest and agitation, and one feels an oppression as on summer days before a thunderstorm. I had that feeling again just now, and when I have it, I change my work, just to make a new start.

That trouble one has at the beginning sometimes gives an awkwardness to the studies.

But I do not take this as a discouragement, because I have noticed it in myself as well as in others, who afterwards just slowly got rid of it.

And I believe that *sometimes* one keeps that *painful* way of working one's whole life, but not always with so little result as in the beginning. What you write about Lhermitte is quite in keeping with the review of the exhibition of Black and White. They, too, speak about the bold touch which can almost be compared only to Rembrandt's. I should like to know such an artist's conception of Judas; you write of his having drawn Judas before the scribes, and I think that Victor Hugo could describe that in detail, *so that one would see it*, but to paint those expressions would be more difficult still.

I found a page by Daumier: “ceux qui ont vu un drame” [those who have seen a Drama] and “ceux qui ont vu une vaudeville.” [those who have seen a vaudeville show] I have developed a growing longing to see more of Daumier's work. There is pith and a sober depth in him, he is witty and yet full of sentimental passion; sometimes, for instance in “The Drunkards,” and possibly also in “The Barricade,” which I do not know, I find a passion which can be compared to the white heat of iron.

The same thing occurs in certain heads by Frans Hals, for instance, it is so sober that it seems cold; but when you look at it for a short while you are astonished to see how someone working apparently with so much emotion and so completely wrapped up in nature had at the same time the presence of mind to put it down with such a firm hand. I found the same thing in studies and drawings by de Groux; perhaps Lhermitte operates also at that white heat. And Menzel too.

There are sometimes passages in Balzac or Zola, for instance in Père Goriot, where words reach a degree of passion that is white-hot.

I sometimes think I will make an experiment, and try to work in quite a different way, that is, to dare more and to risk more, but I am not sure that I should not first do more by way of studying the figure directly from the model.

I am also looking for a way to shut off the light in the studio, or to let it in as I please. It doesn't fall enough from above, I think, and there is too much of it. For the time being I shut it off with cardboard now and then, but I must try and get the landlord to produce some shutters.

What was in the letter I told you I had torn up was quite in keeping with what you say.

But while finding more and more that one is not perfect oneself, and makes mistakes, and that other people do likewise, so that difficulties continually arise which are the opposite of illusions, I think that those who do not lose courage and who do not become indifferent, ripen through it, and one must bear hardships in order to ripen.

Sometimes I cannot believe that I am only thirty years old, I feel so much older.

I feel older *only* when I think that most people who know me consider me a failure, and how it really might be so, if some things do not change for the better; and when I think it *might be so*, I feel it so vividly that it quite depresses me and makes me as downhearted as if it were really so. In a calmer and more normal mood I am sometimes glad that thirty years have passed, and not without teaching me something for the future, and I feel strength and energy for the next thirty years, if I should live that long.

And in my imagination I see years of serious work before me, and happier ones than the first thirty.

How it will be in reality doesn't depend *only* on myself, the world and circumstances must also contribute to it.

What concerns me and is a source of responsibility is that I should make the most of the circumstances and try my best to make progress.

The age of thirty is, for the working man, just the beginning of a period of some stability, and as such one feels young and full of energy.

But, at the same time, a phase of life is past. This makes one melancholy, thinking some things will never come back. And it is no silly sentimentalism to feel a certain regret. Well, many things really begin at the age of thirty, and certainly all is not over then. But one doesn't expect out of life what one has already learned that it cannot give, but rather one begins to see more and more clearly that life is only a kind of sowing time, and the harvest is not here.

Perhaps that's the reason that one sometimes feels indifferent toward the opinion of the world, and if that opinion depresses us all too strongly, one may throw it off.

Perhaps I had better tear up this letter as well.

I understand perfectly that you are quite absorbed by the condition of the woman; that is one of the things which are necessary for her rescue, and also for her recovery.

For one must throw oneself headlong into it, and the English saying is true: “If you want it well done, you must do it yourself, you mustn't leave it to others.” That means that one must keep in hand the care in general and the management of the whole.

We had a few real spring days, for instance last Monday, which I enjoyed very much.

The cycle of the seasons is a thing which is strongly felt by the people. For instance, in a neighbourhood like the Geest and in those courts of almshouses or “homes of charity,” the winter is always a difficult, anxious and oppressive time, and spring is a deliverance. If one pays attention, one sees that such a first spring day is a kind of Gospel message.

And it is pathetic to see so many grey, withered faces come out of doors on such a day, not to do something special, but as if to convince themselves that spring is there. So, for instance, all kinds of people, of whom one would not expect it, throng the market around the spot where a man sells crocuses, snowdrops, bluebells and other bulbs. Sometimes a dried-up government clerk, apparently a kind of Jusserand in a threadbare black coat with greasy collar - that *he* should be beside the snowdrops is a pretty picture! I think the poor people and the painters have in common that feeling for the weather and the cycle of the seasons. Of course everybody feels it, but for the well-to-do middle-class it is not so important, and it doesn't affect much their frame of mind in general. I thought it a characteristic saying for a navvy: “In winter I suffer as much from the cold as the winter corn does.”

Now for your patient too spring will be welcome, may it do her good! How terrible that operation was, at least I was frightened by the description.

Rappard is recovering, did I tell you he had brain fever? It will be some time before he can go to work again, but he is starting to take a walk now and then.

If my eyes do not improve, I'll follow your advice and bathe them with tea. As it is they are getting better, so for the present I'll leave them alone. For they never troubled me before, except once this winter when I had toothache, so I believe it is nothing but strain and overwork.

On the contrary, lately my eyes can stand the fatigue of drawing better than previously.

Write soon again if you can, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

I do not know whether you know those little almshouses on the Brouwersgracht opposite the hospital. I should like to draw there when the weather permits. This week I made a few scratches there already. They are a few rows of small houses with little gardens which I think belong to the charity board.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 9 February 1883

Amice Rappard,

I just received the roll of wood engravings. My hearty thanks for them. They are beautiful, all of them - the Heilbuth more beautiful than any of the sheets already in my possession. I remember that you spoke to me at one time about their extraordinarily fine *execution*. Why should I remember? - just because I was struck by the execution, which is exactly what my brother described in a recent letter. When you come here I am going to show you what it is done *on*, and I expect you to be somewhat surprised, as I was myself. I don't doubt for a moment that you will then get to the bottom of how those grey, white and black effects are obtained.

The sheet I am most delighted with at present is Lucas's “The Light of Other Days,” which is exactly like one of Andersen's fairytales. Oh, I think it so beautiful and characteristic. Now I happen to have a “Sylvesternacht” [New Year's Eve] - I don't know by whom, but it's a German - also a night watchman in front of a church-tower shutter in the snow, which is a companion piece, so to speak. And how beautifully vigorous the engraving is!

Marchetti's “Au Pesage” [At the Weighing] has a lot of life - greatly resembles Small.

I have two curious sheets by Gussow besides; the one with the two old people is good. *That Beautiful Wretch* is alluring. What a contrast there is in the engraving between the illustrations in it and, for instance, The Light of Other Days. I knew some of the little figures in it already, as they have been reproduced in the Univers Illustré; if my memory is correct. But most of them were quite new to me, and some I thought splendid, *e.g.* the little figure in white against a background of wooded brown dunes or heath, and also “The Stroll in the Snow” and “The Old Lady in Black by the Fireside.” The latter is what I would call “cosy” in the highest degree.

These may be only impressions - but they're fresh. It is a magnificent lot; once more, my hearty thanks!

Have you got “Snowballing,” a full-page print by Ed. Frère in the London News - a school playground with boys? I just got a duplicate.

I found an uncommonly fine sheet by Vautier at the same time, “Eine Verhaftung” [An Arrest]. I am so very eager to have you here - not only because from selfish motives I am eager for your company, but because I firmly believe that particularly the wood engravings in these first years of the Graphic will so impress you as to give you *"the full certainty"* of their importance. *Not* that I still believe you're not attached to them with all your heart - on the contrary, I no longer have any doubt about it.

But all the same, there are some sheets that you probably don't know yet and that will make the whole even richer and sounder.

It seems to me that when one has a sheet in one's possession and looks at it repeatedly, one gets to admire it more and more. I think you know all three Herkomers I am sending you today, but it is my desire that you should have them for yourself.

And I often spoke to you, amice, about Pinwell and Walker. Well, here is a genuine Walker, first rate. Have I praised it too highly?

Now you must accept these without any more ado, and also the other duplicates which I shall get out of the Graphics. A collection of sheets like these becomes, in my opinion, a kind of Bible to an artist, in which he reads from time to time to get in a devotional mood. I think it's not only a good thing to know them, but also to have them around continually in the studio.

I don't doubt for a moment that (unless you should have them already), upon receiving these sheets, you'll feel at once that it's a good thing to have them, and that you'll never part with them.

If you should feel some pangs of conscience about accepting these and other sheets, well, just think over whether you have ever regretted taking those first ones with you last year. I don't believe it; it may be because of this or something else - but it is a fact that you think about your collection much more often this year than you used to. And that's only natural; just having these sheets oneself causes one to think of them more often and impresses them clearly and strongly on one's mind. And so I believe that these will have the same result - they will become your friends more and more. Well, personally I don't regret having given them to you, for you appreciate them and look at them as they ought to be looked at. There are so few who have a feeling for them; and it is certainly true that since you have an eye and a heart for them, I have become so attached to your friendship that it would be hard for me to do without it.

I used to think years ago that most artists had the same kinds of feelings and ideas about art as you and I, but in some sense this is not true at all.

Well, so much for that. Trust me in this matter, and accept them without more ado. You will get more of them when you have recovered completely and come to see me.

I have something more to tell you in connection with Hol's "Irish Emigrants."

The character of the woman I wrote you about is something like that of the principal figure of that sheet - I mean the mother with the baby on her arm - *i.e.* considered as a whole, without any attention to details. I could not give you a better description of her.

Now, old fellow, get well soon, and write me a letter before long - have no scruples about this batch - thanks again for yours - a firm handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 11 February 1883

Dear brother,
Another Sunday, and so I am writing you again. Sometimes it seems to me that I didn't express warmly and cordially enough how much I was touched by what you recently told me. As to the question of whether an honest love might become “une illusion perdue” [a lost illusion], I do not doubt that it may sometimes happen; however, it would greatly astonish me if it should happen in your case, nor do I believe it will with me.

Curiously enough, Michelet says that at first love is as frail as a spider's web, and grows to be as strong as a cable.

But only on condition of faithfulness.

I have often walked on the Geest recently, in those streets and alleys where I often walked with the woman last year, in the beginning. The weather was damp, everything was beautiful there, and when I came home, I said to the woman, “It is still just the same as last year.” I tell you this because you spoke of disenchantment; no, no, it is true there is a withering and budding in love as in nature, but nothing dies entirely. It is true there is an ebb and flow, but the sea remains the sea. And in love, either for a woman or for art, there are times of exhaustion and impotence, but there is no permanent disenchantment.

I consider love as well as friendship not just a feeling but also a positive action, and as such it requires doing things and exerting oneself, and exhaustion and impotence are the consequences.

A sincere and true love is a blessing, I think, though that doesn't prevent occasional hard times.

I am glad that my eyes are no worse, rather a little better, but it is not quite over yet and I must be careful. I can tell you, it was quite upsetting. How I should love to talk with you - for I am not discouraged about the work, nor listless nor disheartened, but I am at a standstill, and that is, perhaps, because I ought to have some intercourse with someone who is sympathetic to me and whom I could talk to about it; right now there is not a soul here whom I can confide in. *I do not mean that nobody can be trusted,* far from it, but unfortunately I am not in touch with them. I sometimes think of years ago when I came to The Hague for the first time, and of the three years I spent at Goupil and Co.; the first two were rather unpleasant, but the last one was much happier, so who knows whether the same won't happen now?

I like the proverb, “When things are at their worst, they are sure to mend,” but now and then I ask myself, “Haven't we by any chance reached the worst?” for the “mending” would not be at all unwelcome to me. Well, we'll see.

Lately I read Le Peuple by Michelet, or rather I read it some time ago this winter, but recently I was strongly reminded of it. That book was written quickly, and apparently in a hurry, and if it were the only one of Michelet's books one read, one wouldn't think it very good, and wouldn't be struck by it. But knowing his more polished works, La Femme, L'Amour, La Mer, and Histoire de la Révolution, I thought this one like the rough sketch of a painter whom I like very much, and, as such, it had a peculiar charm. To me Michelet's style is enviable. I don't doubt that there will be many authors who disapprove of Michelet's technique, as there are some painters who think they have the right to find fault with Israëls' technique. Michelet has strong emotions, and he smears what he feels onto paper without caring in the least how he does it, and without giving the slightest thought to technique or conventional forms - just shaping it into any form that can be understood by those who want to understand it. To me Le Peuple is not so much a first idea or impression as an unfinished but well-thought-out and studied conception. Some parts are apparently done hurriedly from nature and joined to other parts which are more finished and studied.

De Bock seems to be in very flourishing circumstances, judging from his fur coat. I hadn't seen him for months, but met him a few days ago in the above-mentioned beautiful fur coat. Yet I cannot say he himself looked flourishing. Have you ever felt sympathetic to a person whom you *saw* was unhappy, but who pretended and was considered to be flourishing; and have you felt in your heart, If I tried to be friends with him, he would either think that I was making fun of him and it would be almost impossible to gain his confidence or his friendship - or if I got that far, he would still say, “I have chosen my course, and will stick to it,” and we should have no influence on each other. This is the way I think of De Bock, and though I feel a real sympathy for him and admire much of his work, I do not think that he and I would profit by each other's society, especially as we have diametrically different views of life, and of art too. It is sometimes difficult for me to give up a friendship, but if I go into a studio and have to think, Talk about inane things, don't mention anything of importance and don't express your real feeling about art - that would make me more melancholy than if I stayed away altogether. Just because I should like to find and keep up a real friendship, it is difficult for me to conform to a conventional friendship.

If there is a desire to be friendly *on both sides*, there may be some difference of opinion, but for all that, one doesn't fall out so easily, and if one does, it is easily made up. Where it is conventional, bitterness is almost unavoidable, just because one does not feel free, and even though one doesn't express one's real feelings, they are sufficiently apparent to leave a continuing disagreeable impression on both sides and to make it hopeless for one to profit from the other's society. Where there is conventional, there is mistrust, and mistrust gives rise to all kinds of intrigues. And with a little more mutual sincerity, our lives would be so much easier.

Meanwhile, one gets used to things as they are, but it is not normal, and if it were possible to go back suddenly to the period of thirty, forty or fifty years ago, I think one would feel more at home in that period than in the present one - that is to say, you and I, for instance, would feel more at home in it. I don't think anyone would want to go back to *this* period fifty years from now, for if a time of antiquated decay or a time of “periwigs and crinolines” follows, people will be too dull to think about it, and if there is a change for the better, tant mieux.

I do not think it absurd to expect that such a time of stagnation may arrive, for what is called “the period of periwigs and crinolines” in Dutch history also had its origin in the relinquishment of principles and the substitution of the conventional for the original. At their best the Dutch people are Rembrandt's “Syndics,” but if the salt loses its savour, a time of stagnation follows, of “periwigs” - not immediately, but history proves that it may.

It is sometimes hard for me to believe that a period of, for instance, only fifty years is sufficient to bring about such a total change that *everything* is the other way around. But just by reflecting on history one learns to see those relatively quick and continual changes; from it I conclude that every man weighs the scale somewhat, no matter how little, and that how one thinks and acts does make a difference. The battle is but short, and sincerity is worth while. If many are sincere and firm, the whole period becomes good - at least, energetic.

Yes, I often think of what you wrote me recently. I think there must be a great difference between the woman you met and the one I have already lived with for a full year, but what they have in common is their misfortune and their sex.

Don't you also think that if one meets someone in such a way - I mean, so weak and defenseless - something makes one surrender completely, so that one cannot imagine ever being able to desert such a person? Generally speaking, such an encounter is an apparition. Have you read Erckmann-Chatrian's Madame Thérèse? It has a description of a woman who is recovering - very touching and beautiful; it is a simple book, but at the same time, deep.

If you don't know Madame Thérèse, do read it. I think she will like it too, and be touched by it.

At times I regret that the woman with whom I live understands neither books nor art. But (though she definitely can't) doesn't my still being so attached to her prove that there is something sincere between us? Perhaps she will learn later on, and it may strengthen the bond between us; but now, with the children, you will understand that she has her hands full already. And especially because of the children she comes into contact with reality, and involuntarily she learns. Books and reality and art are alike to me. Somebody out of touch with real life would bore me, but somebody right in the midst of it knows and feels naturally.

If I did not look for art in reality, I should probably find her stupid; as it is I only wish it were otherwise, but after all I am contented with things as they are.

I hope to be able to work regularly again this week. I feel so strongly that I must work doubly hard to make up for my having started so late; it is the feeling that I am behind because of my age which worries me.

These days Montmartre will have those curious effects which Michel, for instance, has painted; that dry, withered grass and the sand against a grey sky. At least at present the colour in the meadows often reminds me of Michel, the soil, yellowish-brown; withered grass with a muddy road full of puddles; black tree trunks; a greyish-white sky; the houses at a distance subdued, but with the red roofs lending a little touch of colour.

Those effects are striking enough, and Michel's secret (like Weissenbruch's) depends on taking the proper measurements and finding the correct proportion of the foreground to the background, and feeling the exact direction in which the perspective lines run. These things are no accident (Michel's works are plentiful enough, and I see clearly from them that he had reached such a height that it seemed like child's play to him), it is a *science*, and I think that before he succeeded, Michel must have been perplexed and disappointed sometimes because things *wouldn't go right*.

Simple though it may seem, there is a very extensive general science behind it all, as there is behind even more simple-looking works, Daumier's, for instance.

Well, I must finish this letter. Write soon, if you haven't already. I am longing to hear whether your patient has had any serious consequences of the operation. Isn't it curious that in the very first letter I had from Rappard after his illness, he again talks with great animation of some wood engravings he has found, including some of Lançon's? he is now so eager for them that I need not urge him on, and at first he cared for them as little as others do. He is getting a very good collection, and I think I see the influence of those same Englishmen in his work and intentions - though, of course, he is far from imitating them in the slightest. But, for instance, the fact that before his illness he went to make studies in the asylum for the blind is the direct practical result of his love for draughtsmen like Herkomer or Frank Holl.

Adieu, boy, write soon. With a handshake,
Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 12 February 1883

Amice Rappard,

Yesterday I assembled some duplicates which I have found since I sent you the last ones. But all this has nothing to do with the Graphics, which for the time being I am going to leave in the condition they were in when I got them, although I feel strongly inclined to mount the sheets as soon as I have time and mounting board.

I think you will probably appreciate Régamey's “Convicts, Outdoor Work.” I'm sorry I have no duplicates of the other “Convicts” or of some other sheets representing “A Stroll” and “A Dinner,” which are surprisingly soberly done, and possibly even fuller in character than this one. I think Hopkins's “Boat Race” and “Weather” are reminiscent of Percy Macquoid, if I may say so. How much character there is in them, and what a peculiar daylight tone.

Can you guess who did “The First Warm Days”? Beautiful, isn't it? The little Jules Férats, “Prisons d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui” [Prisons of the Past and Present], harmonize well with the little Renouards of Majos.

If there should be some among them *that you already have,* please return them sometime, but there's no hurry, of course.

Now I have a duplicate of a large Heilbuth, “Au Bord de l'eau” [At the Waterside], which has a little figure of a lady sitting on a log; this detail and the title will probably enable you to verify whether or not you have it already. I have not sent it because I feel *almost* sure you have it - yet I am in doubt, and it is very beautiful, so please look it up.

That sheet by Dodd harmonizes quite nicely with Green's “Signboard Painter.” “Poor Irish Scholar” is another one by that same M. F. who did the “Merthyr Tydfil Pawn Office.” However small this print may be, it's marvelously good, isn't it?

I don't know who did the little Irish sketches “Arch,” “Cottage” and “Labourer's Home,” but I think particularly the last one excellent. Well, this is no more than a few things jumbled together.

I think “Good Friday” is by Barnes. It just occurs to me that for a long time now I have had a fine portrait by Corot ready for you; I shall add it to the others at once. Whenever I have time I rummage among those Graphics; there are treasures in them

I am writing in a hurry; I have collected these sheets while tidying up the studio. I hope there will be something that you will like among them.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 12 February 1883

Dear Brother,
Although I wrote you yesterday, I want to add a few words today, first, to thank you for your letter and the money. But at the same time because I am alarmed at your patient's symptom of being “somewhat low-spirited.”

Perhaps it is only my imagination, and if so, tant mieux; nothing would please me more, for if there is no melancholy worth mentioning, and if it disappeared of its own accord, it would be that much better.

But if it continues and you see that something's the matter - and speaking for myself, I think this will prove to be the case - then be careful, for then I think it is more serious, and the only useful physician will be not the doctor but yourself.

If the low spirits and restlessness persist, I am afraid the reason is that the patient - notwithstanding all proofs of loyalty, and precisely because of all you have done for her - is tortured by the thought that sooner or later she will have to part company with you.

We are brothers, aren't we, and friends, and we may tell each other unreservedly what we think; if I should act indiscreetly in telling you what I think, please forgive my indiscretion. For such matters may take a very distressing turn - and very quickly, too - if one does not act in time. In particular, the patient is morally so weak and overwrought and exhausted - although externally she may appear calm - that, in my opinion, she is passing through a mental crisis which is much more serious than if only the body were affected.

Therefore, *if* that little cloud of melancholy persists, *if* there is a je ne sais quoi to interfere with the peace of mind which is absolutely necessary for her recovery, *if* it appears that she is thinking of something which she does not put into words, then, as I see it, there can be no doubt that just because of her weak and overwrought condition, she is mortally afraid - I repeat, mortally afraid - because of the uncertainty whether you love her or not.

In her heart there is an agitated, seething sea of love, but she will not put it into words for the very reason that unless you say so unreservedly and plainly, she will doubt whether you love her or not.

This hidden anxiety may be so strong - although it is possible that the little cloud of outward melancholy is very small indeed, and hardly perceptible to you, and even less so to strangers - this anxiety may be so strong that recovery is *impossible*, and serious consequences may be expected if her mind is not set at ease on this point *à tout prix*. I know quite well that for discretion's sake you might not want to speak *at once*, but prefer to wait until the recovery is complete, and she is free and quite herself.

Or it might be that you do not want to repeat yourself, and you might think, I have done enough to make it clear to her that I am her friend and that she may count on my doing everything in my power to help her.

Yet I repeat, if the low spirits continue - and more than anything else this makes *rest* absolutely impossible, and without rest, no recovery - talk to her again, as your heart dictates.

Dear brother, I am not speaking at random, but from my own soul and my own experience. This I can tell you about the case. When the woman was delivered of the child and the very difficult confinement was over, she was mortally weak, but for the moment her life was saved and the baby was alive and quiet.

Twelve hours after the confinement I went to see her, and found her completely exhausted. When she saw me, she sat up in bed and became as cheerful and lively as if nothing had happened, and her eyes were radiant with love of life and with gratitude. And she wanted to recover, and she promised me she would.

(As your last letter showed, you have discovered for yourself how necessary it is to *insist on such a promise* - and how necessary it is to *want to recover*. You have judged correctly.)

But - a few days later I received a note from her which I did not quite understand, and which disappointed me; it contained something about “she supposed I had probably taken another woman, etc.” - in short, very queer and even absurd, as I myself had not quite recovered, and had left the hospital only a short time before. At any rate it was clear enough for me to understand that she was mentally confused and very upset. I went to her, immediately, that is, as soon as I *could*; I was not allowed to visit her on weekdays, so it was on Sunday, a week later. I found her looking as though she had *withered* - literally like a tree which had been blasted by a cold, dry wind, its young green shoots withering; and to make things complete, the baby was sick, too, and looked shrivelled. According to the doctor the baby was suffering from jaundice, but there was something else the matter with the eyes, as if they were blind, and the woman, who had *not* got jaundice, looked yellow, grey, I don't know what. In short, all this had happened within a week, and apparently - I know of no other expression for it - blighted and withered her so much that it gave me a shock.

What was to be done? How had it come about, and what was there to be said?

She herself told me she *could* not rest, and it was clear that she had become thoroughly melancholy - without any reason at all, without anything having happened since the preceding Sunday.

Well, I thought, something must be done about it, and although I did not know for sure what the trouble was, I took a risk.

I acted as if I were cross and said, Look, is this the way you keep your promises? And I made her repeat the promise that she would recover, and I showed great discontent at the baby's being sick, and I told her it was her fault, and I asked her what that letter of hers meant - in other words, as I saw her condition was abnormal, I myself spoke in an *abnormal* way, that is, sternly, whereas I felt nothing but a deep pity. The result was something like an awakening, as of a sleepwalker, and before I went away - not, of course, without having changed my tone - I once again let her renew her promise that she would get well et plus vite que ça!

Dear brother, from this moment on she recovered quickly, and after a short time I took her and the baby out of the hospital. Because of this the baby had a pretty long bout of ill health - perhaps because during the first few days the mother was thinking more about me than about her child - but of course at present the baby is as healthy as a young rabbit, and just like such a young rabbit, he is looking brightly out of his clear eyes which were at first completely closed. When I came to take the woman home, I waited for her in the little hospital waiting room; suddenly as she came in with the baby in her arms, a heart-rending pathos such as Ary Scheffer paints it, or Correszco, came over her.

I repeat, if I am mistaken in thinking that in your patient's case there is also confusion or an inner struggle (of course, unjustified), so much the better; but if the signs of melancholy persist - let her promise once more she will get well, and show her unmistakably that *you* insist on her getting well, and that *you* cannot live without her. You see, sometimes a certain reticence prevents us from saying such a thing because it sounds egotistic, but don't feel embarrassed in this case, because it means saving her, and for that reason it is not egoism. For if two persons share their feelings to such an extent that they *cannot* be easy and calm in their minds when alone, egoism is out of the question, for then these two need not become one, *they are one already*. Only - this must be put into words, and with a sick person that craving for a real unbosoming may be such a *necessity* that recovery depends on it.

And still I go on talking about this (don't take this going on amiss - for I feel obliged to tell you to the fullest extent what my opinion in this matter is); for days I have been imagining your patient to myself (but perhaps incorrectly - of course I can't know for sure; there are certain things which one can't help connecting with each other) as being necessarily in a condition similar to that of this woman of mine during the days following her confinement.

I have been imagining this ever since receiving your letter in which you describe the operation, and I may say I have been disquieted by it all the time. And when I read she was somewhat low-spirited, I couldn't help writing about it. Almost from the very beginning - every time I tried to get a clear insight into the state of your patient's mind - taking into consideration that the series of calamities she has encountered cannot but have bewildered her - I thought her condition beyond the reach of any other remedy than love in the fullest sense of the word.

Without you I figure she is lost; I cannot think of any rescue, any renewal of the future, for her without you. And although I have discovered in your letters some expressions from which I see, at least which seem to show, that as for the future, you are in doubt about whether she for her part will love you forever and ever - I myself have only one opinion about this, which is that she loves you; and as far as you are concerned, I have only one question to ask, Did you tell her that you love her forever and ever, or have you been somewhat silent about it, either out of reticence or because you were afraid to hurt her?

Of course I am speaking about these intimate matters (which on the whole I consider so intimate that I should never speak about them unless there were a clear reason for it) only because I see this resemblance between the cases of your patient and mine:

1. Both had to undergo a dangerous operation, and both were, notwithstanding the chloroform, not wholly quiet during the operation.

2. Both were, shortly before the operation, severely shaken by anxiety and tension and perturbation of mind, and had to undergo moral sufferings which were almost more than the nervous system can stand.

3. Rest for body and soul is absolutely necessary for both of them in the interest of recovery and readjustment.

I think these resemblances are important. And now that you have mentioned a sort of melancholy, I believed it would be profitable for you to hear how it became very serious in my patient's case, even alarming and dangerous, and this within only a few days, and how - after her mind had been set at ease by the very security of a new love which made her gain hope and confidence in the future - she very soon recovered physically, at least, from the operation.

As for me, before that time I had reassured her as emphatically as I could that I should never leave her - less by words, however, than by doing whatever I could for her, but nevertheless in words too. Notwithstanding this, doubt and restlessness arose in her mind - but they disappeared as soon as I did my best to reassure her again.

May I remind you that I raised certain objections because in your earlier letter you hinted at having mentioned a job - I already had some nebulous misgivings then - and now you write about the first signs of melancholy - well, this is what I feared.

I hope quite unnecessarily - but if the melancholy persists, and the restlessness too, and the je ne sais quoi which is interfering with her recovery - then my opinion is that a renewed assurance of your love and loyalty will ease her mind and enable her to get well again - yes, I truly think her life may depend on it.

Adieu, my dear fellow, I have written this to the best of my knowledge, and prompted by an unfeigned sympathy and a deep interest - but this you of course know, and it is my earnest desire that things turn out favourably. Once more, thanks for your letter and what you sent. Without my meaning it, my letter about "somewhat low-spirited" has grown to such a size that there is no room to write anything else. Believe me, with a handshake and my best wishes,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

This was written at the top of the letter:

Until today every night or morning when I woke up, my eyelids were stuck together because of the discharge, but last night for the first time both eyes were all right. Otherwise nothing was apparent except for the whites being somewhat muddy and bloodshot and what they call bags (?) under the eyes, but this is as good as gone, too.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 15 February 1883

Dear Theo,

Many warm thanks for your letter; the enclosure was very welcome, it helps me a great deal. I begin by telling you that it takes a load off my mind to know that the past of the woman whom you write about is quite different from what I first supposed. Namely that she has known other things beside poverty and narrow-mindedness, so that I suppose she can fully appreciate you with regard to culture and broad-mindedness too, more than a woman who has been crushed by misery from childhood on and knows no better. From what you say about her reading, for instance, I see she has a sentiment which many other women completely lack.

Social standing and her experience contribute to the formation of her character, and, I think, make her entirely suitable for you. Certainly you will be doubly, doubly happy when she recovers. And I wish from the bottom of my heart that she might become your wife, for a woman turns life into something so very different.

And what is a woman like her without a man to appreciate and understand her? Something pathetic, yes, you termed it correctly, something like a spirit or a shadow. Look, I am afraid she would return to such a state (even if her circumstances and her health were different) if you left her.

And in my opinion an infinite and profound happiness - for you as well as for her - would be within reach because of the consciousness of not being alone any more. For it is sometimes bitterly hard for us men, too, that being alone.

But Israël's poetry without there being anybody to understand it - that is something so awful that it is beyond one's comprehension, and one cannot keep hold of the idea.

Only this being alone and wandering … How deep Michelet's saying is, “Pourquoi y a-t-il une femme seule sur la terre?” [Why is there a lone woman on earth?]

You once said, or rather wrote, “Earnestness is better than the most delicate raillery.” It is the same thing here, *mustn't* one take such a figure seriously? I mean, the life of us men is so dependent on our relations with women - and, of course, the opposite is also true - that it seems to me one must never laugh at women or think lightly of them. If one reads carefully, Balzac's Petites misères de la vie conjugale is very, very serious and honestly well meant - not intended to separate but to unite; but not everybody sees that in it.

When I read your letter, what struck me immediately was that you are involved with a person who, for instance, would be able to evoke the past along with you, who will learn to see the same things in art that you see, and this is of great value.

I congratulate you, my dear fellow, because by your description, she is a woman to whom one may apply Michelet's words, “Une dame c'est une dame.”

I think you will also find her in Ary Scheffer's work.

As to reading, I think the works of Michelet would be something to soothe and strengthen her mind.

Just like Victor Hugo.

And what Michelet himself thought desirable reading for a woman is Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis - of course the origional edition, not the one that has been garbled and spoiled by the clergy.

But I suppose you know more about French literature than I.

That book by Thomas a Kempis is as beautiful as, for instance, Ary Scheffer's “[Christus] Consolator” - it can be compared to nothing else. But I have seen editions that were purposely changed and distorted by adding to each chapter a kind of explanation which was terrible. I once bought one like that; it was a very bad bargain indeed.

And do you know what seems excellent to me? - that a patient should breathe fresh air from a book. What I mean is La Nature chez elle [Nature at home] by Bodmer, with text by Théophile Gautier - the old series for sale at L'Illustration or Monde Illustré. But I recently saw a Nature chez elle which was much thinner and less fresh than the first series, nor do I think the text was by Théophile Gautier. Probably done by Bodmer at a later period, when he had lost some of his early vigour.

Boy, I have been drawing with such delight - fishermen's heads with that sou'wester I told you about; the fish scales were still sticking to it when I got it.

What a feeling you must have had when you walked into the hospital or clinic to visit her the day after the operation! Isn't that one of the things one can hardly talk about, the emotion being so intense? At least, when you wrote me about that operation, I was reminded of visiting the woman on the day of her confinement last summer.

Recently you wrote about a certain Laurens who generally makes large drawings or pictures. I didn't know him then (only as a painter of Oriental landscapes), but today I saw an etching by Courtry after a picture by Jean Paul Laurens, a scene from the Revolution, and I liked it very much, especially some types and heads.

But it is quite possible that his pictures are not so good as the etching.

Is Jules Goupil's work still good? One is inclined to ask that question when one sees men like Émile Wauters and Hoeterinks, for instance, lose their strong grip on reality, replacing it with things which are correct, yes, and have a delicate sentiment, too, but which do not reach the vigour of their earlier work and instead betray a certain timidity.

And it is sad when it's that way.

So few manage to remain vigorous like Israëls, for instance.

Recently I saw a new edition of R. Caldecott's picture books and bought two of them, namely, illustrations of Washington Irving's Sketch Book, which both together cost a shilling now. There is a description of Christmas in a little village at the beginning of this century. Those small drawings are pithy, like Jacque's, for instance, or Menzel's. When you come, you must look at the wood engravings again. Right now there are some people like Caldecott, for instance, who are quite original and highly interesting. How I wish we could be together more, and on an evening or a Sunday, look over those things which many others pass by.

I am reading Eliot's Middlemarch. Eliot analyzes like Balzac or Zola - but English situations, with an English sentiment.

Adieu, boy, may everything go well, and once more, best wishes.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 18-20 February 1883

Amice Rappard,

About a week ago I sent you a little roll of wood engravings with a letter enclosed. Since then I have taken the Graphics apart.

There was a preponderant reason that made it desirable. Looking through twenty-one volumes is a job that takes up too much time. Of course, there is a whole lot in it that leaves me indifferent and is only useless rubbish.

I think it desirable, moreover, to keep the things by Small or Herkomer, or Green or Frank Hol, for instance, together, instead of having them scattered among things that do not match them in the least. When one has taken out only the best and most characteristic sheets, it is possible to get a general view of them within a few hours. And one does not need a long time to hunt up a particular thing.

And so I have done it after all. And I have already sorted those I have taken out too - but I haven't mounted them yet.

The bindings of the volumes can now serve as portfolios, and I am going to complete the collection of Graphic wood engravings by adding all the other things I have already.

It means a lot of drudgery but it certainly is stimulating work - for I count myself a lucky fellow to have something so pleasant around the studio, now and forever.

Of course I have quite a number of duplicates available.

I have another kind of drudgery on my hands; the fact being that I have started a sort of battle with my landlord to get a number of privileges - I mean alterations in the studio. And of course it is not easy to get him to do something.

And yet - I made a pact with him just now by which he granted me at least some of these privileges. He does not find it easy to get tenants for his houses, and what I asked him for was wood which he had no immediate need for.

I assure you it is quite an advantage, for the studio will gain a lot by it. Well, I am glad I attacked him. I got the idea of starting a fight with him while reading Fritz Reuter's Ut mine Festungstid - perhaps you know the book - in which there is the highly funny story of the way in which Fritz R. and others who had been sentenced to detention in a fortress tricked the “town major” into granting them all kinds of advantages.

Speaking of Reuter, don't you think that the figure of Bräsig in Dried Herbs is glorious - and his Havermann? I think it as beautiful as anything by Knaus and Vautier.

I have been working recently on large figures (busts, or rather figures down to the knees), which are intended as staircase wall decorations. Six pieces on cardboard in black and white.

It will be much easier to look through the wood engravings whenever you come here. You will be interested, for instance, in Boyd Houghton's “Mormons,” “Indians,” some London sketches and a number of sheets about “Paris during the Commune,” perhaps thirty pieces in all. And some large compositions, “Emigrants” and “Mormon Prayer Meeting.”

I now have seven large sheets by du Maurier - first and foremost “Dieppe Harbor,” the finest of them all - you know it - and then “Musical Rehearsal,” “Rival Grandpas” and “Before Dinner” - now in the Graphic portfolio “Battle-dore and Shuttlecock,” “Sketch in the Monkey House” and “Cricket Match.”

But there is also a “Ladies' Boarding School,” which I do *not* have; perhaps it occurs in the very first numbers of the Graphic.

Otherwise I have never seen any large compositions by him. The series is done by du Maurier and Miss Edw. Edwards M. E. F., and the latter has some sheets in it that are almost as beautiful as those by du Maurier himself.

Do you know J. D. Linton (monogram JDL)? A crowd of females (during some “Commune”) he has drawn is superb. “Jewish Synagogue,” “Tower” etc., are also very striking. But you will greatly enjoy the Ch. Greens, large sheets, including a “Hospital” - benches full of patients - which is excellent.

I am writing you because there was a letter in the little roll of wood engravings I sent you (which is really prohibited) - in it I thanked you for your package - and because of this you might not have got it.

Is your recovery progressing? And have you gone back to your work completely? Adieu - write soon. I did receive your little roll, but no letter.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 20-24 February 1883

Dear Theo,

I wanted to write you last Sunday already, but I waited a little because I was trying to do something and its outcome was uncertain. A few weeks ago, I read Fritz Reuter's Ut mine Festungstid, in which he describes, in the most witty way, how Fritz Reuter and others who were confined in a fortress tried to make their life as comfortable as possible and to obtain several privileges from the town major.

That book gave me the idea of attacking my landlord about certain improvements which would make work easier for me.

And several times I have gone down to Voorburg, where he lives, in order to find out if he would do something for me.

There were old shutters and boards which I wanted to use lying around there, but it was hard to get them. But I have them now.

You know there are three windows in the studio. They let in far too much light, even when I cover them, and for a long time I have been thinking about how to remedy this.

But he refused to do anything unless I paid for it. But now, after a new attack, I have six shutters and about six long boards.

Those shutters are sawed in two now, so that both the upper and lower halves can be opened or closed at will, and the light let in or shut out from either above or below.

From this little scratch you will see that it is pretty slick. And the boards are for a big closet in the alcove to put away drawings, prints, books, and to hang up different smocks and jackets, old coats, shawls, hats, and last but not least, the sou'wester - all the things which I need for the models.

I have always paid the landlord regularly, and now I told him briefly and succinctly that if he thought the rent low, I wouldn't contradict this, but that I wanted him to consider that for me the rent itself was very heavy, and that I could not work well in this way and couldn't make progress before I had better light.

That if he wouldn't change it, I, for my part, should really have to take another studio.

That I wouldn't mind it if I had the money, but that under the circumstances I couldn't pay more than I did. So that to pay a higher rent was out of the question, and my staying or leaving would depend on his consenting to these improvements; if he didn't mind my leaving, well, we would separate on good terms, without more ado.

Well, then he said No, he would do *something*, and so we at last arranged that I should only have to pay a few guilders in wages. He has been to the studio several times and is not exactly a penny pincher, though he is rather sharp (something of a Yankee), and the studio looked better than he had anticipated (he hadn't been there since last July) - at least, once in the studio he gave his consent, and even more readily than I had expected.

If one had to deal with people only inside the studio! But personally I cannot get on well with people outside of it, and cannot get them to do anything.

I've been drawing a few figures, rather large-size, bust or half-length, which, with a few others I already had, will become a kind of decoration for the hall and stairs, though they are really nothing but ordinary studies.

So you can see from all this that I have thrown myself headlong into it again, in order to get new ideas.

For instance, in Voorburg, when I went with him to pick out that wood, I saw beautiful things of workmen in a shed, and digging a cellar, and laying the foundation of a house. Then I thought again of the description you once gave me of those workmen in Montmartre when you witnessed an accident in a stone quarry.

You know, I already had something in front of the windows, namely some canvas stretched on rods. This can be used for something else now, that is, it will make a very good background covered with a darker or lighter material - if one wants to draw heads, for instance.

You understand that I can also shut one or two of the windows now, and so get one general light which will make the effects much stronger; they used to be neutralized by reflections or diffuse light.

If I had had to pay for it myself, the job would have been quite out of the question because it would have been too expensive; but as it is, I am mighty glad to have it.

I had felt the necessity for better light, especially when making those last drawings - for instance, those heads I sent you in which I used a deeper black.

I hope everything will turn out well, but from this little scratch, you can see it is so simple that it must turn out well.

How miserably these modern houses are constructed nowadays, compared to what they might be if they tried to make them a little more cozy. Compare a window of the present with one of Rembrandt's time. At that time everyone seemed to feel the need for a special kind of tempered light which doesn't seem to exist any more - a least they seem to aim at making it cold, harsh and unfeeling.

The workmen's houses were all right in the beginning, but I don't see that they've progressed any in the last twenty or thirty years. Quite the opposite, the attractiveness is disappearing more and more, and is being replaced by something cold, systematic and methodical, which is becoming more and more unsatisfactory.

If I could have afforded it, I should have had the windows fixed this way. It wouldn't have cost so much more if we hadn't had to use the blinds we had. The only difference is that each pane would have had a separate shutter, so that the shutters would have been a little smaller. But this way one could easily build a nice, pleasant window. But one can't have everything. And, in fact, a broad windowsill, which one can sit on, goes with it, but this house hasn't anything like that.

I am very eager for your letter and news of your patient. I hope that she is in good spirits and that the recovery is normal and rapid. But sometimes things don't go so smoothly and rapidly, there is almost always some complication or other - at least, one must always be watchful.

Last week I again read Notre Dame by Victor Hugo, which I had already read, more than ten years ago. Do you know what I found in it, at least, thought I found in it, so that I don't doubt Victor Hugo meant such a thing? I found Thijs Maris in Quasimodo.

Probably most people who read Notre Dame have the impression that Quasimodo was a kind of fool. But, like myself, you would not find Quasimodo ridiculous, and, like myself, you would feel the truth of what Hugo says, “Pour ceux qui savent que Quasimodo a existé, maintenant `Notre Dame' est vide. Car non seulement il en était l'habitant mais il en était l'âme.” [“For those who know that Quasimodo once existed, `Notre Dame' is now empty. For not only did he live there, but he was the soul of it.”]

Taking Notre Dame as a symbol of that tendency in art which found its expression, for instance, in Leys and De Groux (sometimes), and Lagye, De Vriendt and Henri Pille, one can apply to Thijs Maris the words, “Maintenant il y a un vide pour ceux qui savent qu'il a existé, car il en était l'âme, et l'âme de cet art-là c'était lui.” Well, Thijs Maris still exists, but not in his full bloom and strength, not unscathed; and disenchanted *in so far as he can be disenchanted*.

One of the most stupid things about the painters here is that even now they laugh at Thijs Maris. I think that as terrible as suicide. Why, as suicide? Because Thijs Maris is so much the personification of everything high and noble that in my opinion a painter cannot mock him without lowering himself. Whoever doesn't understand Maris, so much the worse for him; those who have understood him, mourn him, and regret that such a man has been broken. “Noble lame, vil fourreau” [A noble blade, a vile sheath] is applicable to Thijs Maris and to Quasimodo. “Dans mon âme je suis beau.” [Within my soul I am beautiful.]

Well, write soon, if you haven't done so already. And believe me, with a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 25 or 26 February 1883

Dear Theo,
Just a little word to tell you I received your letter and to thank you for it.
And I was very glad to hear the good news about your patient. That's good.

In every love there are many different loves - and when the woman recovers, it will be quite different again - and that is something delightful, too. The principal thing is to continue and to persevere, he who wants variety must remain faithful. And he who wants to know many women must stick to one and the same.

Spring is coming fast here.

For the moment the studio is in a terrible mess.

Enclosed is a little scratch, made in a hurry, on a scrap of paper, while they were putting up the shutters I mentioned. Why am I sending it to you, unimportant as it is, in its unfinished condition? Because I believe you will see one thing clearly from it, that now I can get a quite different light effect in my studio than the too-strong light of those three large windows.

The lower part of window Number 1 in the scratch is closed, and the rest, partly so - now it looks like the door of a little room in an almshouse, for instance.

Window Number 2 is closed at the top, and looks like a little window which the figures are sitting by.

The background to the left is dark, for window Number 3 is completely closed.

Just think of the difference between the effect of the crude light which the three windows would be letting in at this moment if they weren't shuttered, and you will understand how infinitely better I can work now. Besides the glaring light, there used to be an enormous reflection which neutralized all effects.

It often made me desperate, when, for instance, I saw a woman puttering around a small room and found something typical and mysterious in the figure, which absolutely disappeared when I had the same woman in the studio. Thus the old man was also much more striking in a dark passage than in my studio.

And it was very aggravating, and the space the three windows took up was so large that the light couldn't be dimmed sufficiently by screens or cardboard.

But now I am going to overcome all that.

However indistinct the little sketch may be, it has been done from nature, in a great hurry, while they were working on the window; and from it you will see that one can now get fine effects, and vary them greatly. I am sending you this rather than explain the thing in words.

Well, now the light in the studio is somewhat under my control, and when I have seen a little figure in some other house, I can easily reconstruct the effect back home if I pay attention to the way the light strikes it, and regulate my light accordingly. How much light was there? Did it strike the figure in front, from behind, to the right or left, from above or from below?

I think it will please you when you come. The closet is also excellent. It has been a rather difficult job, as the shutters were too large for the windows and had to be cut down. But now everything is finished so far, and only now can I really enjoy the studio, and it is, in fact, in keeping with what I want. Later on, perhaps, they will make me another little room in the attic - when there is some leftover lumber again. They could make quite a picturesque and intriguing little room there, but it is of secondary importance.

But the studio is ten times better.

However, the expenses have been rather more than I expected, as so much of the old shutters had to be altered.

Therefore I must ask you, as I have promised a payment on the first of March - if you can, send it a day sooner rather than later. I know you will understand that the studio has been quite changed by it; oh, I am so delighted with it - it has worried me so because I couldn't get it right.

I mentioned the good news about your patient, but her wanting to go back to her own country doesn't seem quite right to me; but as you say, little can be said about the future before she has recovered. May spring do her good!

Well, boy, I am writing in a hurry, as I still have a great deal of cleaning up to do; I am so very happy about that improvement in the windows.

As far as I can tell, it is quite effective. You will remember from your visit last summer that the light was too crude, and couldn't be changed. From this little sketch you will probably see how it can be varied infinitely, and that the effects one sees in little houses can be reproduced here. And the special advantage is that in the small houses one can't get the right distance for drawing the figures, and in the studio, one can.

Adieu, with a firm handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I think tonight I shall probably dream of fellows in sou'westers and oilskins, on which the light falls and makes piquant highlights, accentuating the shape.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 27 February 1883

Amice Rappard,

Thanks for your letter, which I had been looking forward to eagerly. Oh, I am not at all surprised to hear that you admire the sheets I sent you. Personally I cannot imagine anything more beautiful than the “Harbour of Refuge” or the “Low Lodginghouse.”

Now you must come soon to get the rest. I cannot think of a better way for you to find out which duplicates you have than to come look them over and make your selection, for making a list of the titles would be too inconvenient on all sides. If you think you won't be able to come in the near future, however, and if you would like to have them, I can make a package of all the duplicates I have and send it to you; then you can keep the ones you don't have yet and send back the rest. Remember, if you prefer it, I shall do so with the greatest of pleasure.

I have a request to make: please send me the *worst* print you already had of Herkomer's “Old Women's Almshouse” (from that French Illustration*)*. I have it myself, of course, but there's somebody here I want to start a collection for, namely the painter Van der Weele, who is drawing master at the secondary school here. He himself has done some ten etchings - a bit meager but nevertheless well done - but in his studio I saw a first-rate sketch of a ploughed field in the evening, and an excellent little easel piece on wood besides, called “Loading Hay on a Wagon,” of which he has also done an etching. He is the sort of man to develop a true liking for it - at least I hope so - and it may induce him to continue to work vigorously in black and white, in lithography, etching or drawing - it doesn't matter which.

On this man's behalf I should like to ask you to let me have all the duplicates you have available - I think you have Régamey's “Gypsies,” for instance.

I hope you'll meet him someday; he is a sound kind of fellow. In order to be sure that I don't give him any sheets you may not have yourself, I'll give you herewith a list of what I've set apart for him:

Herkomer “At Death's Door”
Menzel “Siesta”
“Hunting Field”
Renouard “Enfants assistés”
“Boat Race”

Frère	“Snowballing”
Heilbuth	“Au bord de l'eau”

This week I bought a number of issues of this year's Illustration, Le Monde illustré and Univers Illustré. Now I have duplicates of the sheets “Enfants assistés,” all six of them, and I shall specify them again to be sure that you have them all:

- “L'abandon”
- “La creche”
- “Le change”
- “Le Numéro 68, 762”
- “Passe au réfectoire - Heure de la bouillie”
- “Sheet with sketches: rachitique, scrofuleux, etc.”

Should there be any number missing in your collection, I shall send it to you. I hope to be able to get Fildes's “Charles Dickens Empty Chair” for you. It has been promised to me.

I am sending you herewith a sample of that lithographic paper; I have scribbled a little on it with lithographic crayon and autographic ink and engraving ink, more to combine the various methods on the same sample than to advise you to tire out the uninitiated by applying so many methods at once under ordinary circumstances, of course. I scribbled it on a scrap I had left, and I have no time to do it better.

What can you see from it? - (1) what kind of paper it is; (2) on which side you must draw; (3) what kinds of things one can do on it - but the autographic ink is treacherous. Sometimes the transferring succeeds quite well, but at other times the ink runs (for the drawing is wetted before it is laid face down on the grained stone, and then run through the press to be printed). So it may happen that the ink starts running, and in that case you get nothing but a black blot instead of your drawing.

All the same it *can* be done - and the important thing is that you can retouch the drawing with ink on the stone itself.

At the same time I am sending you two samples of coarse paper which I think is very suitable for mounting the wood engravings. They show up well just because it is so rough, and its colour is lovely.

The alterations in my studio have turned out very well indeed; the light is wonderful now, and I am delighted with it.

I have finished cutting out and mounting the wood engravings from the Graphic. Now that they are arranged in an orderly manner, they show up ever so much better.

Do you know Daziel as a black-and-white artist? I have a “Public House” by him - something like the one by Green - excellent.

Well, amice, perhaps I shall write more soon. I wanted to send you the sample of the lithographic paper without delay, but I am very busy. So goodbye, write again soon, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

I have a magnificent Giacomelli, a large sheet representing a “Flight of Crows.”

I know your beautiful Bodmer, “Grands Ducs,” very well, but I don't have it.

There must be many fine things in that old volume of *L'Illustration.*

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 2 March 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. I think the news about your patient is very favourable. Congratulations, the recovery from that anemia is decidedly a result of renewed hope and vitality, brought about by sympathy and kindness.

The heart that is fainting
May grow full to o'erflowing
And they who behold it
Shall wonder and know not
That God at its fountains
Far off has been raining.

Now you will already have received - at least I sent it yesterday afternoon - a very rough sketch of a watercolour.

This, in answer to your question about that.

It was not done recently, however. I started it a few months ago, and have occasionally given it a few touches since then. But it is still crude. Since then, I have made a large number of studies - that is, drawings of the figure, and especially of heads - with just such a scene in mind as this sketch represents; it must be finished by adding character and relief, especially to the beads, hands and feet. I am sending them to you because you will see in them more clearly than in many other watercolours I have done till now that I have a keen eye for striking colours - that I see them fresh, through a grey haze. However unfinished and imperfect it may be, this is part of a street chosen at random and done in the way in which I want to represent the Geest or the Jewish quarter. This sketch was no accident: I can take all kinds of scenes I see this far, getting the same relatively strong effects of colour and tone. Now if you compare this drawing with the *lithographs* and *drawings of heads* I sent you this winter, you can see my intentions clearly from those various *failures*.

The large studies of heads, for instance, of which I have still many others - for instance, with sou'westers, with shawls and white bonnets and top hats and caps - must serve for compositions such as the one I am sending you this time.

But I shall have to put up with many more failures, for I believe that in watercolour much depends on a great dexterity and quickness of touch. One must work in it before it is dry to get harmony, and one hasn't much time for reflection then. So the principal thing is not finishing each one separately, no, one must put down those twenty or thirty heads rapidly, one after the other.

Here follow a few curious sayings about water colours: “L'aquarelle est quelque chose de diabolique”; and the other is by Whistler, who said, “Yes, I did that in two hours, but I studied for years to be able to accomplish this in two hours.”

Enough of this; I love watercolour too much ever to give it up entirely, I come back to it again and again. But the foundation of everything is the knowledge of the figure, so that one can readily draw men and women and children whatever they are doing. So this is my chief aim, which cannot be realized in any other way, I think.

And I try to work myself up to a higher level of knowledge and ability in general, rather than to care very much about finishing off some particular sketch. After having drawn for a month, I now and then make a few watercolours, for instance, by way of casting the plummet to fathom my depth. Each time I see that I have overcome some obstacles, but that new difficulties have arisen. Then I start drudging again to conquer those.

As for the colours, they are really all used up - and not only that, but because of some relatively heavy expenses, I am not only hard up, but absolutely penniless.

Spring is coming, and I should like to take up painting again, too. So that is partly the reason why I am not working in watercolour right now.

But indirectly I am always working at it, and now that I can study the effects of chiaroscuro better because of the alterations in the studio, I shall work more and more with the brush, even in Black and White drawings, and wash the shadows in with neutral tint, sepia, India ink, Cassel earth, and accentuate the lights with Chinese white.

Do you remember that last summer you brought me pieces of mountain crayon? I tried to work with it at the time, but it didn't work well. So a few pieces were left, which I picked up the other day; enclosed you'll find a scratch done with it; you see it is a peculiar, warm black. You would greatly oblige me by bringing some more of it this summer. It has a great advantage - the big pieces are much easier to handle while sketching than a thin stick of conté, which is hard to hold and which breaks all the time. So for sketching outdoors, it is delightful.

Well, boy - it is difficult to write it all, and I wanted to answer your question about watercolour in more than words. I should not want anybody to see just this one sketch of mine, because I myself think nothing is right in this sketch except the general aspect, and I will wrestle with the figures till I get in watercolour what they are beginning to get in lithography - that is, more character and effect.

It is not pleasant to make sketches like the one I sent you, and then not to be able to finish them; I hate this so much that I rarely make them, except as a trial to see if I have made any progress. But now I have new courage and interest, just because I have been making a great many studies again.

I think the change in the studio will help me on, not the first day, but after a few months' struggling.

I can now do part of my work perfectly well at home, studying with models, such effects as the watercolour I sent you.

Here the windows are closed at the bottom so that the light on the group of figures falls from above. In this way I can group them in the studio, and then I get, for instance, the highlights on the heads of the figures.

Like in this watercolour.

I have tried it already with the old man, the woman and the children - it gives *splendid* effects. The desire to make them is not wanting, but I expect new failures - which I hope, however will have *something* in them to encourage rather than to make one lose courage though they are failures.

I had to pay for so many things at once out of the money you sent that I wish you could send some more but arrange it as best you can - I have so much work now that I can vary it just as I like. I long very much for your coming, just to show you the studies and to talk about the work.

Adieu, thanks again. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 3 March 1883

Dear Theo,

I enclose a little sketch which I made in the soup kitchen. They sell the soup in a large passage where the light falls from above, through a door to the right.

Now I tried to find that same effect in the studio. In the background I put a white screen, and on that I drew the hatch, according to its real position and measurements; I closed the farthest window entirely, and the middle window at the bottom, so that the light falls from *P*, exactly as in the place itself.

You see, when I have the models posing there, I get exactly the same effect as in the real soup kitchen.

In the sketch above, you see the grouping in the studio. I have put a line around the part I wanted to draw.

Of course I can study the poses of the figures as long and as much and as correctly as I like, yet generally remaining true to what I have seen.

I should like to try this again in watercolour, for instance, and work hard on it to develop it more. It seems to me that there is more opportunity for figure painting in the studio now. Before the change, when I tried it last summer, the figures got such a neutral, cold tone that one didn't feel strongly inclined to paint them. The picturesqueness disappeared, so to speak, as soon as they came into that strong light.

Do you know what I shall still need very much? Different pieces of grey or brown cloth, to get the right shade of background.

In the above sketch, the wall is white, with wainscot painted grey, the floor, darker. By paying attention to those things, one gets the local colour so much more correctly. I have a few of these things already, and also many *real* clothes. Yesterday, for instance, I bought a very picturesque patched smock of coarse linen. I am always on the lookout for such things; by paying some attention to them, the models give more satisfaction than if one leaves it all to chance.

I love my studio the way a sailor loves his ship. I know that in time it will become just what I want, but my purse doesn't always allow me to do what I should like. But the things which one buys in this way are things that last, and *now* I have a chance which perhaps I shouldn't get again later.

The change in the studio brings even more expenses - indirectly rather than directly - for I won't consider it finished before I have many more things which are necessary to make it practical.

Your patient will cause you a great deal of expense; if you can't send anything extra just now, I needn't stop working because of that. Besides, not long ago you did send something extra, so I want to emphasize that I should be able to pull through if necessary. But I have a burning desire to push on, and to make progress.

There is another thing spurring me on, namely that Rappard is also working at top speed, more than he used to, and I want to keep up with him, because then we'll get on better together, and can profit more from each other's experience.

He has painted much more than I, and has drawn longer, but we are both on just about the same level. I don't try to compete with him as a painter, but I won't let him beat me in drawing. I wish that in the future he and I should keep working in the same direction, that is, types from the people, scenes in a soup kitchen, hospital, *etc.* He has promised to come to see me one of these days. I wish I could make some arrangement with him about making a series of drawings from the people, which we should lithograph *as soon as they are good enough* - not before.

This and many other things give me a strong desire to push on vigorously.

At all events, whether you can send me something or not, I can promise you better drawings before long.

The change in the studio itself, as far as it goes, enables me to undertake some new things already.

But there would be fewer obstacles in the way, if you could send me something extra just now. I am afraid that otherwise I should be checked by some things, either by the lack of drawing materials or by not being able to take models, or by the making of a few more alterations.

I mention “better drawings,” this is meant comparatively.

Among the studies of heads - old men, *etc.* - which I still have, there are some which I will not be able to improve at once, because there is unquestionably some touch of nature in them, and at the same time something with which I am, of course, not quite satisfied; so I dare not say “I shall do it better in a few days.”

But I mean something else by “better drawings,” that is, drawn from a different point of view, and with more chiaroscuro in them, of which there is little or none in this winter's studies.

At all events, one thing I can promise you now, tomorrow I'll have the house full of people, that is, the woman's mother, and her younger sister, and a boy from the neighbourhood, and all these persons, together with my own people, will pose for the drawing of which this is the first rough sketch.

Rappard always works with models, too, and in my opinion there is no better way. Especially if one sticks to one model, one finds more and more qualities in it. So this letter complements yesterday's, in so far as you will see from it that today I made a plan for a new watercolour of the same kind I sent you, and that tomorrow I shall have the models for it. I hope to finish this one more thoroughly than the one I sent you. Shall I succeed? I can't tell beforehand.

I started, though I am still short of a few things. But one thing I have now that I didn't have before, and that is the better light. And it is worth more to me than ever so many colours. If I can have the colours too, please let me have them; but I have had so many things from you already, and in many respects I am so little satisfied with the result, till now, that I hardly dare to ask for them. As in algebra the product of two negatives is a positive, so I hope that the product of *failures* may be *success*.

Adieu. My best wishes for your patient, or rather, your convalescent.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 4 March 1883

Dear Theo,

It is just getting dark, and for curiosity's sake I am sending you today's drawing, because I wrote you about it. This morning I began a watercolour of a boy and a girl in such a soup kitchen, with another figure of a woman in a corner. That watercolour became too blurred, which was partly because the paper was not suitable.

But I saw how infinitely better the studio is now for colour, and of course I will not stop at this first experiment. So the morning passed, and I spent the afternoon making a drawing with crayon, the one piece that was left from this summer. I am sending you the drawing by the same mail. I don't think it finished enough, but as a “sketch from life” there is perhaps some life in it, and some human sentiment. By and by better things will follow.

This drawing still leaves the question of watercolours undecided, but gives a provisional answer to what you wrote about the little sketch I sent you to give you an idea of the effect of the windows in the studio.

Will you do me a *very great* favour - send me a few pieces of that crayon by mail?

There is a soul and life in that crayon - I think conté pencil is dead. Two violins may look the same on the outside, but in playing them, one sometimes finds a beautiful tone in one, and not in the other.

Now that crayon has a great deal of tone or depth. I could almost say, That crayon knows what I want, it listens with intelligence and obeys; the conté pencil is indifferent and unwilling.

The crayon has a real gypsy soul; if it isn't asking too much of you, send me some of it.

Who knows, if now, with the better light, and the crayon, and the lithographic crayon, I shan't succeed in making something for illustrated papers. *Current events* - that was what they asked for - if they mean such things as, for instance, illuminations for the king's birthday, I should care very little for it - but if their lordships the managers would consent to rank scenes from the daily life of the people under current events, I should gladly try my best to make them.

When I have some more of that crayon, I shall make a few more figures of almshouse men.

And from those soup kitchens, of which this is the first, you will get some quite different compositions.

You will perhaps find this size a little too large, but I think after having worked some time, always with models, I shall succeed in making the figures so vigorous that their being large won't matter, and it will be even better that way. It need not prevent my making smaller ones, and I can always reduce the size. There is much that I don't like in this rough sketch, but I know for sure that in a short time I shall make progress.

When you see this group of people together, can you understand that I feel at home with them?

Some time ago I read the following words in Eliot's Felix Holt the Radical:

The people I live among have the same follies and vices as the rich, only they *have their own forms* of folly and vice - and they have not what are called the refinements of the rich to make their faults more bearable.

It doesn't much matter to me - I am not fond of those refinements, but some people are, and find it difficult to feel at home with such persons as have them not.

I shouldn't have thought of it in these terms, but I have felt the same sometimes. As a painter I not only feel perfectly at home and contented with them, but I find in them a quality that sometimes reminds me of gypsies, at least of something as picturesque.

As I have written so often lately, I probably won't write again before the tenth; don't send me the money later if you can help it, for I promised Leurs I should pay something off about that time; I must do that before I can get some new things which I shall need. For instance, I intend to buy, at what they call wholesale price, several things which he has had for a long time, and will let me have cheaply. Especially a number of sheets of a rough kind of watercolour paper which is no longer in demand, but which I like better than the smooth kind. You would do me a great favour by sending that crayon.

Adieu, my very best wishes, especially for your patient. Believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 5 March 1883

Amice Rappard,

Thanks for your letter of February 27, which I'm answering today. First as to what you say about lithography. You will have seen that the very same paper is used for ink and for crayon. I got the paper from Jos. Smulders & Co., paper dealers, Spuistraat, of this city; their storehouse is on the Laan, and they have a large stock of stones of various sizes there. They called it “Korn” paper, and they had bought it for one of the ministries, where they drew all kinds of maps on it for lithographic reproduction.

There were a number of sheets left, and I took these, all of them. At the time he told me he would order some more sheets - did he do it? - I don't know - but Smulders knows all about it at any rate, and can have it sent to him by parcel post within a few days. It is rather expensive: 1.75 guilders per sheet. The lithographic crayon - likewise made expressly for this paper - is more expensive than the ordinary kind, and in my opinion much worse than the crayon that is *not* expressly made for it. Autographic ink, liquid or in lumps [is certainly also sold by] Smulders and other dealers - for surely you can find these ingredients in all lithographers' shops.

The scraper I used has this form: I got it at Smulders's - [illegible] called a point - to scratch hair with, for instance, only for light fine scratches like those an etching needle makes, but which turn out white on the black surface.

It goes without saying that you - [illegible] can use all kinds of implements as scrapers; the shape doesn't matter - now and then I scrape with my pocket-knife.

What am I paying for my proofs? ? - he promised to state a fixed price, as well as the prices for printing and for the stones. The prices that I paid provisionally do not count; as the printer himself was not familiar with the method, we have compounded the matter - and also because there were failures, *etc.* I shall get estimates from Smulders, however, that will be rather important to know, but he will have to calculate them at his leisure. The fact is that he will give me the prices of the stones in various sizes, if taken by the dozen, and also the printing expenses for, say, a series of a dozen drawings and a series of two dozen - besides the price of the paper. When I saw him the last time he was in an awful rush and said, “Come and discuss it again by the end of March; then we'll go to the warehouse and look everything over together.” So for the time being I hardly know anything about the real prices.

The ink's running when making transfers isn't caused directly by the thickness of the lines; I have seen enormously thick lines transferred quite clearly. As for your friend who draws with a little pen - well, that's his business - but personally I think it decidedly wrong, because I'm afraid that by doing this he is trying to get an effect from the process that's not in its character.

If one wants to work with a fine point and yet remain vigorous, then I know only one method - *etching*. If one wants to work with the pen and autographic ink, then I am of the opinion that one should in no case take a finer pen than an ordinary writing pen. Very fine pens, like very elegant people, are sometimes amazingly useless; and, as I see it, they often lack elasticity which the most ordinary pens just naturally have to a certain extent.

Last year I bought at least six special penholders and all kinds of nibs - and the whole lot was rubbish. But they *looked* very practical. Well - I'm none too sure myself - there may be good ones among them, and one may possibly get good results by working with finer pens and autographic ink - all right, so be it - I shall be delighted if it turns out well, but I should think one would not get the satisfaction one derives from the more fluent, bolder stroke of an ordinary quill pen, for instance.

Now something else. Do you know “black mountain crayon”? Last year I got some big sticks about this size from my brother.

I worked with it but without paying much attention to it; I found a piece of it the other day, however, and I was struck by its beautiful black colour.

Well, yesterday I made a drawing with it - women and children at the serving window of the public soup kitchen. And I can tell you I was delighted with this experiment.

I've scratched a few strokes here at random in order to let you see the colour of the black. Don't you think it's a beautifully warm tone?

I immediately wrote to my brother for more of it - shall I send you a piece when I get it? But if you know it already, and if you should be able to get it in your town, then please send me some. For I intend to go on using it in combination with lithographic crayon. It's just as if there's soul and life in that stuff, and as if it understood what you mean to express and co-operated. I should like to call it “gypsy crayon.” One need not use a holder, as the pieces are so long. It has the colour of a ploughed field on a summer evening! I would provide myself with a bushel, if it were sold by the bushel, which I doubt.

The Album des Vosges is a relatively old publication, but it certainly does exist. And it is beautiful.

Your list of wood engravings is very good, especially the Lançons; I have the “Contrebandiers” too, but not the “Comité d'aide” [Committee of Assistance], for instance. But I have found a duplicate of precisely the “Soup Distribution” - perhaps it is the same one, perhaps not - and I have a duplicate of “Ragpickers in a Pub.” So you can have these.

I know little sketches by Renouard of cats, pigs and rabbits, but I haven't got any. I have “Les Cours de Gambetta” and “Mendiants le jour de l'an” [Beggars on New Year's Day] besides.

I have found two beautiful Régameys - a “Foundlings' Hospital in Japan” by F. Régamey; and by Guillaume Régamey, soldiers in white cloaks leading black horses by the bridle, after a painted sketch, very beautiful. I read a short biography of the two brothers. Guillaume lived only to the age of thirty-eight. Last fall he exhibited some military - [illegible] rather like Boulanger. After that he retired somewhat; he seems to have had an ailment that made life difficult for him. But he kept on working through it all - for many years. A multitude of superb studies came to light after he died - there has been an exhibition of them - hardly anybody knew of their existence during his lifetime. A fine thing, eh?

F. Régamey is traveling around a good deal, and as you know he is very strong on Japanese art. What you say about the French wood engravings in general rather coincides with my own opinion. The English especially have found the *soul* of the wood engravings - the original character that is just as peculiar as the character of etchings. Take Buckmann's “A London Dustyard,” for instance, and the “Harbour of Refuge” by Walker. Boetzel and Lavieille know how to do it too all the same, but Swain is the master. I think the Lançons engraved by Moller, however, have a very original character too. There is a lot of good, for instance, in the Feyen-Perrins done by Boetzel and the Millets by Lavieille. But for the rest, yes, they often lapse into industrialism, into the unfeeling.

You ask me about De Bock. I haven't been to see him for a long time, in fact, not since before I fell ill. I noticed that every time I came to him or met him in the street, he said, “Oh, I'll come and see you one of these days,” in such a way that I felt I had to conclude from it, Don't come to see me until I come to see you, which will never happen. Anyhow I haven't gone there again, because I certainly don't want to intrude. I know that De Bock is working on a large picture at the moment; this winter I saw some smaller ones which I thought very beautiful. I've met De Bock twice lately - not in his studio but in the street, in a fur coat, kid gloves, etc., in short like a man in very flourishing circumstances. I hear that he is doing what they call flourishing in general.

I often think his work very fine - but it does not remind me primarily of Ruysdael, for instance - and I hardly think this will be your lasting, well-considered impression.

In point of fact I should like greatly to go to his studio again, for the very reason that I should so like to be convinced that it is really *as* beautiful as I should like it to be, for now I cannot help having my doubts about him every now and then. My impression of him last year was really not very favourable - he was continually talking about Millet - very good! - and about the greatness and breadth of Millet - I talked with him about it once, for instance, in the country, in the Scheveningse Bosjes [Groves]. I said then, “But, De Bock, if Millet were here at this moment, then would he look at those clouds and that grass and those twenty-seven tree trunks and forget that little fellow over there in his bombazine clothes, who is sitting there on the stump of a tree eating his poor-man's lunch, his spade lying at his side? Or do you think that little part of the scene, where the little fellow is sitting, would be the exact spot on which he would concentrate his attention? I don't believe I am less fond of Millet than you are,” I said; “it pleases me enormously that you have a certain admiration for Millet - but, pardon me, I don't think Millet would look at the things you point out to me all the time. Millet is primarily, and more than any other, the painter of *humanity*. He has unquestionably painted landscapes, and they are beautiful - nothing is surer than that - but I find it hard to understand how you can really mean it when you say that you see in Millet *principally* those things you now point out to me.”

In short, Rappard, I find more of *Bilders*, for instance, than of Millet or Ruysdael in our friend De Bock. But I may be mistaken for all that, and see more in his work later on; nothing would please me more.

I most certainly like Bilders too - and there is no picture of De Bock's that I don't look at with a certain pleasure - there is always something fresh and genial about it. But there is a certain kind of art - perhaps less flowery, more thorny - of which I find more in my own heart.

I know, Ruysdael himself has had his metamorphoses, and perhaps his most beautiful works are not the waterfalls and the grand forest views but “L'estacade aux eaux rousses” and “Le Buisson” in the Louvre, “The Mill at Wijk bij Duurstede” in the Van der Hoop Collection, the “Bleacheries at Overveen” in the Mauritshuis [museum in The Hague] and other more commonplace things which he turned to in later years, probably under the influence of Rembrandt and Vermeer of Delft. I wish something similar would happen to De Bock, but will this be the case? I should be sorry for him if he did not land more in the thorns than in the flowerets - that's all.

And although I have, unintentionally, been a little à froid with him of late, nothing more serious has occurred between him and me than a few discussions about Millet and similar topics. I have nothing against him, only I haven't exactly seen the style of Millet or Ruysdael in him up to now - I think his style for the present is something like Bilders's; I don't mean Gerard Bilders but the old one.

I'm still quite delighted with the alterations in my studio, especially since the experiments I've made with various models have shown me how great an improvement it is. Formerly a figure in the studio cast no sharp shadow because the strong reflection threw light on it again, and so all effects were neutralized. This drawback has now been overcome.

Don't think that I am going to neglect the lithographs, but I have had so many expenses, and I still have to buy so many necessaries, that I cannot attack new stones. Nothing will be lost by waiting a bit. I am very eager to work more with the “black mountain crayon.”

Do you know what I have a great longing for now and then? - for a look at your studio. And not only that, but also for a look at the places you are in the habit of walking in when hunting up subjects. No doubt there are beautiful little courts and alleys in Utrecht too.

The Hague is beautiful - and there is an enormous variety of scenes. I hope to work hard this year. There are also often financial difficulties that hamper me, which you will understand, and this is the very reason why - because I want to work much and must in fact do so - I shall concentrate more and more on black and white.

When I'm doing watercolours or oil paintings I must stop every now and then on account of the expense, but with a piece of crayon or lead pencil one has only the expense of the model and some paper. And I prefer to spend the little I have on models, I assure you, than to spend it on painting materials. I have never regretted the money I spend on models.

Do you have the portrait of Carlyle - that beautiful one in the Graphic? At the moment I am reading his Sartor Resartus - “the philosophy of old clothes.” Among the “old clothes” he includes all kinds of forms and in the matter of religion all dogmas; it is beautiful - and faithful to reality - and humane. There has been a lot of grumbling about this book, as about his other books. Many consider Carlyle a monster - a joke about his “philosophy of old clothes” runs like this: Carlyle not only strips mankind to the skin, he even flays it. Something like that. Well, this is not true, but it most certainly is true that be is honest enough not to call the shirt the skin - and very far from seeing a tendency to belittle man in his works, I find, on the contrary, that he raises man to a high position in the universe. And much more than bitter criticism I find in him a love of humanity besides - a great love. He - Carlyle - has learned much from Goethe - but still more, I believe, from a certain man who did not write books, but whose words, though he did not write them down himself, have endured - namely Jesus... who, long before Carlyle, included many forms of all kinds of things among the “old clothes” too.

I bought a new sixpenny edition of Dickens's Christmas Carol and The Haunted Man (London, Chapman & Hall) this week, in which there are some seven illustrations, e.g., among other things, a “Secondhand Shop” by Barnard. I admire everything that Dickens wrote, but I have reread these two “children's tales” nearly every year since I was a boy, and they are new to me again every time. Barnard understood Dickens well. The other day I saw photographs again of some black-and-white drawings by Barnard, a series of characters from Dickens's books; I saw Mrs. Camp, Little Dorrit, Sikes, Sydney Carton and some others. They are highly accentuated figures - most important, treated as cartoons.

There is no writer, in my opinion, who is *so* much a painter and a black-and-white artist as Dickens. His figures are resurrections. On a nursery print I found a little wood engraving after Barnard by Swain - a black policeman is dragging along a woman in white who is struggling backward, and a crowd of street urchins is following them. It is hardly possible to express *so* much of the true character of a poor neighborhood with fewer means. I shall try to get another copy of this print for you; as a matter of fact it's only a small sketch.

Unfortunately I have *not* been able to get that sheet of Fildes's “Empty Chair” for you, which was promised me together with some others. Now the man remembers getting rid of them some years ago.

Write soon again - I wish you good luck with your work in every respect. By the way, I have a nearly complete French edition of Dickens, translated under the supervision of Dickens himself. I think you told me once that you could not enjoy all the English books by Dickens because of the sometimes complicated English, as for instance the miners' [sic] dialect in Hard Times. If you should ever want to read something of this French edition, it is at your disposal, and I am even willing to exchange the whole collection of Dickens's works in French for something else, if you should care to. I am thinking of gradually getting the English Household Edition.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

There is character too in the illustrations by John Leech and Cruikshank - but the Barnards are more intensively worked out. Nevertheless, Leech is strong on street urchins.

In the Graphic for February 10, 1883, there is a little figure by Frank Hol - a child in a little attic, very full of character; I bought the number especially for that.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 6 March 1883

Dear brother,

I didn't intend to write so soon again - but as you know, I am trying to do different kinds of drawings. And now again today I made another sketch with the rest of that little piece of crayon - and afterward washed it in with sepia. I think I find in this crayon all kinds of qualities which make it an excellent means of expressing things from nature.

This morning I took a walk outside the town, in the meadows behind the Zuidbuitensingel where Maris first lived, and where the public ash dump is. I stood there a long time, looking at a row of the most twisted, gnarled, sorry-looking pollard willows I have ever seen. They bordered a path of vegetable garden - freshly dug up - and they were mirrored in a dirty little ditch - very dirty - but in which some blades of spring grass were already sparkling. But that rough brown bark, the freshly spaded earth, in which one could see the fertility, as it were - it all had something so intensely rich in the dark deep tones that it reminded me again of this crayon. So that as soon as I have some more, I hope to try my hand at landscape.

Though the enclosed sketch is very unfinished, it seemed to me there might be things in it compatible with your intentions - and again, it is a “sketch from life.” Don't think I consider it of good quality, even if it isn't detailed enough - far from it; but the elaborateness which you as well as I should like to see in it doesn't consist so much of details added later, but ought to be expressed at once, more than is the case now. For it must not lose its freshness that way, and, if only the impression is correct, sometimes there is expression even in unfinished things. But of course I shall try to bring more variation into the tones. “Y mettre des détails” leaves me rather cool, but “dégrossit” [take away the coarseness] is certainly my aim, that is, “serrer la forme de plus près” [concentrating the form more firmly]. Though this sketch is not sufficiently so, that little bit of sepia made so much difference in the general effect that, comparing it to yesterday's, I thought you could see the different ways in which that crayon can be used.

I wrote Rappard about the crayon yesterday, because I had to write him about various things concerning lithography; and as I wanted to send him a few sketches done with it, I used it for some drawings of our baby, in different positions, and I found it is very well suited to sketching, too. One also can bring in demitones by means of breadcrumbs. Perhaps only the very deepest shadows can't be done very well with it, but in many cases one can use lithographic crayon then, which is also very rich in tone.

I think you will see from the figures how the studio has improved as to light. How beautiful everything out-of-doors is these days, don't you think so?

You can imagine that I am full of plans.

You know that I am working on many different things, for I should so much like to know many different techniques; because it stimulates one to work hard, and creates new ideas.

I wish I had thought of that crayon before, for it is preferable to many other things. Nor is it as hard as a conté pencil - that is, it doesn't scratch so.

I don't ask you to send me some because I could not work without it, but because with it, I could make many other things in addition to my usual work.

Did I already write you about those two large etchings by Israëls, a man lighting his pipe and the interior of a workman's home? How beautiful they are. I think it is so splendid of Israëls to go on with his etching, the more so because all the others have given it up, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which the etching club was originally started. At least, most of them haven't made any progress in etching, and if they make an etching now, it is no better or more perfect than what they did years ago. But father Israëls, notwithstanding his grey hairs, is still young enough to make progress - and great progress, too - and I call this real youth and lasting vitality.

Confound it, if the others had done the same, what beautiful Dutch etchings would have been given to the world. I have two little etchings by Israëls, perhaps his very first, a little girl with a spade in a garden, and a woman with a basket on her back; do you know them? I believe the Belgian Aquafortistes publish it.

So with that little bit of crayon I have already made two sketches, and some small croquis, too, and there is still some left. I think perhaps in the future I am going to use little else for the ordinary work.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 11 March 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter of the 9th of March, and for the enclosed. Is your patient improving? I hope in this case “no news is good news.”

If it has been as cold in Paris as it was here last week, it cannot have agreed very well with her.

When you say that you sometimes wish we could talk together more, about a variety of things in art, I for my part have that longing continually, and sometimes very strongly.

So often I should like to know your opinion about this or that, about some studies, etc., for instance, if they might be of some use, or if it would be advisable, for some reason or other, to go more deeply into them.

So often I should like to have some more information about things on which you are better informed than I, and I should like to know more about the state of things, I mean what kind of work the painters are producing. One can write about it to some extent, but writing takes time, and one cannot always get to it, nor can one go enough into detail.

And just now, owing to a piling up of studies, it would be worth a great deal to me if we could talk things over together, and I should also like so much to have you see how the studio is improved.

Well, let us hope that it will not be so very, very long before you come to Holland.

Be clear in your mind, dear brother, how strongly and intensely I feel the enormous debt I owe you for your faithful help.

It would be difficult for me to express all my thoughts about it. It constantly remains a source of disappointment to me that my drawings are not yet what I want them to be. The difficulties are indeed numerous and great, and cannot be overcome at once. To make progress is a kind of miner's work; it doesn't advance as quickly as one would like, and as others also expect, but as one stands before such a task, the basic necessities are patience and faithfulness. In fact, I do not think much about the difficulties, because if one thought of them too much one would get stunned or disturbed.

A weaver who has to direct and to interweave a great many little threads has no time to philosophize about it, but rather he is so absorbed in his work that he doesn't think but acts, and he *feels* how things must go more than he can explain it. Even though neither you nor I, in talking together, would come to any definite plans, etc., perhaps we might mutually strengthen that *feeling* that something is ripening within us. And that is what I should like.

This morning I was at Van der Weele's, who was working at a marvellous picture of diggers, horses, and sand wagons, large size. It was beautiful in tone and colour, a grey morning haze, it was virile in drawing and composition, there was style and character in it - in fact it was by far the most beautiful and strongest thing of his I have ever seen. He had also painted three very beautiful serious studies of an old white horse, and also a beautiful little landscape in the dunes.

This week he will probably look in at my studio, which I should like very much indeed.

Last week I met Breitner in the street; his position in Rotterdam frees him from much anxiety; however, Van der Weele had a little note from him just this morning, to the effect that he was ill again. To tell you the truth, the impression I had when I saw him again was not very assuring; he had an air of disappointment, and he spoke in rather a queer way about his work.

Now I still have to tell you about the surprise I have had. I received a letter from Father, very cordial and cheerful, it seemed to me, with twenty-five guilders enclosed. Father wrote he had received some money, on which he had no longer counted, and he wanted me to share in it. Wasn't that nice of him, however it quite embarrasses me.

But, involuntarily, a thought occurred to me. Can it he, perhaps, that Father has heard, from someone or other, that I was very hard up? I hope that this was not his motive, for I think this idea of my circumstances would not be correct. And it might give Father anxieties which would be quite out of place. You will understand my meaning better than Father would if I were to try to explain it to him.

In my opinion, I am often *rich as Crœsus*, not in money, but (though it doesn't happen every day) rich, because I have found in my work something to which I can devote myself heart and soul, and which gives inspiration and significance to life.

Of course my moods vary, but there is an average of serenity. I have a sure *faith* in art, a sure confidence that it is a powerful stream, which hears a man to harbour, though he himself must do his bit too; and at all events I think it such a great blessing, when a man has found his work, that I cannot count myself among the unfortunate. I mean, I may be in certain relatively great difficulties, and there may be gloomy days in my life, but I shouldn't want to be counted among the unfortunate nor would it be correct.

You write in your letter something which I sometimes *feel also*: “Sometimes I do not know how I shall pull through.”

Look here, I often feel the same in *more than one respect,* not only in *financial* things, but in art itself, and in *life* in general. But do you think that something exceptional? Don't you think every man with a little pluck and energy has those moments?

Moments of melancholy, of distress, of anguish, I think we all have them, more or less, and it is a condition of every *conscious* human life. It seems that some people have no self-consciousness. But those who have it, they may sometimes be in distress, but for all that they are not unhappy, nor is it something exceptional that happens to them.

And sometimes there comes relief, sometimes there comes new inner energy, and one rises up from it, till at last, some day, one perhaps doesn't rise up any more, *que soit*, but that is nothing extraordinary, and I repeat, *such is the common human fate, in my opinion*.

Father's letter was an answer to a letter of mine, which I remember quite well was very cheerful, for I told him about the changes in the studio, and I did not write anything to Father that could give rise to thoughts of my being in any difficulties, either financial or otherwise. In fact, Father doesn't write anything about it, and his letter is very cheerful and cordial, but the money came so unexpectedly that involuntarily the thought came into my head, can it be that Father is worried about me? If I am mistaken in this, it would be very much out of place to write as if that were the principal impression his kindness has made upon me - the principal impression being that I feel very grateful for having received something which enables me to do several things that otherwise I couldn't have done. But I tell you my thoughts about it, because in case you should perceive that Father is worrying about me, you would be better able to reassure him than I.

At the same time, you see from this that I have had a real stroke of luck. I intend to spend it on getting my watercolour things in good shape. I will pay off Leurs and will be able to arrange for different things in the studio, in order to make it even more practical.

It sometimes seems to me that the prices of the various painting and drawing materials are terribly inflated. So that it thwarts many a person from painting. One of my ideals is that there would be more institutions like the *Graphic,* for instance, where people who want to work can find all the materials, on condition that a certain ability and energy is demonstrated.

Like Cadart, in his day, enabled many a man to etch, who wouldn't have been able to etch, because of the expenses, if he had had to pay them from his own pocket.

I am privileged above many others, but I cannot do everything which I might have the courage and energy to undertake. The expenses are so extensive, beginning with a model and food and housing, and ending with the different colours and brushes.

And that is also like a weaving loom, where the different threads must be kept apart.

But we all have to bear up against the same thing - so just because everyone who paints or draws has to hear it, and if alone would almost sink down under it, why shouldn't more painters join hands, to work together, like soldiers of the rank and file; and why, especially, are those branches of art which are least expensive so much despised?

As to the crayon, I do not know whether the one you gave me came from the Plaats, but I am quite sure that you gave it to me on your visit of last summer, or *perhaps when I was still in Etten*. In a drug store I found a few remnants, perhaps six pieces, but all in small bits. Please keep it in mind. When I again asked Leurs for it, he told me that Jaap Maris had asked him so often for it.

I have made two sketches with it again, a cradle, and one more like the one I sent you already, in which I washed a great deal with sepia. As to what you write about that sketch of those two figures, the one above the other, it is mainly an effect of perspective, and also of the great difference in size between the little child and the woman on the basket.

What I myself dislike more than that line of the composition is something which, in fact, you have noticed, that the two figures are too much of one tone, which is partly the fault of the crayon, which does not express all shades, and one would like to strengthen it with lithographic crayon, for instance. But I think that the principal reason is that I do not always have time enough to work as elaborately as I should like. If one works a long time on a drawing, it is possible to go more into detail, to seek the different tones. But too often I must work in a hurry. I dare not ask too much from my models. If I paid them better, I should have the right to demand longer poses, and could make better progress.

At present, I often think I get more from them than a just return on what I pay them in money.

However, I do not mean to say that there is not a still more important reason, namely, that I must become more skilled than I am before I can be ever so slightly satisfied with myself. And by and by I hope to make better and more elaborate things in the same amount of time that I now spend on them.

Well, brother, my best wishes for your patient, I long sometimes for another description of an aspect of Paris from you, and — rest assured I'll make shift as best I can, with what your faithful help gives me — that I try and try to make an even better use of it, and especially that I blame myself for being unable to manage to do what I want with it. Adieu with a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 21 March 1883

Dear Theo,

Many warm thanks for your letter and the enclosure. I was glad to hear some more details about your patient, the more so as the news seemed to be very favourable.

What you write about her influence on other people is very charming. I believe such things are true, the influence exerted by a good person is sometimes far reaching. Curiously enough, it has been compared to leaven. Two good people - man and woman combined - with the same intentions and object in life, actuated by the same serious purpose, what couldn't they accomplish!

I have often thought of that.

For, by co-operating, the power of goodness is not just doubled, but multiplied many times, as by involution, to use a mathematical term.

Well - your description of the house and its surroundings, the cabstand, is very good; it has a more characteristic setting than your other descriptions of the city; the cabstand is excellent, can I have that personage with the red nose pose for me someday?

I am glad you saw our friend Wisselingh again. So he has come back to Paris - is *he still with the firm of Cottier?*

Will you give him my best regards sometime? If he comes to Holland, a visit from him would give me great pleasure - indeed, he has already promised as much. I wish you could remind him, so that he won't forget. I should like to ask him several things about London. Did he happen to see my lithographs? I should like to renew his acquaintance - I always found much that was attractive in him, and he knows many things, and has original and correct sentiments in things of art; in short, he is a man of character.

The enclosed scratch is from a drawing which I started early this morning, and I worked on it the whole day. Perhaps it is the best one I've made up till now, at least in light and shadow. I am sending you the little sketch because I think you will see from it how much I gained by the change of light in the studio. But it is impossible to work on this paper so that it gets the same values; the sketch hasn't the right proportions, and the drawing has more foreground. This figure is posed against the light, and to render it, one needs more than an outline because, as the light falls from a single window, the modelling becomes stronger, and the values become harmonious and related to each other. From this conception results first, the difficulty of rendering what one has before one's eyes, and second, something else which is rather difficult - that is, the problem of posing a figure and letting the light fall so that it renders the character most completely and strongly. The light in what one sees outside or inside must be analyzed so that one can find the same effect again.

I'm very glad to hear you found the crayon. It didn't arrive in today's mail, however, though you wrote you had sent it. If you have forgotten it, I remind you of it again, and if you have already sent it, it will certainly arrive soon. I have a new stock of lithographic crayon, and am going to combine it with drawing crayon, which I think *must* give good results.

This week I was very busy drawing wheelbarrows; a little fellow viewed from the back came out quite well, I think. Van der Weele came to see me, and we had a private exhibition of wood engravings, seated cosily on a wheelbarrow, for I was just working with a model. He will begin to collect them too, and will try to get some from the collection of the late Stam, the wood engraver.

I didn't tell you yet that I have almost the whole Graphic complete now, from the very beginning in 1870. Of course, not everything, there is too much chaff - but the best things from it. When one sees, for instance, Herkomer's work, arranged together instead of scattered among many insignificant things, it is, in the first place, easier and pleasanter to look at, but in addition, one learns to distinguish the characteristics of the various masters, and the great difference between the draughtsmen.

How I should love to see something of Lhermitte's.

I can't tell you enough how happy I am with the changes in the studio, and how full I am of all kinds of figures I want to make.

Among the things Van der Weele saw were this winter's studies of heads. I am sure they will be of use to me later on, the same as the other studies. Do you know what pleased me this winter? You remember Van der Weele came to see me months ago, when I was doing studies of diggers, one of which I tried to make a lithograph of. He saw them at the time, but they didn't seem to interest him, definitely not. Now, recently, for the picture on which he's working, he has either had diggers pose for him or has observed them while they were at work - in fact he has studied diggers closely from nature.

Now, in looking over my studies, when we came to the diggers, he spoke quite differently of them than he did last winter; at least, he wasn't so quick to say, “This or that isn't right.” I myself didn't mention them at all this time. But more and more I begin to notice in myself, as well as in others, how often one is mistaken in thinking this or that “*isn't so,*” or “*that's not correct*” - how often one says it when it doesn't apply, I myself no less than others. One thinks one knows something for sure, and yet if one wants to be honest, one must take it back later.

Your description of the cabstand and the ancient urinal with the posters on it is really very good - it's a real pity you don't draw it.

Speaking of posters, the places where they are pasted up are sometimes a queer parody on the posters themselves, or the reverse.

For instance, to quote one of many, over the entrance of the pawnshop, I saw a poster advertising in large characters

“Prospectus
Hearth and Home”

N.B. - Hearth and Home is a magazine, as you perhaps know. I thought it rather good; if one paid more attention, one might find even better ones.

Gavarni once made something of it - it was the entrance to a house, over which was written, “On prend des enfants en sevrage” [Here children are minded]. Standing on the steps were a woman of very unfavorable appearance and a fellow with a cutty in his mouth, obviously the owners of the institution. Against the wall was stuck a poster: “*Perdu* un enfant, tel et tel” [*Lost* such and such a child].

Another one is, “Au rendezvous de la fraternité” [At the meeting place of brotherliness], the sign at an inn where a few tipsy fellows are scuffling.

Rappard is going to send a large picture to the Amsterdam exhibition. It represents four tile painters around a table. Indirectly I've heard much good about it. Now, though it's not my intention to do large pictures for exhibitions, still I wouldn't like to do work inferior to Rappard's, for instance.

I even find something animating in the thought that one works in one direction, the other in another, yet there is still mutual sympathy. Competition, when it proceeds from jealousy, is quite a different thing from trying one's best to make the work as good as possible, *out of mutual respect*. “Les extrêmes se touchent.” I do not see any good in jealousy, but I would despise a friendship which did not call for some exertion on both sides to maintain the same level.

The thing I begin to long very much for is to work with more models at a time. To do somewhat more complicated drawings. But the longing for it is not too intense, I have enough to do as it is.

At Van der Weele's I saw the studies for his large picture. Those studies were excellent - conscientiously done, but one who understands a little how studies from nature are made, and knows the difference between these and the picture or ultimate composition, naturally doesn't expect to find the picture in the studies.

No wonder the greatness and unity of the picture isn't in the studies; the studies are made for the figures - either horses or men, it doesn't matter - and the surroundings are neglected; for instance, there isn't enough background or foreground, *etc.* They do not stand out and are not *in their right places as they are in the picture*. Does everybody understand this when they look at studies? I hope you will keep it in mind when you see mine, especially when, sooner or later, you see the ones I still have here. This week, for fun, I sketched a few in different proportions, in such a way that I can make them into a whole. The thing which I would call picturesqueness came by itself, simply by stressing a few lines, and washing in a few flat tones with sepia. What I want to say is, don't think that with respect to space I look at nature with a different eye than, for instance, Van der Weele.

Adieu. Write soon again, best wishes,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

In this little sketch you see something which I spoke about at the end of this letter. Now there is no foreground here at all, though in the real study there is a little more of it; but if I combined this study, for instance, with one of the diggers, let's say the one in the lithograph, then a large patch of ground would belong in front, and, for instance, a woody stretch behind, with a bit of sky visible quite high up, just to indicate where the light comes from. So that it would perhaps become a wide composition, and then the figure would be in its surroundings and in its place.

If I put all this into the study itself, the figure would become so small that it would be of no use to me as a serious study of the figure. Believe me, the aspect is not the hardest thing; if my studies are good, I am quite confident of the rest.

Space, atmosphere, and broadness are things which you mustn't think I neglect, but one mustn't *begin* with them; first the foundation, then the roof follows in time.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 21 March 1883

Amice Rappard,

Thanks for your letter; I was interested to learn that you are working on your picture “The Tile Painters” again. I also found something in your letter which bears on your coming here, which was all the more reason for me to decide to send you one of these days the rest of the wood engraving duplicates that I have, as I think you would *not* like to wait for them any longer than necessary. You will, as I see it, *after*looking them over, consider various of the sheets not unsatisfactory possessions. I have also taken apart the Graphic Portfolio and inserted the items among my loose sheets. This is the reason why you have already got Herkomer's “Low Lodginghouse,” and a number of the best ones in the present batch too. I am sending you the ordinary prints of some of the sheets whose duplicates I got in this way, but also some others which are impressions from the book itself, which means that they are not prints from cliches but impressions of the original blocks.

In the present package you will at last find some things by Boyd Houghton, namely “Shaker Evans,” “Liverpool Harbour,” “Mail in the Wilderness” and “Niagara Falls.” After you have seen my Boyd Houghtons from the first year of the Graphics you will understand more clearly what I wrote about the importance of this master's work. Van der Weele saw them too this week and was struck by them.

This week I have been working on drawings of figures with wheelbarrows - perhaps for lithographs too - but how do I know what will come of it? - I just go on drawing, that's all. As I told you just now, Van der Weele came to see me during the week. I had just been working from the model, and we held an art show of pictures from the Graphic spread out on a wheelbarrow that had been the attribute of the model I had been drawing. We looked at one sheet by Boyd Houghton with special attention - I already wrote you about it once - it represents a corridor in the offices of the Graphic at Christmas. The artists' models come to wish them a Merry Christmas, and most probably to receive tips. Most of the models are invalids - a man on crutches leads the procession - his coattail is held by a blind man, who is carrying another man on his back who cannot walk at all - his coattail again is held by a second blind man, who is followed by a wounded man with a bandage around his head, and after him come others shuffling along. I said to Van der Weele, “Just tell me - do you think we use *enough models*??” Van der Weele answered, “When Israëls came to my studio the other day, and saw my large picture of the sand carts, he said, I advise you above all to use a lot of models.”

Well, I believe that many would use more models if they had a bit more money - but if we only spent every tenpence we could spare on them all the same...! It would be wonderful if the artists combined, and there was some place where the models could meet every day, as in the old days of the *Graphic*.

Well, however that may be, *let's encourage each other to do it,* and let's inspire each other as much as we can to work, on, not in the manner the dealers want us to, but with virile strength, truth, good faith and honesty. All of which has in my opinion a direct bearing on working from the model. It seems to be some kind of fate that what one produces in this fashion is called “unpleasing”; but I think that this imaginary but very active prejudice would have to yield to *contrary* efforts on the part of the painters, provided these painters agreed among themselves, and helped and backed each other up, and no longer let the dealers be the only ones to speak to the public, but spoke up themselves once in a while too; for although I am willing to admit that what a painter would say about his own work would not always be understood, I am still of the opinion that a better seed would be sown in the field of public opinion in this way than the seeds the dealers and such fellows customarily sow according to a never-changing formula - convention …

These thoughts cannot but lead me to the question of exhibitions. You are working for exhibitions - all right - I for my part most decidedly don't hold with exhibitions. I used to attach more value to them than I do now - I don't know why - formerly I looked upon exhibitions otherwise than I do now - perhaps I once had rather too good an opportunity to look behind the scenes at some proceedings connected with exhibitions - and perhaps it is not merely indifference on my part when I say that many people are mistaken about the results of an exhibition. I don't want to expatiate on this theme at present, I only want to say this, Speaking for myself, I expect more good from a uniting of *painters* actuated by mutual sympathy and singleness of purpose and warm friendship and loyalty than from a uniting of their *works* by means of exhibitions.

I do not venture to infer from the fact that I see a number of pictures hanging together in the same hall that there is a spirit of unity and mutual respect and wholesome co-operation among those who made said pictures, *etc.* I consider this latter exigency - whether it is to be or not to be - so important that very little else can be counted important except in connection with achieving spiritual unity, and however important some other things may be considered by themselves, no substitute can ever make up for the lack of this unity; and the lack of it means the lack of sure ground to stand on. I don't at all desire that exhibitions, etc., should be discontinued, but what I do desire is a reform, or rather a renewal and strengthening, of painters' societies and of the co-operation among painters, all of which would have such an influence that even exhibitions would actually become useful.

As regards your “Tile Painters” - and I was interested to hear that you have started working on it again - I am extremely curious to know what it is and how it will turn out. I am interested in everything connected with this picture or your other pictures, and all that I see of them or hear of them arouses my sympathy - whether or not they are going to be sent to an exhibition leaves me as indifferent as the kind of frame you have put around them.

Well, adieu. Write again soon.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 21-28 March 1883

The Hague, 21 -28 March 1883
My dear Theo,
You have so often afforded me a glimpse of Paris with your descriptions, this time for a change I am giving you a glimpse out of my window at the snow-covered yard.
I am adding a glimpse into a corner of the house, and they are two impressions of one and the same winter's day.

We are surrounded by poetry on all sides, but putting it on paper is, alas, not as readily done as looking at it.

I made a watercolour of the above, from which this small sketch is taken, but I don't think it is vivid and powerful enough.

I believe I've already written to you that I was able to find some mountain chalk here in the city. I am at work with that, as well.

To my mind the cold spell we had last week was the most perfect part of this winter. It was fantastically beautiful, what with the snow and the curious skies. The thawing of the snow today was almost more beautiful still. But it was *typical* winter weather, if I may call it that - the kind of weather that awakens old memories and lends the most ordinary things the sort of look one cannot help associating with stories from the age of stagecoaches and post chaises.

Here, for example, is a quick little sketch I made in just such a dream-like state. It shows a gentleman who, having missed a coach or something of the sort, has had to spend the night in a village inn. Now he has risen early, and having ordered a glass of brandy against the cold, he is paying the landlady (a little woman in a peasant's cap). It is still very early in the morning, la piquette du jour [the crack of dawn], - he must catch the post chaise - the moon is still shining and one can see the snow glittering through the taproom window, and all the objects are casting curious, whimsical shadows. This story is really of no consequence, nor is the little sketch, but one or another may perhaps help you to understand what I mean, that is, that lately everything has a certain je ne sais quoi, which makes one feel like getting it down quickly on paper. Still, the whole of nature is an indescribably beautiful Black and White exhibition during such snow effects.

As I am doing small sketches at present anyway, I am adding another, very slight one, of a drawing done in mountain chalk, the girl by the cradle, done like the woman and child you mention. This mountain chalk is truly the strangest material. The other little sketch of a bargee is after a drawing in which a great deal has been lavis [washed] with neutral tint and sepia.

It would not surprise me at all if the few things I sent you recently seem to you rather meager products. Indeed I believe it could hardly be otherwise. There is something inevitable about the fact that, to appreciate the characteristic nature of work in Black and White, one must take the whole set into account all the time, which cannot always be done. What I mean is that there is a difference between making 10 drawings and making 100 drawings or sketches or studies. Not because of the quantity, to be sure - forget about the quantity - what I am trying to say is this, there is a kind of tolerance to Black and White that enables one to draw a single figure one admires in perhaps 10 different poses, while if one were to do it in, say, watercolour, or to paint it, one would do just one pose.

Now suppose 9 of those 10 are no good, and I hope in all conscience that this would not be the proportion of good to bad al the time, but just suppose that to be the case. If you were here in the studio yourself, it is my belief that not a week would pass without my being able to show you, not just one, but *a whole number* of studies, and I should be surprised if you were unable to pick out one from amongst that number that appealed to you every time. Meanwhile the rest would not have been done wholly in vain, since in some respects even unsuccessful studies are likely to prove useful or serviceable one day for some new composition.

And that is why I think that the next time you come, you may well find a few more things about which you can give me a few tips. For instance, it is quite hard, since I am not at all familiar with Lhermitte's drawings (you will remember my asking you about them), but am familiar with Ciceri's watercolours as well as his old lithographic drawing examples, though not at all with his current black and white drawings, I repeat, it's quite hard for me to grasp your precise meaning when you write with reference to a certain little sketch, “Couldn't you do something that would somehow fit in with the above-mentioned drawings?” I'm sure that both those artists are infinitely more advanced than I - but your idea could be feasible and I myself will keep learning too, don't you agree? - so it's not beyond the bounds of possibility. And I wanted to emphasize to you again that, in my opinion, supposing I do produce something that would fit in, there is a sort of tolerance to Black and White which would allow one to become very productive in that direction, once one has embarked on it. Not without working unremittingly, of course, but I do that anyway.

So if the small drawings in mountain chalk I sent you are not what you intended, although I had your tips in mind when I did them, don't let that put you off and don't hesitate to return to the subject, the more often the better. And bear in mind, too, that as soon as I am sure of what you are after, I shall be ready to do as I said just now, to turn out 10, for example, in order to arrive at one good one. In short, if you do come to the studio one day, I think you would see that I am being fairly energetic, and you would, I hope, go on thinking of me in these terms, wouldn't you, and you would understand as well that even though someone who is fairly energetic may be working hard for himself, or rather without an immediate purpose, it might be twice as stimulating for him if there were a purpose. This is also true of possible work for the illustrated papers.

I immensely enjoyed rereading Fritz Reuter's *Gedroogde kruiden* [Dried Herbs, the Dutch translation of Reuter's Sämtliche Werke (Complete Works)] recently, it is just like, say, Knaus or Vautier.

Do you know a draughtsman by the name of Régamey? There is a lot of character in his work, I have got some woodcuts, including drawings made in prison, and gypsies and Japanese. When you come, you must have another look at the woodcuts, I've acquired a few new ones since last time.

It may well seem to you that the sun is shining more brightly and that everything has taken on a new charm. That, at any rate, is the inevitable consequence of true love, I believe, and it is a wonderful thing. And I also believe that those who hold that no one thinks clearly when in love are wrong, for it is at just that time that one thinks very clearly indeed and is more energetic than one was before. And love is something eternal, it may change in aspect but not in essence. And there is the same difference between someone who is in love and what he was like before as there is between a lamp that is lit and one that is not. The lamp was there all the time and it was a good lamp, but now it is giving light as well and that is its true function. And one has more peace of mind about many things and so is more likely to do better work.

How beautiful those old almshouses are, I can't find words to describe them. And though Israëls does this sort of thing to perfection, so to speak, I find it strange that so *relatively* few should have an eye for it. Every day here in The Hague, so to speak, I see a world which very many people pass by and which is very different from what most make of it. And I shouldn't dare to say so if I didn't know from experience that figure painters, too, actually *pass it by*, and if I didn't remember that whenever I was struck by some figure or other I encountered while out walking with them, I would hear time and again, “oh, those dirty people,” or “that kind of person” - expressions, in short, one would not expect from a painter.

Yes, that often used to make me think. I remember, for instance, a conversation with Henkes, who frequently saw, and sees, things so clearly, which took me completely by surprise. It is as if they deliberately shun the most serious, the most beautiful things, in short voluntarily muzzle themselves and clip their own wings. And while I am gradually acquiring greater respect for some, I cannot help thinking that others will be reduced to sterility if they go on like that. And the old *Bohème* was very insistent on this very point, on being productive. And, and “La Bohème” was no good, according to some, but mind you, there will always be those who want to have their cake and eat it and, and, and who will end up with jam on their faces. Snuff out the candle - que soit [so be it] - but there is no point in applying the snuffer prematurely. Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 21-28 March 1883

Amice Rappard,
I was at *Van der Weele's* last Sunday. I saw a picture of his there that was by far the most beautiful of his work that I know. It represented some sand carts near the edge of a canal or ditch - “In the Mist.” The subject, as well as the conception and execution, showed some affinity, perhaps, with Mauve's work. It was done in the same vein, but had enough personality to be absolutely original, and distinctly his. The size was rather large. I am telling you this in order to state that in my opinion Van der Weele is one of the “rising men.” I wish you knew him personally; I think the wood engravings might easily lead to your getting acquainted. Either you could - sooner or later - take the sheets in question (the Herkomer, I mean, and what you may find besides) to him, or you could let him have them through me as intermediary, allowing me to mention that you are the donor, and to tell him that you have already seen some of his work and would like to get in touch with him - or something of the sort. I mean, in short, that if you could come into contact with him somehow, you would find him a man you'd like to keep in touch with, and you'd probably become *real friends.*

I sent you a roll of wood engravings today; they are the double-page engravings from the Graphic. I have some more, but some of them are unsuitable for rolling because tears in them have been repaired and they are mounted, and there are also less important ones. But first of all these are sheets I am sure you don't have, and they are such besides that, if you *should* have them, I could give them to Van der Weele. So please check whether or not you have them, and if so return them.

You can select the other ones later on; but seeing that, if you should come here, we should need all our time for other things too, I think it advisable to look over the most important wood engravings in this way. Then that part of the job at least is finished.

As soon as I have time I shall sort out the smaller ones too provisionally and send you those which I think you don't have for closer verification. For the present I am including only two of the smaller Lançons, which, as they are French, might slip my memory when I sort out the Graphics later on, and which you would undoubtedly like to have - unless you have them already. Isn't the “Boarding School” by Hol superb? And “Ploughing” and “Claxton [Caxton]

Printing” by Small?

You are no doubt having winter weather again in Utrecht. Herewith a little scratch from my window. I think it such an enormously pleasant thing to be sitting by the fire in the twilight, looking out the window at a landscape in the snow.

I have found the “black mountain crayon” I wrote you about here in this city too; it is something which was virtually unknown to me until recently. But now I discover that it is not so rare - and perhaps you know it, and have it already. If not, I think it a suitable material for finishing drawings up.

Adieu, old fellow, a handshake in thought - write soon and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 30 and 1 March-April 1883

Dear Theo,
By chance I have at last seen something of Lhermitte's - a very careless reproduction in wood engraving. It represented a little old woman in a church pew. A girl was kneeling beside her. However imperfect the reproduction may be, it gave me some idea of his work. It immediately reminded me of De Groux and Legros - there certainly must be many things in common between his work and Millet's and Breton's.

Careless though the little wood engraving was, it stayed in my mind for days, and I still think of it because some things I had heard about Lhermitte made me eager to see something of his work, and I was looking for it. You remember I wrote you about him apropos of a review of the “Black and White” exhibition.

I received the crayon - many thanks - it is very good. But it is softer than the kind you gave me the first time, and the pieces are half as long. I am still anxious to get that harder kind in larger pieces, but nevertheless I'm very glad to have this.

I made a large drawing with it combined with lithographic crayon. It is a drawing of a digger - my model was the little old almshouse man you know already - his bald head, bent over the black earth, seemed to me full of a certain significance, reminiscent, for instance, of “thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow.” Now these drawings of the woman with the spade [JH 337] and this digger have such an aspect that people won't think they are made in some intricate way, but rather won't think about how they are made at all.

But I believe that if I had made them with ordinary conté pencil, they would have got a dull and ironlike aspect, which would have made people say a once, “That's not life, that's not nature.”

By certain grey tints, through a certain richness and pith in the black, one avoids that dull and ironlike aspect.

And these little things are, in my opinion, worth the trouble of looking for such material as that crayon and lithographic crayon.

I am very glad you sent it.

This morning a painter saw these two drawings, namely Nakken; he didn't intend to come to me, but knocked at my door, thinking that Van Deventer lived here - but he lives in another street. I straightened him out, but asked if he wouldn't come in and look at my studio, which he did. As I was drawing that digger mentioned above, it was the first thing he saw on the easel, and he said, “That is vigorously drawn and seriously studied.”

Take those words at their face value, without delving too deeply, yet they pleased me because I don't suppose Van Nakken would say that a figure was vigorously drawn if it weren't. But that's all I think of it - I am writing about it because it happened to be the drawing made with that crayon I mentioned, and you can tell that since you took the trouble to procure it for me, I for my part like nothing better than to work with it.

Just how near such drawings would come to certain fusains - Lhermitte is an ideal - and to reach that point is still far distant - but to aim at it is the order of the day. Well, when you come sooner or later, we can talk about it better.

Recently I spoke to Smulders about lithographs; I met him on the street, and he asked me if I didn't intend to make some more. Which is just what I should like to do. But I must talk it over with Rappard, and he must see my studies first.

It always seems to me that one might make of workmen's figures something that has a raison d'être.

The lithographs by Émile Vernier after Millet and Corot and Daubigny possess qualities which I appreciate highly. How one would like to talk with somebody who is a master of his trade to such a degree. Not with the intention of making reproductions of pictures, but to understand better what may be done in lithography.

Just imagine original drawings with those characteristic greys and that peculiar expression of material. Bodmer has found that, as an artist, he is original, and at the same time, he has what one might call the lithographic tones, or rather the grey colour scale. Which is in some respects quite different from Gavarni's lithography. Bodmer's lithographs are prints finished like paintings. I refer here, not only to Bodmer's real lithographs like “Au bas Breau” and “Combats de Cerfs” [stags fighting], but also to the prints from Illustration, or Monde Illustré. But in my opinion the respect for the need and longing for advice and correction by others may be no excuse for one's idleness. To say, “I don't need other people,” however, is rash, if one should systematically use it as a reason to stick one's nose up at other people.

The act of printing has always seemed like a miracle to me, just such a miracle as a tiny seed's growth to an ear of corn. An everyday miracle, even greater for happening every day: one drawing is sown on the stone or the etching plate, and a harvest is reaped from it.

Can you understand that it is something which I think about a great deal while I work, and that I feel a great love for it? Well, the main thing for me to do now is to see to it that the quality of the seed (namely the drawings themselves) improves; it may take more time, but if the harvest is better for it, I am satisfied - I always have my eye on that harvest.

Well, write soon again, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I kept this letter back a few days, as today, Sunday, I have more time for writing. I am reading Les Misérables by Victor Hugo. A book which I remember of old, but I had a great longing to read it again. It is very beautiful, that figure of Monseigneur Myriel or Bienvenu I think sublime.

You spoke in your last letter of “exerting influence” in connection with your patient. That Mgr. Myriel reminds me of Corot or Millet, though he was a priest and the other two, painters. Because in the painters' world Corot, and Millet too, or Breton, besides doing their own work, have roused so much energy in others, who wouldn't have developed fully without them. You surely know Les Misérables, and certainly the illustrations which Brion made for it too, very good and very appropriate.

It is good to read such a book again, I think, just to keep some feelings alive. Especially love for humanity, and the faith in, and consciousness of, something higher, in short, quelque chose là-haut.

I was absorbed in it for a few hours this afternoon, and then came into the studio about the time the sun was setting. From the window I looked down on a wide dark foreground - dug-up gardens and fields of warm black earth of a very deep tone. Diagonally across it runs a little path of yellowish sand, bordered with green grass and slender, spare young poplars. The background was formed by a grey silhouette of the city, with the round roof of the railway station, and spires, and chimneys. And moreover, backs of houses everywhere; but at that time of evening, everything is blended by the tone. So viewed in a large way, the whole thing is simply a foreground of black dug-up earth, a path across it, behind it a grey silhouette of the city, with spires, and over it all, almost at the horizon, the red sun. it was exactly like a page from Hugo, and I am sure that you would have been struck by it, and that you would describe it better than I. And on seeing it, I thought of you.

I already wrote you that I made a drawing with that crayon - yesterday I began a second one with it, of a seamstress, especially for the chiaroscuro. When you come to the studio again, I think you will see pretty soon that, though I don't mention that plan of making workmen types for lithography so much any more, I still have it in mind. However, the fact is that I find it more and more difficult, in that I want to have my figures much better.

I have a sower - a mower - a woman at the washtub - a woman miner - a seamstress - a digger - a woman with a spade - the almshouse man - a grace before meat - a fellow with a wheelbarrow full of manure. There are even more, I suppose, but I think you will understand that just making them, looking at the models, and thinking it over do not make one satisfied with one's work; on the contrary - I mean, one says, Yes, that same thing, but even better and more serious.

And I shouldn't think so much about it if I considered it impractical, but the fact that I have already done these drawings proves my longing to make them better is not just an abstract idea, but an actual struggle to achieve it.

And I didn't make any further definite plan because I think the execution of the drawings much more interesting.

It seems to me that these drawings all go straight in the direction which you meant when you wrote about it recently - though they are *far from equalling* those by Lhermitte. -

You will understand that, too.

Lhermitte's secret must be no other, I think, than that he knows the figure in general thoroughly - that is, the sturdy, stern workman's figure - and that he takes his subjects from the very heart of the people. To attain his level - one must not talk about that - one must work, and try to get as near as possible. Because talking about it would only be a presumption on my part, but working for it would be, on the contrary, a proof of respect and trust and faith in such artists as he.

Have you ever seen anything by an American named Abbey? At present there is a draughtsmen's club in New York called the “Tile Club” or the “Tile Painters”; I saw a number of their illustrations, for instance, in a Christmas issue of Harper's. I ask you because all those gentlemen seem to have been in Paris at the same time - judging from a page of cartoons by one of them.

In my opinion Abbey is by far the cleverest of them all. His figures often remind me somewhat of Boughton. Boughton is also a member, or an honorary member, of that club, but I think he himself is more serious than all the rest of the club put together, and doesn't make such a splash.

Abbey, however, is very beautiful.

I have a little figure of a woman in the snow by him, which simultaneously reminds me of Boughton and of Heilbuth.

A large pen-and-ink drawing representing a Christmas scene in Washington's time, or a little earlier, recalls, for instance, Henri Pille. He has style, and that's a good thing, but Boughton has the same - he used to have it even more.

I write about it because I believe you will agree with me that not all Americans are bad. That, on the contrary, there are extremes there like everywhere else, and besides a lot of braggarts and daubers of the most detestable and impossible kind, there are characters who give the effect of a lily or a snowdrop between the thorns.

Now I will go and read a little in Les Misérables, though it is already late; such a book warms one the way pictures by Dupré and old Millet's or some of Descamps' do - it is written with what we call fougue, vehemence.

I saw that a new book is out by Zola, Au Bonheur des Dames, if I remember correctly.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 2 April 1883

Dear Theo,
I was very glad to get your letter and thank you warmly for what was enclosed. But I am very sorry that probably sending it to me after all inconvenienced you more than you say. I sincerely hope that you have got that money back since.

So Hendrik has also returned from the Indies. Were he and his family in good health? Or was ill health the cause for their return? In the past Hendrik made a much less favourable impression on me than his two brothers - is this your opinion too?

Lately I have been working with printer's ink, which is diluted with turpentine and applied with a brush. It gives very deep tones of black. Diluted with some Chinese white, it also gives good greys. By adding more or less turpentine, one can even wash it in very thinly.

I think it will give good results on that paper Buhot gave you.

Sometime when you are here we'll talk that matter over, and I will show you drawings that might be made on it. A year ago it puzzled me, how to get some very deep tones of black, but I found a few of them in the printer's office. So now I can penetrate a little further into seeking for plastic effects and chiaroscuro.

Thanks for the good wishes on my birthday. It happened to be a very pleasant day, as I just had an excellent model for a digger. One thing I can assure you of, the work gets more and more stimulating, and it gives me, so to speak, more vitality; and then I always think of you, because it is you who make it possible for me to work. That is, without fatal obstacles, without direct handicaps. Difficulties sometimes spur one on even more. Now the time has come to put more energy into it.

My ideal is to work with more and more models, quite a herd of poor peoples to whom the studio would be a kind of harbour of refuge on winter days, or when they are out of work or in great need. Where they would know that there was fire, food and drink for them, and a little money to be earned. At present this is so only on a very small scale, but I hope it will grow. Right now I confine myself to a few models, and stick to them - I cannot spare one of them, but would have use for some more.

You write about some art lovers who might take my work some time, even though it shouldn't become exactly a current article. Well, I really believe the same. If I should succeed in putting some warmth and love into my work, it will find its friends. The thing is to keep on working.

I am glad your patient is progressing, though slowly. It is beautiful spring weather here, the evenings are indescribably beautiful. If the weather is the same in Paris, it will do her good. Is she up already?

Today I have the old man again, and must go and get my things ready.

This week I met Van der Weele again, and also expect him here one of these days.

Probably you will be very busy with the Salon. I suppose you can't tell me approximately when you will come to Holland yet, can you? Have a good time, and if you have a moment to spare, write me again. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 2-4 April 1883

Amice Rappard,

I received the package of wood engravings on March 30; as there was no accompanying letter, I waited a few days to see if you were going to write me. Now, however, I shall write you a few words to thank you very much for this batch, and to tell you that I found several sheets among them that I did not have myself (among other things, “A Ghost Story” by Thomas, “Christmas Carol” by Gilbert, Oberlander's “In der Kirche” [In church], etc.).

I gave the other ones to Van der Weele, who was very glad to have them. I imagine you will be very busy with the picture you intend for the exhibition. When everything connected with it is finished, I shall look forward eagerly to the resumption of our correspondence about lithography and black and white in general, and - if it is possible - no less to getting together with you.

I am writing you only a short letter this time, as I can understand that you are very busy.

Just one thing, though. What do you think of the following method for making drawings in black and white? You make a drawing, either with lead pencil or with charcoal. Put as much vigour into it as you can, but without worrying about the weakness or inadequacy of the effect. When you have done this, you put a little ordinary printer's ink on a palette, then a little Cassel earth, for instance, and also white - oil paint. With these - mixing the colours and the printer's ink, which is as thick as tar in its ordinary state, with *turpentine* (no oil, of course) - you start to attack the original drawing again - with the brush, of course. This is something I tried out the other day.

It goes without saying that the *printer's ink* - diluted with more or less turpentine (you can dilute it until it is so thin that you can wash with it with the utmost transparency - on the other hand, one can use it in so thick a condition that one gets the deepest black tones) - is the principal ingredient you use. I think this is a method with which much can be done. Well, more about it later on - I am still experimenting myself.

The drawing I am working on now with this method is an *orphan* man standing near a coffin - in what they call the “corpses' den.”

Adieu, with a handshake, and thanks again for what you sent me,

Ever yours, Vincent

It stands to reason that, in order to simplify things, you could experiment with printers' ink and turpentine only. This time, however, I don't mean autographic ink, but ordinary printer's ink. Perhaps you have it already, otherwise you can get it at any printing office.

It is my experience that this printer's ink clings very nicely to the coarse grain of a certain paper which is called papier torchon here (but which is nothing like the Whatman torchon); Smulders ordered it again a short while ago in two sizes, the large size 3.75 guilders per quire.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 11 April 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosed 50 fr., which were as welcome as ever, the former as well as the latter. I read with interest what you wrote about your patient. The change in circumstances brought about by her recovery has a more or less critical side, because probably, and you expect it yourself, it will raise opposition in some minds - but let's hope it won't. How strange it is that it must be so. We ourselves see such a thing as very simple and natural - something logical - and then we are more or less astonished because others cannot find in themselves the motives which make us act as we do. And one would almost conclude that some people have cauterized certain sensitive nerves within themselves - especially those which, combined, are called conscience. Well, I pity them - in my opinion they travel through life without a compass. One might suppose that the love for humanity which is the foundation of everything should be in every human being. But some pretend that thee are better foundations. I'm not very curious to know them; since the old one has proved to be the right one for so many ages, it is sufficient for me. Don't you like this little poem - it is from Les Misérables:

Si César m'avait donné
La gloire et la guerre,
Et qu'il me fallût quitter
L'amour de ma mère,
Je dirais au grand César:
Reprends ton sceptre et ton char,
J'aime mieux ma mère, o hé,
J'aime mieux ma mère.

[If Caesar had given me/ glory and war,/ and if I had to leave/ the love of my mother,/ I should say to great Caesar:/ take back your sceptre and your triumphal car,/ I love my mother more.]

In the context in which it appeared in the book (it is a student's song of the time of the Revolution of '30), the “love for my mother” stands for the love for the republic, or rather love for humanity, in other words, simply universal brotherhood.

It is my opinion that no matter how good and noble a woman may be by nature, if she has no means and is not protected by her own family, in the present society she is in great, immediate danger of being drowned in the pool of prostitution. What is more natural than protecting such a woman, and, if it can be done in no other way, if circumstances lead to it, if il faut y mettre sa peau - marrying her?

At least I think one must, on principle, continue that protection until she is definitely safe, and shield her with one's own breast, as it were. Even without real love?

Perhaps so - then maybe it is a marriage de raison, but not in the sense of a marriage for selfish reasons.

And further, your particular case is different from the more commonplace ones like mine, for instance, because the person in question possesses a special charm and, as I see it, sympathy of feeling; as a consequence, the possibility of an inner struggle about the problem you mention would also have emerged, even if the meeting had taken place under quite different and less dramatic circumstances.

You will find my thoughts on the question, “How far may one go in helping an unfortunate woman?” in what I have said. The answer is, Indefinitely. However, granting that in love the first and principal thing is to be faithful, I remind you of your own saying, “Marriage (that is, civil marriage) is such a queer thing.” This saying of yours describes it exactly, and on that point I declare I do not know which is better or worse, to reject it or not. It is what they call puzzling, it puzzles me, too, and I wish one could leave it alone altogether. I think the saying is true, “If one marries, one doesn't marry only the woman herself, but the whole family in the bargain” - which is sometimes awkward and miserable enough when they are a bad lot.

But now about the drawings.

I have again done a few with printer's ink, and this week I made some experiments in mixing that printer's ink with white. I found out that it can be mixed in two ways - that is, with the white from the tubes of oil paint and, probably even better, with the ordinary powdered zinc white which can be obtained at any drugstore; it must be diluted with turpentine, which doesn't soak into this paper or cause spots on the back like oil does, because it dries quickly and disappears.

One gets much stronger effects working with printer's ink than with ordinary ink.

How beautiful Jules Dupré's work is. In Goupil's show window I saw a small marine which you are sure to know. I went to look at it nearly every evening. But you are perhaps somewhat blasé about Dupré and similar works of art, which one sees so much more in Paris than here; you do not know what a beautiful impression it makes here, where one sees so very little of it.

I am reading the last part of Les Misérables; the figure of Fantine, a prostitute, made a deep impression on me - oh, I know just as well as everybody else that one will not find an exact Fantine in reality, but this character of Hugo's is true - as, indeed, are all his characters, being the essence of what one sees in reality.

It is the type - of which one only meets individuals.

If you meet, one of these days, an engraver like, for instance, Girardet or Eichens, who make aquatints, you would do me a great favour if you just asked him how the drawings which serve as a guide for the engraving are usually made. Perhaps they will answer, with printer's ink; if this is right, what do they dilute the printer's ink with, how do they use it?

It seems to me that if you spoke to some engraver casually about it, and repeated what he said to me, I might find something in it which would shed light on some questions, even though it contained no direct information about how the printer's ink is diluted so that one can work with it in different ways *on paper*.

There certainly is some kind of printer's ink other than the one I am using right now, and gradually I shall find out many things for myself. When one works with printer's ink and turpentine, as I do now, the drawings get effects like those in aquatint engravings. At one time I saw drawings, for instance, by Mottramb, the English engraver who has engraved Boughton's pictures, and I wish I knew what materials he worked with.

Of course I'm in no hurry for this information, only when you hear something about different drawing techniques, be sure to tell me.

I remember Soek's wife and her mother [acquaintances of Vincent and Theo in Paris, with whom Theo's patient went to live] quite well (if she still lives with her), and used to visit their house; and I think them two sympathetic persons who remind me of those of my own household, so much so that I often think of them as if they were of the same family. They are just like figures done by Souvestre, for instance, or of Ed. Frère. One sees them in Paris often, in fact, one finds them everywhere. Such persons always remind me of the women figures in the Gospel, perhaps because their expression is something like, for instance, the figure in Delaroche's Vendredi Saint, or in Landelle, “Bien heureux ceux qui pleurent” [blessed are they that mourn]. I know quite well that their conception is not perfect - there are other aspects even better than Delaroche's, and deeper than his, for instance, those of Lhermitte and Herkomer.

Well, I see these too, but I can readily understand that in the days of Souvestre, Delaroche, Frère, Landelle, etc., this tendency became popular, though compared with Millet and others it isn't quite correct and true.

Is Anker still alive? I often think of his work; it is so serious and the sentiment is so delicate. He is a real good old Brion type.

Boy, how I sometimes long to have you in the studio once more. I sincerely hope you will get the money back from Hendrik. As for me, I had to pay so much all at once that very little is left. Well, write as soon as you can, about the twentieth. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 21 & 22 April 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the letter and for the enclosure.

I read your letter with great interest. I am glad that you are aware from what quarter the difficulties will probably arise, that - without doing it on purpose - women like, for instance, S. (however good they may be in other ways) are not very careful about what they say, *etc.* when you refer to the tie between your patient and her own mother, that's a thing about which I cannot wish you joy. However, it is nothing unusual.

But it is a sad thought indeed, that a thing like the relation between mother and daughter can have a dark side, so that a man who loves *light* and seeks it can be fatally thwarted.

A mother's influence and conversation with friends, more than anything else, sometimes bring a kind of backsliding in women which prevents a reform in thought and action - sometimes so urgently necessary.

I'm glad you are not fully aware of what may be in store for you from that quarter, but I'm not glad you weren't spared this - if the woman were unhampered by her relations, you might expect fewer difficulties for the future, I think.

And the trouble is that it's impossible to predict exactly in what form the difficulties may crop up, and when taking certain precautionary measures, one can't help thinking, Yes, but it's quite possible that I shall have to manouever in precisely the opposite way.

In a certain preface Zola makes the following remark: “Ces femmes ne sont cependant pas mauvaises, l'impossibitité d'une vie droite dans les commérages et les médisances des faubourgs, est la cause de leurs fautes et de leurs chûtes.” [Yet these woman are not bad, the impossibility of (living) a straight life in the midst of the gossip and calumny of the suburbs is the cause of their faults and their fall.]

If the woman is cultivated enough to understand your thoughts and views and consequently take part in your inner life, this would mean a strong tie which could neutralize many difficulties.

Entering into relations with her family, I'm afraid, would bring the drawback of falling into officialism (people sometimes very indiscreetly take it like that) whereas one intended only privacy and nothing official. Not everybody's intention is to act silently, and some older and wiser members of the family often get so clamorous that one regrets having spoken to them. The more so, because they cannot stop intriguing and, oh well - they are probably wolves.

I wish we were not so far away from each other. Yesterday I wrote you in detail about some difficulties which will perhaps present themselves to you soon, but the feeling that there are times when I myself do not know how to face them kept me from sending the letter; besides, I am quite confident that true love cannot die, at least not if one acts with judgement at the same time. But I should like to scratch this out again because it isn't correct, for love can certainly die - but there is a strength of revival in love.

Ce que l'homme tue Dieu le ressuscite [What man kills God resuscitates].

Van der Weele has come to see me again. Perhaps he will bring me into contact with Piet van der Velden, whom I think you will know from his figures of peasants and fishermen.

Once I met Van der Velden, and he made a very good impression - he reminded me of Eliot's character of Felix Holt, the radical. There is something broad and rough in him which appeals to me very much - something of the roughness of torchon. A man who apparently doesn't seek culture in outward things, but who is inwardly much, very much further than most.

Well, he is a real artist, and I wish I knew him, for I have confidence in him, and I know for sure that I should learn from him. It's not impossible that I shall meet him someday even if it isn't through Van der Weele.

Rappard would have come to see me last Monday, but then he wrote his sister had fallen ill, and he couldn't come. Perhaps he will come this week.

At present there isn't a single drawing in which I do not work with brush and printer's ink.

To tell you the truth, my purse is rather empty; it certainly isn't your fault, yet it isn't mine, either - no matter how I contrive, I can't save more, and I need more money than I have to execute some plans. If I started on those things, I should have to give them up in the middle. But it is a melancholy thing to have to say, “I could make such and such a thing if it weren't for the expense.” Then an unsatisfied energy remains, which one should wish to use instead of stifle. But I don't want to complain - I am grateful that I can make progress - though not so vigorously as I should wish. But the English say, “Time is money,” and sometimes I can't help thinking it is hard to see the time pass during which things might have been done if I had had the means.

You will understand what I mean: I should wish to be able to spend more, both on models and on painting materials. Though I do not sell a single one of my studies, I think they are worth the money I spend on them. The studio has become so much better and convenient, but I only have enough steam for “half speed,” and should like to go “full speed.”

I repeat, I do not say this to complain, nor to force you to greater sacrifices - you are really burdened beyond your strength too. But I say it for the sake of a better understanding, and to relieve my mind. For you will understand that I am often full of heavy cares. Well, we must make the best of it, and the things we can't move by force must be undermined by patience.

This week I drew a few reclining figures; some time I shall need figures of corpses or of sick people, men as well as women.

Recently I passed Israëls's house - I have never been inside - the front door was open, as the servant was scrubbing the hall. I saw things hanging in the hall, and do you know what they were? the large Herkomer, “Last Muster, Sunday at Chelsea,” and the photograph of that picture by Roll, “Grève de Charbonniers,” which you perhaps remember I wrote you about at the time . I didn't know that there existed a photograph of the “Last Muster.” I possess the large wood engraving of the two principal figures, and the first rough sketch made long before the picture.

Well, adieu, boy, my best wishes for your patient, success in your work.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 30 April 1883

Dear Theo,
On your birthday I want you to receive a little word from me too. May it be a happy year for you, and may you have success in your work, and I do hope, especially, that you may have in this year some satisfaction for what you did for your patient; may she recover and start a new life. Do you know it is almost a year since you were here? Yes - I long very much for your coming. It is the work of that whole year that I have to show you, about which we must speak in regard to the future.

Do you think it will be about the same time as last year that you will come? Well, as soon as anything is decided about your coming, let me know.

Some time ago you told me many things about these Swedish painters, Heyerdahl, Edelfelt.

This week I found a reproduction of a picture by Edelfelt: “A Prayer-Meeting on the Beach.” There is something in it of Longfellow's poems; it is very beautiful. It shows a sentiment of which I am very fond, and which I think does more good in the world than the Italians and Spaniards with their “Arms Merchants of Cairo,” of which I get so tired in the long run.

This week I have been working on the figure of a woman on the heath, who is gathering cuts of peat.

And a kneeling figure of a man.

One must know the structure of the figures so thoroughly, in order to get the expression, at least I cannot see it differently.

The Edelfelt is indeed beautiful in its expression, however the effect lies not only in the expression of the faces, but in the whole position of the figures.

Do you know who has claims to being the cleverest of all these Swedes?

It is perhaps a certain Wilhelm Leibl, [actually a German] an absolutely self-made man.

I have a reproduction of a picture with which he suddenly came out, I think it was at the exhibition in Vienna in `82. It represents three women in a pew, one seated figure of a young woman in a checkered dress (Tyrol), two kneeling old women in black, with kerchiefs round their heads. Its sentiment is beautiful and drawn like Memling or Quinten Matsys. That picture seems to have made a great sensation among the artists at the time, I do not know what became of Leibl since then. I found him very much like Thijs Mans. In England there was also a German of that kind, but less clever - Paul de Gassow, who reminds me a little of Oberlander, whose heads you certainly remember. Well, there still seem to be some good artists in Sweden.

I am longing again for your letter. As to what I wrote you about relations between women and their mothers, I can assure you, in my case nine-tenths of the difficulties I had with the woman originated directly or indirectly therein.

And yet those mothers are not exactly bad, though they act absolutely wrongly.

But they do not know what they are doing.

Women of about the age of fifty are often distrustful, and perhaps it is that very distrust and cunning that entangles them. If you care to hear them, I can tell you some particulars some day. I do not know whether all women become more serious in getting older, and then want to govern and correct their daughters, which they do in exactly the wrong way.

In some cases their system may have some raison d'être; but they ought not to fix as a principle and accept a priori that all men are deceivers and fools, for which reason women must cheat them and suppose they know everything better. If, by ill chance, the mother-system is applied to a man who is honest and of good faith, he is indeed badly off.

Well, the time has not yet come when *reason*, not only in the sense of *raison*, but also of la conscience, is respected by everyone; to contribute towards bringing about that time is a duty, and in judging characters one of the first things that humanity demands is to take into consideration the circumstances of contemporary society.

How beautiful Zola is - it is especially L'Assommoir which I often think of. Apropos, how far did you get in reading Balzac? I have quite finished Les Misérables. I know very well that Victor Hugo analyses in a different way than do Balzac and Zola, but he probes to the bottom of things just as well.

Do you know what I should prefer in the matter of relations between the woman and her mother - in my case where it has decidedly bad consequences - that the mother came to live with us entirely.

I proposed it this winter, when the mother was very hard up, and I said: If you are so much attached to each other, then come and live together, but I believe they, though worse off themselves, don't think our simple way of living good enough, one which I desire on principle and to which I am forced by circumstances.

Many people care more for the exterior than for the inward life of a family, thinking they act well in doing so. Society is full of that: people who strive to make a show instead of leading a true existence. I repeat: those people are not bad, but they are foolish.

However great the difference between the persons in question may be, keep an eye on the relations between your patient and her mother. Don't make the mistake of thinking that I suspect the mother of something definitely evil - no, but I should be surprised if she did not possess her share of the general foolishness. And if your patient did not possess every woman's inclination to blunder in the choice of ones whom she wants to be led by.

A wife's mother is, in some cases, the representative of a meddlesome, slandering, aggravating family, and as such decidedly injurious and hostile, though she may not be so bad herself.

In my case, she would be much better off in my house than in the houses of other members of the family, where she is very often the victim of callous insolence and is incited to intrigues.

Did you ever think of this quality in your patient's mother? She may acquire it to a certain extent - therefore be on the qui vive. And with regard to such persons, it is possible that you yourself foresee also that they will prove not to have the same desirable ideas about reserve as you and your patient.

Towards your patient you have been absolutely honest and straightforward: that is the principal thing, which keeps the future clear, whatever it may be: but even if one has acted rightly, difficulties may arise. Well, in the year that begins for you today, I wish you very few of those - on the contrary may all good be your share. Well, write soon if you have not written already, which I hope will be the case. Adieu, boy, with a hearty handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 2 May 1883

Dear Theo,

Your letter and the enclosure were as welcome as ever. And as always, many thanks.

And I appreciate it the more for knowing how many cares you have yourself.

In some ways what you write about your patient isn't news, but in other ways it is. That you have written our parents about it, or rather, that you are going to, is something which will set your own mind at rest, and it is the right thing to do. Of course I never breathed a word of the affair, and you may rest assured that neither at home nor anywhere else shall I hint that I knew something about it in the past, nor that I am acquainted with intimate details. I think I shall act as though I heard about it only the other day, and then only superficially. But it is unlikely that anybody will discuss it with me.

So you may be easy in your mind about this.

Well, from the bottom of my heart I hope that things will turn out the way you planned them, toward October, and I am glad things have been carried so far, heartily glad for *your* sake as well as for *hers*. I think it is well as it is - especially *because I know* all the details - if two persons meet in this way they should not part company again.

And I sincerely hope you will be able to come to Holland with her next summer. Who knows whether it might not help to set right certain things concerning my own woman.

And so the Salon has opened. I suppose you will have a visit from Mr. Tersteeg and C. M. one of these days. It is now almost a year since I had differences with him, that is to say, with Tersteeg. I will not cross his path again; he must have noticed that, I think; and he may be sure that I hardly ever think of what has happened.

If Tersteeg begins talking to you about me, you might cut it short by saying, “Has Vincent ever troubled you or crossed your path since then? He hasn't, so don't you bother him either.” It is rather unpleasant for me that, because of that quarrel with Tersteeg, I must always avoid the Goupil gallery out of discretion. You remember what Tersteeg wrote Father about me at the time - his opinion that I had made it impossible for him to have anything to do with me; he has not taken it back up to now.

Of course, as long as he has that opinion of me, I will not enter his place again. Not because I am afraid of meeting Tersteeg, not because I want to hide myself from him or anything like that, but because I do not want to give any offense. If somebody wants to cut me, I myself will lend him a helping hand, and try to avoid the rare occasions when we might happen to meet. For the rest, I shall never contradict his opinion. From a certain point of view, Tersteeg is not wrong - but things may be looked at from another angle - they might be viewed in a way different from his - but that is his own business.

For my part, I have expressed my opinion of him to you - but as far as I know, to nobody else - influenced by various very disagreeable circumstances, differences with Mauve, *etc.* I readily agree that because of all these things, my judgement of him was not correct either, and provided that Tersteeg takes back what he wrote Father about me - that I had made it impossible for him to have anything to do with me in the future - I retract my opinion that Tersteeg was the cause of the unpleasant things which happened to me.

If I express myself clearly enough, you will perhaps find in this acknowledgement something which may lead to more peace or to a better understanding, to which I would be far from indifferent.

When I think back to May of last year, Theo, the year has not been exactly easy or free from care for me, has it? But that doesn't matter. To be without care or trouble has indeed never been my ideal or intention. But things have not been exactly easy for me.

What you send me is not little but much; but though it was perhaps much more than you could really spare yourself, I assure you that going on and making progress with my work, and keeping the household going, is not child's play for the woman and me. Now it is sometimes very hard on me that because of such strained relations, I must avoid the very persons with whom, for my work, I ought to be directly or indirectly in touch. And I wish it were peacefully settled.

Well - for the moment I cannot change it.

I am working on several things just now which I must carry through; but really I am very hard up. You write about Rappard - I am so sorry that he did not come when he wrote he would. If I asked him to advance me something, I am sure he would not refuse. For he himself proposed it this winter, but then he fell ill and we could not correspond about the matter for which the money was intended - that is, lithographs, and drawings connected with it. I remember his father wrote: “My son is ill, but I know about it; if you are perhaps in difficulties, I will advance you the money.”

I thought that so nice of Rappard's father that it would have been indelicate of me to have accepted it at that moment. So I wrote him, “Thank you, let us wait for the recovery of your son.”

Rappard recovered, but I heard nothing more about it, and he became absorbed in other work. So that is still hanging, and again and again there are obstacles which prevent carrying this thing through. But I personally did go on with it, namely making drawings in printer's ink, lithographic crayon, etc., and I have had a lot of expenses too. Of course he is not in the least responsible for that: but what I want to say is, it is that much more reason, I think, for his not refusing to advance me something.

Therefore I will ask him to do so, but I am expecting a letter from him: and before I have described the whole thing and have got an answer, some time may elapse, for he is lazy about his correspondence sometimes.

When your money arrived this morning, I had been without money - absolutely without a penny - for about a week. Besides, all my drawing material was used up. I was negotiating with Smulders about a lot of drawing paper and took it, though I cannot really afford it right now; but I absolutely needed it, together with other materials, for instance, the printer's ink of the engravers, and lithographic crayon. And I had to pay for several household things and to lay in provisions. And had to pay the models, whom I had had meanwhile, in order to be able to work on.

I am very, very sorry I have to ask for it, but if there is the slightest possibility, send me another 10 francs. A week's work depends on it, for I cannot expect an answer from Rappard right away. I am already hard up, and have made arrangements with models. After Rappard sends me the money, the time will come when things will run smoothly again. If you can send it, this week will pass without a hitch; if not, the damage will be unpleasant. But do not be angry with me; it was a combination of expenses, all strictly necessary, which I could not avoid. And if you cannot send it - well, it will not kill us. The difficulties in small matters, even when small sums of money are involved, are often really brain-wracking, and this is such a case. I hope Rappard will be able to help me a little, for I need it as much as a meadow needs the rain after a long drought.

Well, once more my best wishes for your patient; the weather is delightful here at times - in your country it will be beautiful too, and will do her good.

Adieu,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 4-6 May 1883

Dear Theo,

I suppose you will be busy for the Salon - I saved up a stamp on purpose, to be able to write to you once more.

I have written to friend Rappard, but of course no answer as yet; in ordinary cases he sometimes waits a month before he answers.

If you are strained yourself, send me less than usual if it must be; but send it as soon as possible. For next week I have an arrangement with Van der Weele to go and *paint* in the dunes - he will show me a few things which I do not know yet.

I have been working in the dunes for some days, but I long for a model: otherwise I cannot go on.

In short, I feel rather worried. So write as soon as possible. As for the work, I am getting on pretty well, and I think you would like some of the drawings I have on hand now.

I wish you might have some good luck, boy, for I know you are having a hard time too. Best wishes, adieu, I must set to work - out-of-doors.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I shall soon write you at greater length about some things. There seems to be something the matter with the woman in regard to what I told you about her mother; perhaps it is nothing. I do not know what it is myself, but it is another thing that worries me. Write soon, boy, for it is very unpleasant to be without a cent. It makes trifles take on the biggest proportions.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 8 May 1883

Amice Rappard,

I received your telegram this morning. I was on the point of going to you when I heard you were prevented from coming to me, but on thinking it over I gave up the idea, because I thought it possible that the doctor thinks speaking might be harmful for you, *etc.*

As a matter of fact I don't think you would raise this objection yourself - I myself should not be uneasy about its hurting you. In a certain sense there is something peculiar in the constitution of every painter. Temporary fits of weakness, nervousness, melancholy are often caused by the exertion of working; but at the same time there is something like a rebound, so that weakness, etc., may be overcome again by exertion.

If one is fed up and sick of arguing and thrashing things out with friends, it may do him good to seek solitude for a while - but as far as I know this is not the case with you. So I thought I would go to you.

But I thought, Rappard has fathers [sic], mothers [sic], sisters, brothers, maidservants and menservants and I don't know who else, who might be standing guard to keep him quiet if the doctor has ordered such a thing. If one comes at such a moment, the gilt is off the gingerbread, and we would both feel embarrassed. Speaking for myself, I'll tell you frankly that sometimes I feel clearly that these two forces of exhaustion and reinforcement in my constitution are there through one and the same cause - the exertion of working. And I have so much faith in this, not only for myself but also for others, that last year, for instance, when I was ill, I boldly disregarded some of the doctor's advice, not because I thought his advice wrong, or because I thought I knew better, but because I reasoned like this, “Life means painting to me and not so much preserving my constitution.” Sometimes the mysterious words “Whosoever shall lose his life shall find it” are as clear as daylight.

And the fact is I recovered *sooner* than some others who I know took a long time to recover from the same disease.

But, my dear friend, I am writing you what I should otherwise have said to you orally - by all means economize your strength in this sense, that you do not expend your energy on things that do not lead you straight to your goal.

I say the same about making church ornaments that I say about decorations. It is wasting gunpowder and bullets on something that may very well be worth a shot fired by someone who has a well-filled cartridge box and can fill it again when it's empty - but, my dear friend, not a cartridge fired by a sharpshooter of the vanguard on whose alertness important things may depend, and whose position has laid a greater responsibility on his shoulders than on those of others.

What is permitted to others may be reprehensible in you, le mieux en ce cas étant l'ennemi du bien [the better being in this case the enemy of the good]. Ergo, beware of the mieux.

Do you share my opinion about your responsibility and about what depends on your position? - I'm not quite sure. There are two viewpoints for everyone: what one is and what one might be. In my opinion we must not shut ourselves up in the former with a “clear” conscience. The latter we must consider a formidable reality superior to our feelings; for, however imperfect and full of faults we may be, we shall never be justified in secretly concealing the ideal and all that approaches the eternal, as if all that were none of our business. For a number of reasons I consider your position very important under the present circumstances. Perhaps this makes me feel gloomier toward you. I ask myself, “What shall I do? Whose side is he on?”

But now is not exactly the moment to philosophize about this. So to come to the point - I am actually very eager to see you soon. I have seen absolutely nothing of your work for a year - even longer than that, for when you were here last year, I didn't see anything either. Besides, you saw only a little of my work - only the lithographs.

So, if you agree, we must try to manage things in such a way that we see each other and each other's work, *i.e.* so that it's mutual. So I propose that you let me know when there will be no obstacle to prevent me from spending a morning in your studio. As long as that symptom of coughing up blood persists, I don't think it's exaggerated to raise objections against your coming here; so let's agree to postpone this until those symptoms are entirely gone. However, please drop me a line the very first day you're yourself again, and I'll come to you if it's not contrary to the doctor's orders.

You see I am writing you before receiving the letter which you mentioned in your telegram. But I don't suppose your letter will greatly alter this plan; perhaps it will even fit in with it.

Don't get the idea that I object to all ornaments and decorations - but I object to them *at present* and under the circumstances which confront us in Holland nowadays. I do *not* object to a certain surplus of vigour being wasted in this direction during a time of great animation and energy and renascence. But I object to it in times when the general atmosphere isn't one of animation and energy - especially among the younger generation; let the man who has energy concentrate - there is a time for gaiety, but also a time for being severe. It is really necessary *not* to share that particular feeling of security of those who think all is going well, which is the convention nowadays, and which can easily lead to a new periwig-and-pigtail era of taking it easy and letting things slide.

When there is decadence - then no ornaments, if you please - but a striving after spiritual communion with “les vieux de la veille” [the old ones of yesterday], ignoring the present.

To my mind, my dear friend, there are some things that take precedence over private affairs and private difficulties. The latter are not really my motive in being eager to speak with you. It so happens that I spoke to you about other matters before proceeding to thank you for your willingness to help me, which is a great relief to me, and will save me from devices that are obnoxious to me. I thank you for it. The truth is that, generally speaking, I hate it.

It will be the same when I come to see you. I cannot conceal the fact that, speaking for myself, I do not see the future very clearly, and that I deem it doubtful whether I shall be able to carry out what I intend to do. The fact is that I want to consult you in the hope of getting some enlightenment. I believe that you have an eye for my work in some way, and in some cases your judgment would be very useful to me, for instance in helping me to organize the studies I have of a certain subject into a definite whole. At the present moment I have a *lot* of studies, and I have in mind a vague conception of two or three more imposing compositions, for which I shall probably be able to find the greater part of the subject matter in my studies.

Exactly because I value your opinion, it is necessary for you to know my thoughts somewhat. And I think that you probably have enough imagination to understand my views, even if you should not agree with me in all matters.

If I object to a certain new style, this certainly does not refer to the style of Israëls, Mauve, Maris - no. No! This is the best style, in my opinion, but something has resulted from it recently which - though there seems to be a resemblance - is in utter contradiction to the style of these masters, and that is what I disapprove of. Van der Weele, for instance, is more serious and keeps to the straight path. I saw his studies last Sunday.

Now I believe that the path you are following is straight too, but I'm not sure that certain things are not divergences in the direction I mentioned just now. I am quite willing to take this opinion back - but it is my impression. Well, I for my part am also trying to find the path I think best, let's say the path of Israëls, Mauve, Maris - I have no idea how far I have progressed on it - and know even less how far I shall progress on it - but I have done my best and shall go on doing my best. And this being so, it is as far from my intention as the north is from the south to object to your decorations in the manner or the tone of a schoolmaster; but, on the contrary, I do so as one who is himself seeking after something true and sound - and serious - not because I have found it already, but serious because I am searching for it myself too.

And all that I think about you, but certainly no less about myself, is that we must beware of being diffuse, and that we must seek concentration and terseness. When I come to see you, it will, before God, be to talk over practical things with you, and not theory or philosophy. For the sake of practice, as prosaic as a Monday morning.

You write about a beautiful sheet in the Graphic by Howard Pyle. If you mean a composition that reminds one of Terborch or Nicolaas Keyzer - “Penn and the Colonists” - yes, I was struck by it too, so much so that I have ordered the issue. Yes, it is a damned fine thing. I bought an issue of the London News for the same reason, because of a sheet by King - “Workmen in a Carriage of the Underground Railway.”

I have also subscribed to Le Salon 1883 by Dumas, of which the first issue has now been published at 1 franc, and which will be complete in twelve issues.

I am very sorry you did not come after all, but that is not your fault. I have had some scruples up to now about going to you, because so many would rather have my room than my company, and also because I think visiting an unpleasant chore in general. And here in The Hague this is partly because I have taken the woman and her two children into my house, and they think that for decency's sake they must not associate with me at all. But having heard from yourself your conditional opinion, which is so different from the behavior of others, I think I can drop my scruples.

I act in this way: if anybody avoids me on account of this, I do not seek his company; I prefer staying away somewhere to not being welcome. The more so because I can make allowances a little, a very little, just a tiny wee little bit, for the prejudice of those who consider, or try to consider, only the social conventions, for which reason I leave them alone, especially as I look upon it as a weakness, so that I won't fight them, or at least I won't attack them. Acting thus, I certainly do save cartridges. Do you think this conceited?

Take me as you find me, and so let's agree that I shall hear from you as to when I may come to see you without going contrary to the doctor's orders.

And thanks again for your willingness to help me, and your letter will be welcome when it arrives, but if your condition makes it advisable for you to postpone writing, by all means do so.

Adieu, with a handshake in thought.

Ever yours, Vincent

I just can't believe that a painter should have no other task and no other duty than painting only. What I mean to say is, whereas many consider, for instance, reading books and such things that they call a waste of time, on the contrary, I am of the opinion that, far from causing one to work less or less well, rather it makes one work more and better to try to broaden one's mind in a field that is so closely allied with this work - and that at any rate it is a matter of importance, which greatly influences one's work, from whatever point of view one looks at things, and whatever conception one may have of life.

I believe that the more one loves, the more one will act; for love that is only a feeling I would never recognize as love.

Well, I hope that this batch of wood engravings will please you.

Please return the things you already have sometime; then I will give them to Van der Weele. I have selected them as carefully as possible, and as far as I know these are all the duplicates I have. There are also a few French ones among them.

We can check the rest whenever you come here. Then too you will be able to see a lot of sheets of which I have, alas, no duplicates.

I wish you joy with them - and write again soon.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 9 or 10 May 1883

Dear Theo,
I received in good order your letter with 50 francs enclosed. It was a deliverance, at least a relief, to me. I also have some news from Rappard, but nothing definite.

A letter in answer to mine, that he will help me and come to see me, but he writes, “I don't feel well again,” finishes with, “I enclose the money.”

“P.S. I think I will come at once and bring the money. I shall come tomorrow.”

Next day a wire: “Cannot come. Letter follows.”

So, though I have heard, I am not more advanced than in the Game of the Goose, where, as you remember, when one alights on a goose, one goes on, but if one chances to drop on another goose which turn its bill the wrong way, one has to go back to one's former position.

But it is not his fault, for he really has been very ill, and is still suffering from the aftereffects. Besides, his sister has had the same illness as he, and they have been very anxious about her; but she also has recovered. But I believe that our friend Rappard is doing things which cost him much energy and nervous power and are not worth the time he spends on them; so I heard that before his illness he made decorations for the centenary of a Utrecht painters' corporation, and now he is speaking of church ornaments. I happened to write him my disapproval of both things, and both times he happened to fall ill after this work. If he was laid up from overwork on his own things, it would be all right, but this, I repeat, it is not worth powder and shot, and I wrote him again, “You are a sharp-shooter and one of the few in the present time who carry cartridges in their bag. Do not use them except in cases where a shot is unavoidable.”

I am afraid, dear brother, that the money you advanced our dear cousin H. has for the moment assumed the shape of a malignant hound, or some such purchase of which he is very fond. I believe it is sometimes impossible for him to change them back into bank notes or silver coins afterward, because he, like many another horse or dog trainer, is caught in some jobber's net. I am among those who wish him the greatest possible success in his negotiations, and can wish no better result than that he may soon pay back what he owes you. At one time there were great plans for peopling the plantation with innumerable dogs. This kind of breeding may be very laudable, but for the moment, I will not say more about it than that I hope it may be extraordinarily profitable.

Has your patient left the hospital for good? But perhaps some days of anxiety will follow, no less serious than when she was still there.

Michelet rightly says: “Une femme est une malade.” They vary, Theo, they vary like the weather. Now he who has eyes to see it finds something beautiful and good in *every* kind of weather, he finds the snow and the burning sun beautiful, the storm and the calm, the cold and the heat; he loves every season and cannot spare one day of the year, and in his heart he is contented and resigned to things being as they are. But even if one feels this way about the weather and the changing seasons, and the same way about the changing feminine nature - believing at heart that there is a reason in its enigma too, submitting to what one cannot understand - I repeat, even if one could feel this way about it, still our own character and opinion are not always, and at every moment, in harmony and sympathy with those of the woman to whom we are united; and one personally feels anxiety or dissatisfaction or doubt, notwithstanding the courage, faith and serenity one may have.

As the professor who attended her confinement told me, it will take years before the woman has completely recovered her health. That is to say the nervous system remains very sensitive, and she possesses the changeability of women to a high degree.

The great danger is - as you will understand - her falling back into former errors. This danger, though of a moral nature, is connected with the physical constitution. And what I should like to call oscillations between improvement and falling back into former bad habits worry me continually and seriously. At times her temper is such that it is almost unbearable even for me - violent, mischievous, bad. I can tell you, I am sometimes in despair. She comes round again, and she has often told me afterward: *I myself do not know what I am doing then*. Do you remember you wrote me last year that you were afraid the mother would become a burden on me? Sometimes I wish it had been so. The mother is so energetic when she wants to be, and might have done so much better than she did. Now she often is more of a trouble than a help. Well, when the woman does wrong, it is sometimes the mother's fault; and when the mother does wrong, sometimes the family is in back of it. These are things which are not so very bad in themselves, but they prevent improvement and destroy or neutralize all better influences.

The woman has certain faults and shortcomings in her behavior - how could it be otherwise? - *but for all that she is not bad* in my opinion. But those errors must be corrected - habits of slovenliness, indifference, lack of activity and ability, oh, a lot of things. But they all have the same root: bad education, years of quite wrong views on life, fatal influence of bad company. I tell you this in confidence, you know, and not out of desperation - so that you may understand that mine is not a life of moonlight and roses, but something prosaic like a Monday morning.

A small picture by Tissot represents a little figure of a woman in the snow among faded flower stems, “Voie des Fleurs, Voie des Pleurs.”

Well, my woman no longer walks on a path of flowers, as she did when she was younger and went her own way and followed her instincts. But life has become more thorny for her, has become a path of tears, especially last year but this year has thorns too, and so will the years to come - but with perseverance she will get over it.

But sometimes there is a crisis - especially when I venture to reprove her for some fault which I have had my eye on for a long time. So for instance, to give you an example, mending the clothes and making clothes for the children herself. But the result is that one day she takes it up, and in this respect, as in many others, she has already improved greatly. I still have to change so many things in myself, too; she must find in me an example of diligence and patience, and it is damned difficult, brother, to act so that one can indirectly be an example to somebody else, and I too fail sometimes. I must raise myself to a higher level in order to rouse new impulses in her.

The little boy, however, does very well; the girl used to be very ill and neglected.

But the little one is a miracle of vitality, already he seems to oppose himself to all social institutions and conventions. As far as I know, all babies are brought up on a kind of bread porridge. But he has refused this most energetically; though he has no teeth yet, he bites resolutely at a piece of bread, and swallows all kinds of eatables with much laughing and cooing and all kinds of noises; but he absolutely keeps his mouth shut for porridge. He often sits with me in the studio on the floor in a corner, on a few sacks; he crows at the drawings and is always quiet in the studio, because he looks at the things on the wall. Oh, he is such a sociable little fellow!

The number of studies steadily increases; when you come, I think you will perhaps find enough among them to fill a portfolio for your room; but this is your own business, as long as you understand that you must of course consider those you like your own property. But the studies must produce new things; and the old studies must produce better ones. I am not sure of them myself, but I long for you to see them.

I saw with great interest an edition of Le Salon 1883: a first series of illustrations, some of them remarkably well done. Reproduced in that new way. I subscribed to it - notwithstanding all my other expenses - with a view to what I am doing myself just now with printer's ink and lithographic crayon. Listen, I firmly believe that some of my things would do well if reproduced in this way, especially -those in which the deeper blacks are expressed by lithographic crayon and printer's ink; the brownish wash, which I often notice in those illustrations, I can get as well. Well, when you come, we can talk it over.

And perhaps I shall write down in detail the different things which I want information about, and then you might take some of my studies, together with that letter, to show for instance to Buhot, who probably could explain many things to me.

I have just read Un Mâle, by Camille Lemonnier - very well done, in the manner of Zola. Everything observed from nature, and everything analyzed.

In the show window at Goupil's I saw a large Fromentin, “A Battle of Fellahs.”

I also saw the nouveautés, perhaps not all of them. By Julien Dupré, about whom I wrote you, I saw two things, which I liked less, and found more conventional than what I saw by him in a magazine last winter.

Have you heard that Rappard's picture has now been accepted in Amsterdam? It is already late. Thanks for your timely help.

I hope Rappard's “letter follows” will not last too long, and that H. may have some success with his hound breeding. Adieu. Best wishes for everything.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

After all, Fromentin is clever and is a *seeker*, and somebody who has perseverance, and he is conscientious too.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 20 May 1883

Dear Theo,

I must tell you that Rappard has been here, and that I borrowed 25 guilders from him, promising to pay them back next autumn. I was very glad to see him - he came in the morning and stayed till the last train in the evening, and we spent the whole day looking at the studies, and drawings, and he also made a sketch in printer's ink and turpentine, just to see what it was like. Now I am going to him tomorrow, to see his work and his studio. It was a thoroughly pleasant day. He was rather changed both in appearance and in manner. I personally like him much better now than before. He has become broader in the shoulders, and I think broader in his views on many things too.

Well, the money he advanced me has helped me to get many things which I absolutely needed.

Among other things, I ordered large sketching blocks for working out-of-doors. And I had to buy a pair of trousers, and tomorrow I shall have to pay the fare to Utrecht. But it has helped me a great deal.

I was also surprised by a very short visit from Father. I think he rather liked the workmen's figures I am working on.

Among the blocks I ordered with Rappard's money is also one for watercolours; I tried it at once, a cottage in the dunes with a wheelbarrow, etc., in the foreground, and a small figure of a digger in the background. Oh, Theo, some day or other I shall surely get the knack of making watercolours.

These last days, or rather weeks, I have had the very pleasant company of a young land surveyor who tried his hand at drawing [Furnée]. He once showed me drawings, which I thought very bad, and I told him why I thought them so bad.

Of course I never expected to hear from him again after that; but one day he returned - he has more leisure now, might he come with me to work outdoors? Well, Theo, the fellow has got the knack of landscape drawing so well that at present he brings home really charming sketches of meadow, wood and dune. But he still has to pass an examination in October, and his father does not want him to spend so much time on drawing. But in my opinion he can very well combine his profession of land surveyor with drawing.

He is the kind of fellow Rappard was when we first knew him.

The things he made before I knew him were horrible daubs, most of them hideous. I began by telling him that at first he had to confine himself to drawing for some time. I made him draw many things which he did not like at all, but he trusted me in this. Now this morning he asked me if he couldn't try his hand at painting again, and *now* it came off very well, and he has scraped off all his old things.

I am longing for a letter from you; Rappard sends you his best regards.

Are you well, and how is your patient doing? Father told me you had written something about coming this summer. I can hardly tell you how much I long for it.

In the Salon's illustrated catalogue I saw “La Moisson” [Harvest] by Lhermitte. That looks good. How thoroughly it expresses the action of the peasant figure!

Well, adieu, I hope your letter will arrive soon, for I have gone through my money again. I saw Arnold in town with somebody else, perhaps Trip , they were walking with Mauve, but I saw them only from a distance. As Mauve was in the middle, it reminded me of “Le Christ Entre Deux Larrons” [Christ between Two Thieves], or the group silhouetted against a sunny wall made me think of somebody arrested by two policemen.

However, these are merely imaginings, “things as they might be seen.” Good luck, boy. A handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 21 May 1883

Amice Rappard,

On my coming home I found your postcard, which arrived a few moments after I went away this morning; I see from it that apart from having your model this afternoon, you also had an engagement in the morning. I am sorry you did not tell me, for we might have gone together.

For the rest - the pleasure of seeing your work is no trifle to me, and if it's true that I didn't upset your plans too much, I'm delighted with my visit to you.

But it wasn't my fault, as I hadn't received your postcard, which I only just found.

I repeat, I think your work is excellent - I think the sketch of the “Woman Spinning” especially is excellent too, indeed I do - that is *it*.

I wish you had a charcoal drawing of the “Tile Painters” too; I suggest you still make one. Why? - because such compositions most certainly come out strongly in painting, in which state they are in many respects truer to nature and more vigorously accented.... *But* the black and white or the light and brown in itself may acquire a peculiar charm - and has its own merits, and is at the same time suitable for reproduction - a photograph of the painted “Tile Painters” is doomed to be a failure, as the blue would come out white in the reproduction.

I think the heads [studies] of the blind men eminently good. Are you willing to decide in principle that we are to visit each other again before the end of the year?

Here follows a passage from Dickens that expresses forcefully what goes on in the mind of a figure painter while he is working on a composition:

I was occupied with this story during many working hours of two years. I must have been very ill employed, if I could not leave its merits and demerits as a whole to express themselves on its being read as a whole. But, as it is not unreasonable to suppose that I may have held its various threads with a more *continuous attention* than any one else can have given to them during its desultory publication, it is not unreasonable to ask that the weaving may be looked at in its complete state, and with the pattern finished - Preface, Little Dorrit.

Here you are, my dear friend, beautifully expressed, how a figure painter deserves to be looked at - *as a whole.*

This is how I looked at your work today, and my sympathy for you was confirmed by it. And as for you, I want you to go on looking at me as a whole too, which many others don't do.

What I think excellent too is that one sees books in your studio: Hugo, Zola, Dickens - figure painter's books. I shall send you Erckmann-Chatrian's Histoire d'un Paysan. The French Revolution - that is the central point - the Constitution of 1789 being the modern Gospel, no less sublime than that of 1 A.D. And how one can be a figure painter without feeling something of it is incomprehensible to me - and I find a certain emptiness in these figure painters' studios where the modern writings are absent. And I think that's your impression too.

Do you know what I forgot to take with me? - the “Grève des Charbonniers” [Strike of the Miners] by Robe, which I think you have in duplicate. I have it myself, but it was intended for Van der Weele, who - between you and me - is sorely in need of seeing some foreign compositions and, I think, is somewhat afflicted with Dutch prejudices - though he has freed himself of them in his large picture.

What I wanted to say about the printer's ink was, Just dabble a little with it - at random, as it were, and out of your own imagination, on a piece of paper or an old study, just to see the effect. But go easy on the turpentine; then I think you will find things in it that you will be able to use.

And try washing with a wet brush in something you have drawn with lithographic crayon. If you take the trouble, you will be able to find some things in the printer's ink that will be useful and practical - probably more and better things than I have found myself up to now.

How beautiful your illustrations by Lhermitte, Perret and Bastien Lepage are. If I were you, I should make more of those beautiful heads, like the ones of those blind men. I am going to try it with a finer pencil too.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

With reference to novelists, isn't it your opinion too that one knows such writers as Dickens, Balzac, Hugo, Zola only when one has a general idea of their works as a whole? I think the same applies to Michelet and Erckmann-Chatrian.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 21 May 1883

Dear Theo,

I just came back from Utrecht, from my visit to Rappard, and am glad to find your letter. Many thanks for it as well as for the enclosure. I am glad you are having a good time just now - “Le Paradou” must have been glorious indeed. Yes, I should not mind trying my hand at such a thing and I do not doubt you two would be very good models.

However, I prefer to see diggers digging, and have found glory outside Paradise, where one thinks more of the severer: “Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow.”

But I think the beauty of one increases when compared to the other.

I see from your letter that you are rather worried by what I wrote you concerning the woman. But it has redressed itself once again, and I hope the time will come when things go much better still.

When you come, I shall be able to tell you better than I can write it, just what makes me anxious about her sometimes. I repeat, the woman's thorough recovery, in soul as well as in body, is a work of years. You need not suddenly worry, as if something exceptional had happened, when my letters occasionally show some uneasiness; it cannot be otherwise. But in no case mention it to others. In general, she is getting on very well, and is making progress; but at times I do feel anxious, though I find nothing extraordinary in anything that happens to me. Well, we shall talk it over again sometime. In no case think ill of her - she has awfully good traits in her character which, with some luck, are worth fostering.

Now about my visit to Rappard. I am very glad to have been there: we shall now see more of each other in the future. I thought one picture of his - a woman spinning and especially the large sketch for it - very serious and really sympathetic. Then fusains - one of a room in an asylum for the blind, one of a kind of smithy with striking figures, very good.

A second picture, representing tile painters, was in Amsterdam, but I saw the studies and the sketches for it.

My impression of certain changes for the better in his way of thinking was confirmed too.

I do hope our friendship will ripen from year to year, that we shall get more and more interested in each other's work.

He had a small watercolour of a village churchyard which I thought exquisite of sentiment, very original.

If you know the Belgian painter Meunier - some things in Rappard's work reminded me of him.

Of course, we talked much about new projects and plans during these visits to each other.

I firmly intend to start a few large fusains with figures, too.

But, Theo, the work brings so many expenses: and in many things I haven't the free hand that would be necessary. Of course, the household costs are heavy too. One needs food and clothes, there is also the studio rent; well, but it certainly has cheered me that Rappard likes several things I've done, and now that I've seen what his own work is like, I am even more glad that some of my things pleased him.

I am always afraid of not working enough; I think I can do so much better still, and that is what I am striving for, sometimes with a kind of fury. And I see again in Rappard how practical it is to use good stuff, to work often with the model, *etc.* Rappard's studio is very good and looks very comfortable.

I wish you would bring my old studies with you when you come.

I think if you saw all the things together, you would choose differently, and, when you are here, I hope we can select the things you would like to have, so that they form a whole. I myself cannot judge whether some of my studies are finished enough to be worthy of being kept anywhere else but in my studio.

Well, I came back from Rappard's full of plans and full of hope, because there I saw the fruits of the studies already - that is to say, combinations of different figures in more important compositions. *That is what I can expect* too. But it takes time, and in the meantime one must go on making new studies after the model. The good things can be separated from among them. The best of our arrangement is that the studies are kept together, either by you or by me - let us keep courage and grind on.

I am going out with Van der Weele early tomorrow morning. Adieu, boy; again, many thanks, and all good wishes for yourself,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 25 May 1883

Amice Rappard,

I feel strongly impelled to tell you again how much your visit has stimulated me. I intend to start a number of larger compositions; in fact I've already started one of them. It is a composition of “Peat Cutters in the Dunes.”

Do you remember I told you that there was such a beautiful subject there in the dunes? It is something like putting up a barricade. I started it as soon as I came back from you, for it was already about ripe in my mind.

In the same way I have thought a lot about some other compositions, for which I also have the studies. But if I hadn't had the money you gave me, I should not have been able to do it right now.

I had a wooden passe-partout made, something like yours but without a frame. I am thinking of giving this as yet unpainted passe-partout a walnut colour, the same colour as your *frame*. The work gets on nicely when the drawing is shut off; and as soon as I saw your drawings I decided to get such a passe-partout too.

I saw an illustration in Harper's Weekly by Reinhardt - by far the best thing I have seen of his so far - “Washed Ashore.” A corpse has been washed ashore, a man is kneeling beside it to see who it is, a number of fishermen and women are giving information about the shipwrecked man to a gendarme. So it somewhat resembles “Une Épreuve” [A Questioning], which you have, but there is something of, say, Régamey in this drawing by Reinhardt; it is a very beautiful sheet.

How much beauty one can find, can't one? I have now sketched the Peat Cutters with charcoal, “black mountain crayon” and autographic ink [F 1031, JH 363]. I have not yet used the strong effects of printer's ink in it, so its aspect is not as vigorous as I imagine it may become. My only objection against charcoal is that it gets effaced so easily, which, unless one is very careful, causes one to lose things one has found. And there is something in my make-up that does not want to be too careful.

I have some plans for large drawings which, my dear friend, will perhaps arouse your sympathy.

I wish you had read Les Misérables - then it would be easier for me to speak to you about it, for you might be struck by the same things that are continually coming back to my mind - this would not surprise me. I already knew the book, but since I've reread it, many things in it keep returning to my thoughts again and again.

You and I were taught something like history at school, but, if your experience was the same as mine, that was not enough; it was too dry and too conventional. Well, speaking for myself, I should like particularly to have a clear survey of the period from for instance 1770 to the present. The French Revolution is the very greatest modern event, and everything in our own time hinges on it too.

When I read something like Paris and London [A Tale of Two Cities] by Dickens, and think it over, then I come to the conclusion that one can get such splendid subjects for drawings out of that revolutionary period - not bearing directly on history proper, but rather incidents of everyday life and the appearance of things as they used to be then. Take that drawing by Howard Pyle and the other one by Abbey, both of which I showed you some time ago - “Christmas in old New York” and “Christmas in Old Virginia.”

Well, letting one's thoughts dwell on the period beginning in those days and up to the present, one surveys an era in which everything has changed. And several moments are especially interesting. And in various French and English books you find them described so impressively and with so much ability that it becomes possible to get a clear image of those past things.

Dickens, who usually wrote about his own time, could not resist writing the Tale of Two Cities, and every now and then we see descriptions of the old days inserted in his work - a description of the London streets before there were street lamps, for instance.

Now the question is, could one find Dutch subjects, taken, for instance, from the time when the first street lamps were put up, or before they existed? Just imagine a church pew or a funeral scene around 1815; a house-moving, a public promenade, a street on a winter's day of the same period or somewhat later.

In Les Misérables, although it treats of a later era, I find what I have been looking for - aspects of the past that induce me to remember how everything looked in my great-grandfather's day, or even no longer ago than my grandfather's time.

Hugo's Quatre-vingt-treize was something that was illustrated by all the artists of the Graphic in a body.

And how impressively Caldecott does it!

I should like to see what kind of impression that Quatre-vingt-treize and Les Misérables would make on you. It's certain that you will think them beautiful. When I visited you, I saw some nooks of the town which my imagination enlivened with figures of the old days. Well, we shall probably have some more talks about drawings from a past period. I hope it will happen that you come here again this summer, as you said you would. It is not impossible that my brother in Paris will call on you this summer too; I want him to see your work again, and so, when he is here, I should like the two of us to go and see you.

With a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 30 May 1883

Dear Theo,

This week I have been working hard on a large drawing which I sent you a little sketch of.

When I was with Rappard, he said, “Those very first drawings of yours were good after all; you ought to make some again in the same way.”

Do you remember that in the very beginning I sent you some sketches, “Winter Tale,” “Shadows Passing,” etc.? *You* said at the time that the action of the figures was not well enough expressed, do you remember? That was quite true, but now for several years I have drudged exclusively on the figure to get some action and structure into it. And because of that very drudgery I had somehow lost the strong desire to compose and to let the imagination work.

When Rappard spoke with a certain warmth about that very first time, it awoke again. Now, superficial though this little sketch may be, I think you will find something of that very first sentiment back in it, but now with more action.

These are “Peat Cutters” in the dunes - the original drawing is about one meter by half a meter.

It is a splendid bit of scenery from which one can draw an infinite number of subjects. I have been there very often recently, and made all kinds of studies of it. Rappard saw them, but when he was here, we did not yet know how to put them together. I have figured out this composition since then. And once I had, it came off pretty well, and at four o'clock in the morning I was already at work on it in my garret.

Having started composing once again, I intend to go on with it and to carry out some which I have in my head and for which I have already made the studies. I have made preparations for it by ordering some stretchers and also a large wooden frame to be able to work in the frame and shut it off. I hope that when this is finished, you will not mind taking it with you some day to show to the illustration people, and that such a thing will please you more than those single studies.

But I can't tell beforehand, and we shall see how it is when you come. But, boy, I am so glad that I have been able to start this before you come. We can *speak better* about the future now.

I want so much to make something comforting, something that makes one think.

You know that one of the pictures I think most beautiful of all is “The Walk on the Ramparts” by Leys. That style, however, is not the fashion nowadays, but the sentiment in it has something eternal; one may have different conceptions of reality, of nature, and yet find again, even now, what was more generally sought after and felt in Leys's time than now. But it demands continuous effort to express what one feels and to get it into shape.

I cannot tell you how that visit to Rappard has cheered me; I like his work so much, and when I was with him, he said it had also done him good to be with me. By talking together, we have got new ideas.

I wish you could meet Rappard again when you come to Holland. I think in his studio, as well as in mine, you would get an impression more reminiscent of what one used to see in the studios than of what one sees at present.

Yet I think it will have your sympathy.

Right now Rappard is working on a kind of smithy, and last winter he painted “The Asylum for the Blind” and “The Tile Painters.” All of them have style and are serious and original, I think.

You understand all this causes me many expenses. Without the money I got from Rappard, I should not have been able to undertake this.

And though I have studies for it, I still need models continually, and the progress depends on whether I have money to pay them.

I have a few more in mind, but I'm getting short of money again.

You see, whenever I have a bit of luck, I immediately make use of it to undertake a thing that would otherwise have miscarried.

So whenever you can spare it, do send me something extra if possible.

This “Peat Cutters” is quite different from “Le Paradou,” but I assure you I also feel for “Le Paradou.” Who knows, someday I may attack such a Paradou subject.

Write soon if you haven't written already.

When you see the drawing, I don't think you will find it too large. The proportions of the figures is such that one can put some vigour into them, and each of them demands a special study. I have studies for all the figures that appear in it. I made this drawing with charcoal and crayon and printer's ink.

Well, good luck and write soon. A few days ago I was with Van der Weele in the dunes. There we found a spot where they were digging sand from the dunes, a splendid thing with diggers and wheelbarrows.

Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3 June 1883

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and thanks for the enclosure. Today is Sunday, and I have been working furiously this week, and now today I am sitting down quietly to write you somewhat more extensively than I have been able to of late, because there were so many things to distract me. And I particularly want to write to you because I see from your letter that things are not going so well with you, and I want to write somewhat more cordially than usual.

If in my own case - considering my small income - Father and Mother should raise objections to my marrying on account of my having no money, I could approve of it to a certain extent, at least understand why they talked this way and gave in. But, Theo, now that in *your* case - knowing that you have a permanent position and a good salary (nota bene, considerably more than their own) - they raise the same objection, I can only say that I think it unutterably pretentious and downright ungodly. In point of fact, clergymen are among the most unbelieving people in society and dry materialists. Perhaps not right in the pulpit, but in private matters. From a moral point of view one might be allowed to object to a marriage if real *want of bread* in its literal sense were to be expected; but as I see it, such an objection utterly loses its moral justification as soon as there is no question of *actual want of bread*. And it would be ridiculous to predict want of *bread* in your case.

Suppose somebody like old Mr. Goupil should raise monetary objections - from his point of view as a rich merchant, one could not expect anything else.

But coming from Father and Mother, who ought to be humble and contented with simple things, I think their speaking that way very wicked, and I feel something like shame at their behaviour.

I wish we only strove for peace in our homes, and stinted ourselves rather than strain after a high position. And used our energy to increase our spiritual refinement and humaneness, but were contented with the most simple things as a matter of principle.

So I regret it, and it grieves me; again, I am horribly disappointed at Father and Mother saying such a thing.

I should be willing to do anything to undo this.

I should like to be proud of Father, because he is truly a poor village preacher in the pure sense of the Gospel, but I think it so rotten that Father stoops to such considerations as something not being in keeping with “the dignity of his calling.”

My opinion is that one might expect Father to co-operate as soon as the question of saving a woman arises. It would be right to be on *her* side, because she is poor and deserted.

By not doing so, Father commits an enormous error: it is inhuman for anyone to do such a thing; doubly so, however, if he is a servant of the Gospel.

Thwarting the interests of such a woman, preventing her rescue, is monstrous.

Oh, I know very well that nearly all clergymen would use the same language as Father - and for this reason I reckon the whole lot of them among the most ungodly men in our society.

You and I also sometimes do things which are perhaps sinful; but for all that, we are not merciless, and we feel pity, and for the very reason that we do not consider ourselves perfect and know how things can happen, we do not revile fallen or frail women as the clergymen do, as if they themselves were the only ones at fault. And now this woman of yours is, moreover, a decent woman of a middle-class family, and I really think Father's error *serious*.

Suppose there were objections - my opinion is that Father, because he is a shepherd, ought to urge you on to help her and put up with difficulties for the sake of her preservation. One ought to find comfort from people like Father when society does not give comfort - but not they! - they are even worse than ordinary people.

It is horrible that Father assumes this attitude.

When Father was here, he spoke disapprovingly of my being with the woman, and then I told him I did not refuse to marry her.

Then Father *evaded* the point, and started talking in generalities.

He did not want to tell me I ought to desert her on the spot, but he regretted that I had relations with her.

For the rest, I talked but little with Father about the matter, seeing that I do not exactly consider him the person to be concerned in it. You have done your duty by informing Father and Mother of the affair, but now that they talk the way they do, I am of the opinion that they have given you the right to exclude them from certain confidences and to consult them less than you would if they were more reasonable. Their error is that they are not humble and humane enough in this case.

Now you write that business is less flourishing. This is rotten enough. But the position has always been precarious, and may be expected to remain so as long as you live. Let us keep up our courage, and try to find energy and serenity.

I can tell you that my first composition, of which I sent you a sketch, is almost finished. First I made the drawing in charcoal, then worked it over with brush and printer's ink. So there is some pith in it, and I think when you look at it for the second time, you will find more in it than you did at first.

Besides, since I sent you this sketch I made a second drawing, of a similar subject.

Do you remember that once you described (last year) an accident in a stone quarry in the Butte Montmartre where you saw a group of workmen, one of whom had been badly hurt in the quarry? Well, this is a similar case, but simply the group of men at work.

I was with Van der Weele in Dekker's Dune, where we saw that sand pit; and since then I have gone there regularly and had a model every day, and now the second drawing is also done.

It represents men with wheelbarrows and men who are digging.

I shall try to make a sketch of it too, but it is a complicated composition and can hardly be judged from a sketch, any more than the other one can.

The figures have been drawn after painstaking studies

I should like very much to have these reproduced

The first one is on grey paper, the other, on yellow.

I long very much, Theo to have you in the studio again, for there are so many studies, and now you can see what I was aiming at when I made the studies, and they may furnish the raw material for many more things.

I have had a frame made, or rather a passe-partout of ordinary wood, and have given it a walnut colour with a black inner strip; that shuts off the drawing very well, and it is pleasant working in the frame.

I have made arrangements for other larger compositions, and I have again stretchers for two new ones ready; I should also like to do the tree felling in the wood, and the refuse dump with the dustmen, and the potato digging in the dunes.

It was a good thing that I went to see Rappard, for his sympathy has cheered me where I hadn't enough self-confidence. But when you see these drawings, Theo, and the studies, you will understand that this year I have had as much care and trouble as a man can bear. It is devilishly difficult to hammer out a figure. And indeed, it is the same as with iron - one works on a model, and goes on working, at first with no result; but at last it mellows, and one finds the figure, like the iron, becomes malleable when it is hot, and *then* one must go on working on it. So I had a model continually for these two drawings, and worked on them early and late.

I am sorry to hear from you that business is rather slack; if circumstances become more difficult, let us redouble our energy. I will be doubly intent on my drawings, but for the present do be doubly intent on sending the money. To me it means models, studio, bread; cutting it down would be something like choking or drowning me. I mean, I can do as little without it now as I can do without air. I had these two drawings in my heart for a long time, but I did not have the money to carry them out; and now, thanks to Rappard's money, they have got form. The creative power cannot be repressed, one must give vent to what one feels.

Do you know what I often think? I should like to get into contact with the Graphic or London News in England. Now that I am getting on with it, I should like so much to continue a few large compositions suitable for illustration.

Boughton and Abbey together are making drawings called “Picturesque Holland” for Harper's in New York (agent for the Graphic too). I saw those illustrations at Rappard's (very thoroughly done, small though they are and undoubtedly made after larger drawings). Now I say to myself, If the Graphic and Harper's send their draughtsmen to Holland, perhaps they would not be unwilling to take on a draughtsman from Holland if he can produce some good work and not too expensively.

I should prefer being put on regular monthly wages to selling a drawing now and then at a relatively high price. And I should like to make a contract for a series of compositions, for instance, following up these two drawings I am working on now, or those I am going to do. I should think it advisable to go to London myself with studies and drawings and to visit the managers of the various establishments or, better still, the artists Herkomer, Green, Boughton (but some of them are in America at present) or others, if they are in London. And there, better than anywhere else, I should be able to get information about the different processes. Perhaps Rappard would come with me, and take drawings with him too. Such a thing, more or less modified, ought to be done, I think.

Personally I could undertake to do one large drawing for a double-page engraving for illustration every month, and I will also apply myself to the other sizes, whole page and half page.

I know perfectly well that reproductions can be made large or small, but a double page is more suitable for things done in a broad style; the smaller ones may be drawn in a different way, for instance, with pen and pencil.

Now, I don't think it's every day that the managers of magazines find somebody who considers making illustrations his specialty.

From the little sketch which I made after the large drawing just now, in a quarter of an hour, and which I enclose herewith, you will see that I don't mind making the size larger or smaller if necessary; when I know that a certain size is wanted, I can make it.

But for my own study, I prefer the large size, so that I can study hands, feet, head in greater detail. Don't you think that a number of drawings of tree felling, etc., might be done in the same style in which I just did “Peat Cutters” and “Sand Diggers” - and in that way would be interesting enough to serve as illustrations?

But I repeat, the money from you is absolutely indispensable to me as long as I have not found employment. Out of what I received from you today, I have to pay exactly as much as I received: I have *still to pay* three models who have posed several times. I have to pay the carpenter, to pay the rent, to pay the baker and the grocer and also the shoemaker, and I have to lay in some provisions. Then I have in front of me two blank sheets for new compositions, and must set to work on them. I shall again have to take a model every day, and struggle hard till I have got it down. Quand bien même I'll get started, but you will understand that in a few days I shall be absolutely penniless, and then those terrible eight long days of not being able to do anything but wait, wait for the tenth of the month.

Oh, boy, if we could only find somebody who would buy the drawings. The work is an absolute necessity for me. I can't put it off, I don't care for anything but the work; that is to say, the pleasure in something else ceases at once and I become melancholy when I can't go on with my work. Then I feel like a weaver who sees that his threads are tangled, and the pattern he had on the loom is gone to hell, and all his thought and exertion is lost.

Try to arrange it so that we can go on with energy. I am going to ask permission to work in the old people's asylum. I have already made many studies of old men, but I must have the women too, and I must also draw the surroundings on the spot. Well, you also have to provide for the woman, so I suppose you know well enough that in this respect my life is not easy either, with two children into the bargain.

I think it is so urgent that you see the studies and the large drawings, especially with the financial side in mind. You might take the same steps in Paris that I would take in London with regard to illustrations if you could show a few large drawings. But in that case I think it would be best not to begin before we were almost sure of their being readily accepted.

These large compositions cause many expenses if one wants to treat them conscientiously. For, boy, it must all be done with the model; even if one uses studies, one must still retouch them again, using the model. If I could take even more models, I should be able to make them much, much better. So, boy, if you think I could manage without your help for once, I assure you I need it more than ever, but I show you our chance of success if we persevere. I have already bought several things with Rappard's money - sketching blocks, *etc.* - and everything you send is invested in drawings, and I think you will like those I am making now better than the first ones. So let us keep up our courage and energy.

A great drawback for many things I should like to make on the beach is that I have no Scheveningen woman's dress. You understand, I could make a composition of Scheveningen figures such as the enclosed little sketch. But when I draw a figure out-of-doors, it is of course too superficial. It must be taken up again and finished with a model, and one needs the costumes.

That expenditure, if I could afford it, would enable me to start two or three drawings I have in mind. But how can I do it? I repeat, within three days all the money I have now will be gone, I have to spend almost everything. For these two drawings I also needed a number of frocks, trousers, sou'wester, *etc.* A model does not always wear a good, picturesque frock; by changing it, it becomes more characteristic and arresting. When you come, you must see how elaborate the studies of the figures for the first plane of the sketch are. I made them out-of-doors on a sand heap in a florist's garden.

In the beginning of your letter you write that you are glad there was no cause for anxiety about the woman. Well, it is true there is no direct reason for it, that is to say that in this respect too I try to preserve my serenity and good courage. But there are worries enough, heavy cares even, and difficulties are not wanting. I began trying to save the woman, notwithstanding the difficulties, and up to the present I have gone through with it, but in the future everything will not be couleur de rose either. Well, we must work as hard as we can.

Theo, do you know what the difficulties I had with the woman were when I wrote you last? - her family tried to draw her away from me; I have had nothing to do with any of them except the mother, because I did not trust them. The more I tried to analyze the history of that family, the more I was strengthened in that opinion. Now, just because I kept out of their way, they plot against me, and so a treacherous attack occurred. I told the woman my opinion of their intentions, and said she had to choose between her family and me, but that I did not want to have anything to do with any of them, primarily because I thought that relations with her family would lead her back to her former bad life. The family proposed that she, with her mother, should keep house for a brother of hers who divorced his wife and is rather an infamous scoundrel. The reason why the family advised her to leave me was that I earned too little, and I was not good to her, and did it only for the posing, but would certainly leave her in the lurch. Nota bene, she has hardly been able to pose the whole year because of the baby. Well, you can judge for yourself just how far these suspicions of me have any foundations. But all these things were secretly discussed behind my back, and at last the woman told me. I said to her, “Do just as you like, but I shall never leave you unless you turn back to your former life.”

The worst is, Theo, that if we are hard up now and then, they try to upset the woman in that way, and that rascal of a brother, for instance, tries to drive her back to her former life. Well, I can only say of her that I should think it sensible and loyal of her if she broke off all relations with her family. I myself dissuade her from going there, but if she wants to, I let her go. And the temptation to show off her baby, for instance, often drives her back to her family. And that influence is fatal, and makes a greater impression upon her because it comes from her family, who upset her by saying, He will certainly leave you someday. So they try to make her leave me.

Adieu, boy, let us work and keep our head clear, and try to act rightly! You know how it is with my money; if you can help me, do so.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 3 June 1883

Dear Theo,
While I think of it, I must tell you once more that what you say about “like a meek dove” (a period like Correggio painted) is true, it does not last, and it is right that it does not last. It is also right that we see it and that we experience it and shall not forget it; but it does not last, because that poignant feeling (though I believe it remains deeply hidden in man) is changed into a more normal condition - so, for instance the woman here now looks much more like a mother hen fussing over her chickens. But a mother hen is a pretty animal for all that.

This morning I was in a charitable home, boy, to see a little old woman (with whom I had to arrange about posing), and thus far she has brought up two natural children of her daughter's who is a so-called kept woman. Several things struck me: in the first place, the neglected appearance of the poor little creatures, though the grandmother does her best, and many are much worse off; and secondly, I was deeply touched by the devotion of that little grandmother, and it struck me that when an old woman puts her wrinkled hands to such a task, we men must not let ours be idle.

I saw the real mother, who just dropped in, wearing untidy clothes, with uncombed, unkempt hair. And, boy, I thought of the difference between the woman with whom I live as she is now and as I found her a year ago, and between the children here and there.

Oh, if only one keeps reality in mind, then it is as clear as daylight that it is a good thing to take care of what would otherwise wither and droop. And I personally think that no argument about the objections to or the impropriety of meddling can counter the reality of these things. And in my case, just because it fits in with my profession, many difficulties disappear, though from another side, the financial one, many difficulties do indeed arise, and will remain. But here also it sometimes happens that the poor are the poor man's friend, and certainly it is a good thing that women and children learn thrift and that men learn to work hard.

But as for you, there are things which I foresee you will have to contend with, like everybody else - things of another nature, which occur in all men's lives, for that matter. I mean, you should thoroughly prepare yourself for the fact that you will gradually discover quite different things in the woman whom you are taking care of - that is in her character. And speaking my mind unreservedly, I say you will be disappointed in her, and perhaps you will say to her, “How you have changed!” and she will say the same thing to you. And then I think it will mean a step in the right direction if - notwithstanding this “change” on both sides - *neither of you* is annoyed with the other, and *you* learn to put up with things on *her* part, and *she* learns to put up with things on *your* part - or, in other words, if there is a mutual overlooking of shortcomings.

Look, this is a crisis nobody can escape, and it is a crisis which may cause some to become more firmly attached to each other, whereas on the other hand, it may cause others to become estranged by it, which is always a very deplorable thing to have happen once one has started. In short, *sticking it out* is not always an easy thing to do.

And here in my case, for instance, in *those* days I was very glad now and then that there were *children* for whose sake the path of duty was more clearly discernible. To the woman as well as to myself.

Look, man has no stauncher friend than his *duty,* and though at times it may be a rough and stern taskmaster, as long as one works *in its service,* one will not easily become a bankrupt.

And when I say I foresee you will have conflicts, perhaps more than the usual number of conflicts, I base this supposition on the fact that probably this woman may also be of a humbler station in life, as it's called. And what Father says about this, for instance - you know his way of thinking sufficiently for me not to need to repeat it - is really true, at least in certain respects I admit it. Only there are certain cases, like yours, in which the important thing is to save a life - look, in such cases Father himself would not know what to do, or rather, I actually believe that in his heart too “je vôte pour la vie” would carry the day. Ah! you know, once in a while *when* I am in doubt, I ask myself, Would you be a *judge* passing a death sentence? And every time I find only *one* answer: No, once and for all, I am for abolishing death sentences, legal or otherwise, ostracism and other peines capitales. We are called on to *preserve* life, to respect life; that is our duty, and we can always justify it - even if the world puts us in the wrong and things do not turn out to our advantage.

So you see, old fellow, this letter is meant to tell you that you not only have my sympathy if things turn out *well*, but also in case they turn out *badly*.

And as for me, you must not infer from this letter that things turned out badly in my case, for I have much to be thankful for; but notwithstanding this, petites misères of various kinds have befallen me, and the “precariousness” of such situations is so clear to me that, seeing it is only the beginning for you, I wanted to tell you once and for all that in my opinion it is *right to* try to save the life of such an unknown woman, even if one does not know beforehand how this woman will turn out later, nor what she will prove to be. And in no event shall I be among those who say, ”You never should have let yourself in for it,” for it stands to reason that *this* will be the general opinion if it *should happen* that things do *not* turn out well.

Further, this letter is meant to tell you that I think it *desirable* that there be a child, for you will see that most people consider this a difficulty, which I do *not* see, just the reverse. And I assure you, I expect everything can be arranged so that you will not be compromised in the eyes of the world; but suppose things came to such a pass that you had to choose between compromising yourself and deserting her - in that case I should approve of you if you said, I vote for life, and when it is a case of saving a human life, I scorn a compromise. This is if the worst comes to the worst, but as long as you are able to live in peace with everybody without harming her - do so. Well, it is not superfluous to say so, taking into account that Father, for instance, said to me at the time, “There is something immoral in a liaison with a woman of a lower station in life” (which I do not think true, as I do not see any *connection* between the station in life and morality: the station in life concerns the world, morality concerns God), and further, “Do not sacrifice your position to a woman,” which I do not think applies when a human life is at stake.

But Father himself is not such a die-hard, and often he is quite reasonable.

As to the possibility of certain persons turning against you because of the woman, I do not think you will regret going in for a permanent relationship, in which I differ radically from those who as a matter of principle only enter into relationships “without consequences.”

One finds great inner calm in a permanent relationship, and I think it in harmony with nature; whereas one transgresses the eternal moral laws as soon as one tries to shirk the consequences of a relationship with a woman. My opinion is that a man who regulates his life in harmony with the eternal laws of nature as well as of morality contributes his share toward the reform and progress and amelioration of things which have become disorientated in present-day society. Therefore, do not doubt the reasonableness of your act; you cannot be too calm and imperturbable in the face of people's cynical remarks. A permanent relationship often is a source of rejuvenation of vigor and enterprise. One may lose protection, but one gains energy and keeps on one's feet, after all.

But do you know what is a danger, which I realize now more than I used to?

With reference to your ideas about things, you are concerned not only with yourself, but also with the views of the woman you are with. And just when you are firm and unshakable in the face of outward influences, it may happen that in certain respects the woman will let herself be disconcerted by the opposition of certain people. And will start opposing you in the same way as the people I mentioned, and will say, It won't do, it's impossible - and that, at a time when you are already victorious, so to speak.

Well, the woman may change a great deal in consequence of the shocks she has had to undergo and may stand by you; she may turn out a success or a failure according to the way she reacts to things, she may improve or deteriorate in character by rowing against the stream.

And retrogression is part of the female character.

But as there are qualities in your woman which indicate that there is something intellectual about her, and as she is not without culture, I think that for this reason she doubly deserves your confidence.

If it should be that her intellectual development is coupled with contentedness, and she is modest in her demands, I do not think the above-mentioned things are to be feared. And being equal to a period of rowing against the stream, she can only gain energy. Therefore be of good heart.

And with regard to my finances, know it well that whatever you can spare is as absolutely necessary to me as the air I breathe, and that my productivity depends on it, but I don't think you need be afraid of taking any steps toward recommending my work, for it will not be a failure; I think I can assure you we will find friends for it. And for my part, in order to lighten the burden for you, though apart from that I assure you I did not like it at all, I wrote to C. M., and I want to ask you: could *you* perhaps write a little word to Tersteeg, telling him that I am working on those large drawings? Look here, boy, if Mauve gave a helping hand *now*, for instance, perhaps, perhaps they might be turned into paintings. I think the studies and compositions are worked out enough to serve as a foundation for a painted picture. If I had the means, I would not care to sell these at all, and I should keep my work together till it formed a good whole.

And know that I long terribly for your coming. I think you will see, brother, that your faithful help and your sacrifices for me have borne some fruit, and will bear even more. But I am greatly in need of money for the expenses. And even if we don't sell these, I think they might become the means of finding new connections, and perhaps of re-establishing relations with C. M. or Tersteeg or Mauve.

Adieu, boy, a warm handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

[Written on a loose leaf] I should think it all the more desirable if you could send me something extra because, instead of doing less, I should like to do more during the days between now and your arrival.

I hope I shall be able to push things forward a little more, because I am now getting results with lithographic crayon, and turn out things that are better and more vigorous than the former drawings. Only a few more pulls, and I think they may be able and willing to use me for some illustration work or other.

For although this may seem of little account, I am fitted by nature for such a position, and I feel the inclination and the energy for it.

And also, I should like so very much to wash on Torchon again, probably before your arrival too. For you must not suppose that I have dismissed the idea of doing watercolours or painting. I am most firmly resolved to do it, only drawing is the root of everything, and the time spent on it is really wholly profitable.

One cannot help drawing “pictures of the future” in one's mind. One does this even if one is convinced one cannot predict anything with certainty and sufficient accuracy. But what you write today may have a great influence on my future. Who knows if it might not end in our being drawn together even more closely.

Well, at all events your coming here has become doubly important to me on account of this, and I want to try to give myself a few more pulls in the right direction; help me do it if you can.

If at some time or other you should get more of a home life, I think we should understand each other even better, and I have the impression we should mean even more to each other.

I understand it is probable that you are going to have many cares, and if I can do anything to produce better work, I shall exert myself doubly.

At times a blessing may rest on love, though the world seems to think one ought to doubt this. But the blessing is rooted in the fact that if one works with love in one's heart, one can do more than otherwise, and is afraid of fewer things. And consequently one has more serenity. In short, one learns to persevere. And, my dear fellow, however all this may be - whether socially speaking it will be to your advantage or not - I believe that after all you can only gain by it. Therefore a blessing on everything you do, and be assured of my heartfelt wish that the woman you are taking care of may recover and be saved.

Yes, it certainly is inspiring work - saving a life from drowning in a sea of misery! It may well be that it is a great happiness for you as well as for her. For then hidden forces of energy and vitality will develop. Once more, thanks for your letter and the remittance. And if you can, write again soon.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 4 or 5 June 1883

Dear Theo,
I must tell you that this evening Van der Weele came to see my drawings. His opinion was favourable, and I am very glad of it.

Do you know what I have done - in regard to the necessity of earning some money if possible? I have sent small sketches of both compositions to C. M. I wish this may perhaps result in his helping to carry out my plan of making a series of drawings of the work in the dunes.

Then I thought that perhaps these drawings would be something for Cottier. I imagine they would look well, placed in the panels of a large cabinet over a mantelpiece, in a wainscot - in short, framed in woodwork as they do in England, and elsewhere too. But you know how it is with Cottier, when there is a certain degree of style in a drawing he likes it well enough, but alas, he generally pays little. Still, I believe he is one of those who would care for them; and besides, he could display the drawings favourably.

Then, couldn't you show the sketches to our friend Wisselingh, and tell him I think they would look well framed in woodwork? At all events, urge him to visit my studio, if perchance he might come to The Hague. For if he might find them suitable for such a purpose, I could perhaps make an arrangement with him for more of them; and if I knew he cared for them, I could perhaps make them even more suitable for that purpose by trying to give them a decidedly decorative character.

This morning I was already out-of-doors at four o'clock. I intend to attack the dustmen, or rather the attack has already begun. This drawing requires studies of horses, and I made two of them today, in the stables of the Rhine railway station: and probably I shall get an old horse at the refuse dump. That refuse dump is a splendid thing, but very complicated and difficult, and it will cost me a lot of hard work. I made a few sketches very early in the morning: the one that gives a vista of a brilliant little spot of fresh green will ultimately be the one, I think.

It is somewhat like the scratch I made here; everything, even the women in the foreground and the white horses in the background, must stand out in chiaroscuro against the little bit of green, with a streak of sky above it. So that all those gloomy sheds, gliding away, one after the other, and all that dirt and those grey figures are in contrast to something pure and fresh.

A group of women and a horse form the lighter part in the tone of the chiaroscuro, and the dustmen and the dung heaps, the darker.

In the foreground, all kinds of broken and discarded objects, bits of old baskets, a rusty street lamp, broken pots, *etc.*

So many ideas and such an desire to make new ones arose in me while making these first two drawings, that I do not know where to start, but I am definitely going to stick to the ash dump now.

Well, Theo, we must keep good courage and try to work on energetically. We may be hard up sometimes and not know how to make both ends meet, but that does not matter and cannot be avoided; he who perseveres often conquers.

And just now when it is doubly difficult for you to send the money, there is perhaps a real chance to sell something: if only you were here! I also thought, if he did not stick to his idea of not having anything to do with me, Tersteeg might perhaps have some use for these compositions on a smaller scale, for instance, in sepia. If only you were here, you might perhaps make some arrangement with him. I certainly do not refuse to take the trouble to make things, but as long as things are not right with Tersteeg and C. M. and I have no source of income whatever except the money from you, do your utmost, for I think everything depends on my working energetically just now.

Though I have hardly any money left, I have already made arrangements with the models for this new drawing, and with what is left for the moment I will perhaps get a Scheveningen bonnet and cape today. If I can get hold of that patched cape, boy, I have my woman's figure for the first plane of the drawing of the dustmen - I am sure of it; and it is a start to making other figures of women for Scheveningen drawings.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 5 or 6 June 1883

Dear Theo,
Today I received a letter from home, and though Father does not mention you in it, I want to speak to you about it because just now you would perhaps like to know something more about their frame of mind than what they write to you directly. And it is my impression that for the present you need not worry about it.

The said letter is Father's first since his visit here, and it is very kind and cordial, and was accompanied by a parcel containing a woman's coat, a hat, a packet of cigars, a cake, a money order. In the letter was a draft of a sermon, of which I liked the text by far the best, and which touched me less than a simple word about a funeral from a farmhand did afterward.

I tell you this in such detail so that you may see there is nothing abnormal or any definite overexcitement; but I did get the impression that Father was in a rather passive or submissive mood, more inclined toward a friendly, melancholy view of things than might be supposed from the expressions of disapproval you passed on to me.

I suppose those words were intended more as advice or warning - but not as a sign of direct opposition to your firm decision.

Because in my previous letter I disapproved so strongly of what Father had said - and I still disapprove of it, as I am most decidedly of the opposite opinion, and consider it irrelevant to raise difficulties and financial and religious objections in this case - I should like to soften my words to this extent that I think we are concerned with an error (at least number one is an error) [i.e. the financial objections] which exists more in his words than in his heart or his frame of mind. And I cannot help reminding you that Father is an old man, and so fondly attached to you, and I am sure you will find that he will give in to you if it must be so, even though it be contrary to his own opinion, but that it would be impossible for him to live estranged from you or on less friendly terms. Well, I suppose I know Father somewhat, and I think I notice signs of a little melancholy.

And looking at it from a human point of view I withdraw my opinion that “by talking the way they did they have shown themselves unworthy of your confidence, and therefore I think you need not consult them any longer” or something of the kind, for I do not remember exactly what I wrote. But please understand what I mean not because I disapprove less of what they said, but because I have the impression that in this case you need not resent it so much, and that there is no urgent need to start hostilities as long as they confine themselves to words. Better forestall unpleasantness by saying, for instance: “You take rather a somber view of the future,” or, “But you cannot demand of me that I act as if the clock were going to strike the hour of the world's end,” which I think would be more sensible than attaching too much weight to their words.

I have the impression Father is somewhat melancholy, and that perhaps he is worrying over you, and imagining gloomy things - but I repeat, Father did not write one syllable about the matter itself, and did not say a word about it on the occasion of his visit, though this avoidance of mentioning it is somewhat abnormal too.

If you want to remedy this, write somewhat cheerfully and lightly, and write about your visit this summer as if it were certain that you would see them soon (even if you do not know yourself how you can fix the time of your coming).

For perhaps, perhaps Father himself is conscious of having gone a little too far, or perhaps he is anxious about how you will take it, and is afraid you will not come.

Of course I do not know it for sure and can only guess; but what I think is, Father is an old man and deserves to be cheered up if possible.

That it is my opinion that you ought to be faithful to the woman, you know well enough; there is no question of saying anything less about it than I did; you must act as you think right, but don't be angry with Father if he is mistaken.

That is what I wanted to say. Don't even mention that he is mistaken unless he continues to press the point; perhaps he will change his mind of his own accord.

Now again about the work: today I asked permission to make sketches in the old people's asylum, that is, of the men's ward, of the women's ward and of the garden.

I was there today. From the window I sketched an old gardener near a twisted apple tree, and the carpenter's shop of the asylum, where I had tea with two old almshouse men. In the men's ward I can come as a visitor: it was very striking, indescribably striking.

One little fellow, for instance, with a long thin neck, in a wheel chair, was splendid. That carpenter's shop with those two old men and a view of the cool green garden was just the thing, like Bingham's photograph of that little picture by Meissonier, those two priests sitting at the table drinking. Perhaps you know what I mean.

But it is not quite certain that I shall get the permission, and the application must be made to the deacon in charge. I have done so, and must come back for the answer.

Meanwhile, I am making sketches for the drawing of the refuse dump. I wrote you, I hoped to get a Scheveningen cape; well, I have got it, and an old bonnet into the bargain; the latter is not very good, but the cape is superb, and I set to work on it at once. I am just as delighted with it as I was with the sou'wester before.

And the sketch of the refuse dump is so far advanced that I have caught the sheepfold-like effect of the interior in contrast with the open air and the light under the gloomy sheds: and a group of women emptying their dustbins is beginning to develop and take shape. But, the moving back and forth of the wheel-barrows, and the dustmen with the dung forks, that rummaging under the sheds, must still be expressed without losing the effect of light and brown of the whole: on the contrary, it must be strengthened by it.

I suppose you will take Father's words in the same way of your own accord, so that I'm not telling you anything new, but I should be glad if, with a little good will, peace might be preserved. Last winter Father was nearly as much opposed to my living with the woman as he is in your case now, yet he sent me a warm woman's coat “I might have some use for,” not precisely indicating for what, but obviously with the thought, “Perhaps she is suffering from the cold.” Well, you see that is the right thing, and for *one* such deed I would endure a whole shower of words with pleasure.

For neither do I myself belong among those people who always use the right words - such people would be perfect - and I haven't the slightest pretension to perfection.

But what I wanted to point out to you is this: At all events Father certainly objects to my living with the woman *much more* than in your case, and notwithstanding that, last winter he thought, “Confound the woman but she must not freeze.” And perhaps in your case, “That poor Catholic girl must not be forsaken,” or something like that; so don't worry, keep good courage and try to reassure them. Adieu, lad, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 10 June 1883

Dear Theo,

Your letter and the enclosure were very welcome, many thanks. And I was glad to see that you take things calmly, though I did not expect anything else.

Since I wrote you last I have been drudging very hard on that drawing of the refuse dump: it is a splendid scene.

The first drawing of it has already undergone so many corrections; first it was white, then black in all kinds of patches, so that I copied it on a second sheet, because the first one was too overworked. And I am working on it anew. I must get up early in the morning for it, for then I get the effects I need. If I could only get it the way I have it in my mind!

Well, the second one is of the same size as the two former ones of the peat cutting and the sand digging, and it fits in the frame. For the moment it is looking rather good, but I am afraid I'll spoil it. But one must not be afraid of that either, otherwise one never succeeds. And meanwhile I made a large study of a seamstress besides.

But the asylum has been a disappointment in that they refused me permission to draw there - they said there was no precedent for it, and besides, they were in the midst of spring-cleaning, and new floors were being laid in the wards. Well, never mind, there are more homes for the poor, but in this one I know a man who posed for me regularly, and that would have made it easy for me to make sketches. Last winter I saw the old almshouse in Voorburg. It is of course much smaller, but almost even more striking.

It was toward evening when I was there, the old people were sitting on benches and chairs round an old stove, very characteristic.

Perhaps I'll try that one at Voorburg, since I have no permission here. I also spent a day at Scheveningen, and saw a beautiful scene there of men with a cart full of nets which had been tarred and were being spread out on the dunes.

Someday I must certainly make a large drawing of that or of *mending* the nets. It is an improvement, Theo, having those stretchers and that frame for charcoal drawings, or whatever, for it is pleasant working with them. I think you are quite right in what you say about too much intercourse with painters *not* being good, but very much so. And for that reason I am glad Van der Weele is coming.

Indeed, one can have a deep longing sometimes to talk things over with people who know about one's craft. Especially if each works and seeks in the same spirit, it is possible greatly to strengthen and animate each other, and one is not so easily discouraged. One cannot always live away from one's native land, and one's native land is not nature alone - there must also be human hearts who search for and feel the same things. And only then is the native land perfect only then does one feel at home.

This now is the composition of the refuse dump. I do not know how much you can make out. In the foreground, women are emptying dustbins; behind them are the sheds where the dung is kept, and the men at work with wheelbarrows, *etc.* The first one I made of it was a little different; there were two other men in the foreground with sou'westers, which they often wear in bad weather, and the group of women was darker.

But that light effect is really there because the light falls from overhead between the sheds on the figures in the pathways. It would be a splendid thing to paint. I think you will understand all about it. I wish I could talk it over with Mauve. But perhaps it's better as it is, for it does not always help to get advice from somebody else, clever though he may be, and those who are cleverest are not always clever in explaining things clearly. I repeat, I hardly know myself what is best. In the first place, painting is not my principal object, and perhaps I will be ready for illustrating sooner all by myself than if somebody, who wouldn't think of illustrations at all, advised me. I get on best of all with Rappard.

Adieu, boy. All best wishes and thank you for your timely help.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 13 or 14 June 1883

Dear Theo,

Do you remember that I wrote some time ago, “I am sitting in front of two large blank sheets and do not know how I shall get something onto them”?

Since then, you know I did the refuse dump on one, but these last days I have also made good progress with the second one, which represents a coalyard on the grounds of the Rhine railway station as I see it from my studio window.

There are heaps of coal and men working in them and people coming with little wheelbarrows to buy a sack of coals, for which there is sometimes a great demand; and especially with the snow last winter, it was an intriguing sight.

I have been thinking it over for a long time, and a few days ago it was so splendid one evening and I made my sketch in such a way that later I made hardly any changes in the main lines of the composition. Then I had a man as a model right on the spot; he climbed onto those heaps of coal and stood in different spots so that I could see the proportion of the figure in different places.

But since then I have made several figure studies for it, though the figures will only be small.

Just while making these studies, the plan for an even larger drawing is beginning to take root, namely one of potato digging, and I am so absorbed in it that I think you will perhaps find something in it, too.

I should want the landscape to be a level ground with a little row of dunes on the horizon. The figures about a foot high, a broad composition, 1 by 2.

Right in front, in a corner, as a setoff, kneeling figures of women gathering the potatoes.

On the second plane, a row of diggers, men and women.

And I want to make the perspective of the field *such* that the spot where the wheelbarrows arrive is in the corner of the drawing opposite the one where the potatoes are being gathered.

Well, except for the figures of the kneeling women, I could already show you all the other figures in large studies.

Yes, I should like to start that drawing one of these days. I have the grounds pretty well in my mind, and will choose a fine potato field at my ease and make studies of it for the lines of the landscape.

The drawing ought to be finished - at least an elaborate sketch of it - toward autumn, when the potatoes are dug, and I should only have to put in the finishing touches.

Last year I saw it here, the year before last I saw it in Brabant, where it was splendid, and the year before that in the Borinage, where it was done by miners. So it has ripened in my mind.

The figures ought to be such that it would be true everywhere, rather than a costume study.

Well, that blank canvas preoccupies me continually, and while making studies, I am already looking for new ones.

The row of diggers must be a row of dark figures, seen only in the distance, but very elaborate and varied in movement and type. For instance, a simple young fellow beside one of those typical old Scheveningen men, in a white and brown patched suit with an old top hat, such a dull black one which they push back on the neck; for instance, a short, sturdy figure of a woman soberly clad in black, beside a tall grass mower in white trousers, Tight blue frock and straw hat - a bald head next to a young woman. These thoughts rise in my mind because of the contrast in the studies I have made already.

We must wait and see. But anyhow, I have bought a large stretcher (an old picture frame) at Laarman's and put canvas over it. And every day it becomes clearer to me, but it is confoundedly difficult to find figures which contrast well with each other and yet can be put in a very narrow space. And one has to draw each of them three times or more before it fits well.

But I shall make the sketch and do the same with it as I did with the refuse dump, that is, begin it anew later, on another sheet, if the first one doesn't turn out as I wish. But I wanted it almost finished about the real time of potato digging, though I may have to work it up again on a new sheet.

It was a good thing that I went to see Rappard, for I really got the first idea of making those large drawings there, and I have observed that one feels more definitely what kind of studies one has to make while composing. I am working with great animation these days, and am relatively untired because I am so interested in it. As you know, I had repressed my desire to make compositions for a long time, and in that respect a revolution has taken place in me now because the time was ripe for it, and I breathe more freely now that I have loosened the reins which I had put on myself. But I believe it was a good thing after all that I drudged so long on the studies; for it is true in all things, especially with regard to figures, that one must study seriously, and not suppose that one knows it already. I think it such a fine saying of Mauve's - notwithstanding all his work and experience, he says, Sometimes I do not know the place of the *joints* in a cow. At present I personally often do it this way:

when I draw a digger putting one leg in front of the other, or one arm in front of the other, or bending his head, I still draw in detail the leg, the arm, which disappeared behind the first one and consequently is out of sight or the neck and back of the head; and only then do I draw what comes in sight, to get it as correct as possible.

I hope I shall succeed in having the outline or ghost of the potato drawing ready by the time you come. I long very much to see you. Do you know anything more definite about your coming? Well, I must set to work on my coal men.

For the moment my entire supply of ready cash consists of a postal order for 1.23 guilders torn in two, which has already been refused once. So I need not tell you that I am already on the lookout for your letter. As a diversion I have just fixed the large frame, and so that I shall be able to work before I get the money on those days when I may not be able to take a model. But perhaps I shall after all.

My Scheveningen cape is a splendid possession; I made three elaborate studies with it: a woman with a dustbin and two others with wheelbarrows.

The next time you send money, I hope to be able to get a fisherman's jacket with high turn-up collar and short sleeves, and a woman's bonnet. It seems the bonnets are expensive and difficult to get; well, at all events, I already have one. *Scheveningen drawings must be done as well, and shortly too*. About this time last year, I was in the hospital - last summer's painted studies are bad and incorrect, I find - I think of it because I have just been looking up an old painted study of those coal heaps to see how the situation was last year: I now think them done in too slovenly a fashion, in too much of a hurry.

Well, since then, I have concentrated anew on the drawing of the figure, and I think only very vaguely of painting. Adieu, write as soon as you can. Good luck! With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 14-15 June 1883

Amice Rappard,

I was just writing you a letter when the postman brought me your very welcome letter; I am glad to hear that you have made progress with your drawing. I never doubted you would, for that matter, for you attacked it in a virile way.

Now, to begin with I want to tell you that I think what you say about the English black-and-white artists perfectly right and proper. I saw in your work exactly what you say. Well, I quite agree with you - particularly about the bold contour.

Take Millet's etching “The Diggers,” take an engraving by Albrecht Dürer, above all take the large woodcut by Millet himself, “The Shepherdess” - then you see with full clarity what may be expressed by such a contour. And, as you say, you feel “that is how I have always wanted to do it, if I had always gone my own way, etc.” That's well said, old fellow, and spoken like a man.

Now I think another example of characteristic, bold and vigorous drawing is Leys's pictures, and more especially that series of decorations for his dining room - “La Promenade dans la Neige,” “Les Patineurs,” “La Réception,” “La Table,” “La Servante.” And De Groux has it too, and so has Daumier.

Even Israëls, and at times Mauve and Mans too, cannot refrain from drawing a vigorous contour, but they *don't* do it in the manner of Leys, or of Herkomer.

But when you hear them talk, they will have none of it, and more often they are talking about “tone” and “colour.” And yet, in certain charcoal drawings Israëls has also used lines that remind one of Millet. I want to state flatly that personally, however much I admire and respect these masters, I regret that, when they speak to others, they - and particularly Mauve and Maris - do not point out more emphatically what can be done with the contour, and advise them to draw cautiously and softly. And so it happens that watercolours are the order of the day nowadays, and are considered the most expressive medium, whereas in my opinion too little attention is being paid to black and white, so much so that there is even a certain antipathy against it. There is no black, so to speak, in a watercolour, and that is what they base themselves on in order to say, “Those black things.” It is not necessary, however, to devote my whole letter to this.

I wanted to tell you that I have four drawings on my easel at the moment -

peat cutters - sand pit - dunghill - loading coal. I even did the dunghill twice; the first one was too overworked to be continued.

Besides I have not ventured to work too much in them with printer's ink and turpentine; instead I have used charcoal, lithographic crayon and autographic ink so far.... Except in the case of the dunghill that became too overworked; I attacked this one with it and not unsuccessfully; it became rather black, it's true, but for all that the freshness returned somewhat, and now I see my way again to working on it some more, although I thought it hopeless before I put on the printer's ink.

I have been working very hard since I visited you; I had not done any compositions for such a long time - only a lot of studies - that when I once started I went quite wild about it. I was pegging away at it many mornings as early as four o'clock. I am extremely eager for you to see them, for I can make neither head nor tail of what Van der Weele, the only one who has seen them, said.

Van der Weele's opinion was rather sympathetic, but he said about the *sandpit* that there were too many figures in it; the composition was not simple. He said, “Look here, just draw that one little fellow with his wheelbarrow on a little dike against the bright sky at sundown; how beautiful such a thing would be - now it is too turbulent.”

Then I showed him Caldecott's drawing “Brighton Highroad,” and said, “Do you mean to say that it is not permitted per se to introduce many figures into a composition? Never mind my drawing, just tell me what you think of this composition.”

“Well,” he said, “I don't like that one either. But,” he added, “I am speaking personally, and I can't speak any other way than personally, and this is not the kind of thing I like and want to look at.” Well, I thought this well said in a certain way, but you will understand that I did not find in him exactly that sound knowledge of things which I was looking for. But he is quite a sound fellow on the whole, and we took a very pleasant walk together, and he pointed out some damned fine things to me.

It was while taking a walk with him that I saw that sandpit too, but he hardly looked at it on that occasion, and next day I went back to it alone. I have drawn that sandpit with many figures because at times there really are very many fellows toiling there, because in winter and in autumn the town gives employment in this way to persons who are out of work. And then the scene is extremely busy [F 1029, JH 366].

I have had some beautiful models of late. A superb grass mower, a magnificent peasant boy, exactly like figures by Millet. A fellow with a wheelbarrow, the same whose head you may remember I drew, but then in his Sunday clothes and with a Sunday-clean bandage around his blind eye. Now I have him in his everyday clothes, and - as I see it - it is difficult to believe that this is the same man who posed for both studies.

The size of these four large drawings is 40 x 20 inches.

I am much pleased with using a brown passe-partout with a very deep black inner rim. Then many blacks seem to be grey, whereas they would show up too black in a white passe-partout, and the whole retains a clear effect.

Lord, how I wish you could see them, not because I think them good myself, but I should like to know what you think of them, although I am not yet satisfied with them. In my opinion they are not yet sufficiently pure figure drawings, though they are figure drawings all right, but I should like to accentuate the drawing of the actions and the structure more cleanly and boldly.

What you write about feeling that you are now on a *road,* and not on little by-paths and crossroads, is very true, in my opinion. I have a similar feeling myself, because during the past year I have been concentrating on figures even more than I used to.

If you believe that I have eyes to see with, then you may be sure that there most certainly is sentiment in your figures; what you are doing is healthy and virile - never doubt yourself in this respect, and for the very reason that you do not doubt, dash it on without hesitation.

I think the studies of the heads of those blind fellows are superb.

It must not surprise you that some of my figures are so entirely different from the ones that I sometimes make after the model. I very seldom work from memory - I hardly practice that method. But I am getting so used to being confronted immediately with nature that I am keeping my personal feelings unfettered to a far greater extent than in the beginning - and I get less dizzy - *and I am more myself just because I am confronted with nature*. If I have the good fortune to find a model who is quiet and collected, then I draw it repeatedly, and then at last a study turns up which is different from an ordinary *study* - I mean more characteristic, more deeply *felt*.

And yet it was made under the same circumstances as the more wooden, less deeply felt studies that preceded it. This manner of working is as good as any other - just a little more easily understood - like these “Little Winter Gardens.” You said it yourself - they are *felt*; all right, but that was not accidental; I drew them over and over again before, and that feeling was *not* in them then. After that - after the iron-like ones - came these, and also that clumsiness and awkwardness. *How does it happen that I express something with that?* - because the thing has shaped itself in my mind before I start on it.

The first ones are absolutely repulsive to others. I say this to make you under stand that, *when* there is something in it, this is not accidental but most certainly *reasoned out* and *willed.*

I am delighted to hear that you've noticed that I'm doing my best at present and that I attach importance to it - to express the relation of the values of the masses against each other, and to show how in the dizzying tangle of every corner in nature things will show up separate.

Formerly the light and brown in my studies was rather fortuitous, at least not logically carried through, and that is why they were colder and flatter.

When once I *feel* - I *know* - a subject, I *usually* draw three or more *variations* of it whether it is figure or landscape - but every time and for each one I consult nature. And I even *do my best not to give details* - for then the dreaminess goes out of it And when Tersteeg and my brother, and others, say, “What is this, is it grass or cabbage?” - then I answer, “*Delighted* that you can't make it out.”

And yet they are sufficiently true to nature for the honest natives of these parts to recognize certain details which I have hardly paid any attention to; they will say, for instance, “Yes, that's Mrs. Renesse's hedge,” or, “Look, there are Van de Louw's beanpoles.”

I want to tell you something besides about a kind of Faber lead pencil that I have discovered. Here is the diameter of the lead; they are soft and of a better quality than the carpenter's pencils; they give a glorious black, and are very pleasant to work with for large studies. I drew a seamstress with it on gray papier sans fin [i.e. cut from the roll], and got an effect like lithographic crayon. The lead is enclosed in soft wood painted dark green, and they cost 20 cents apiece.

Before I forget, I should like to borrow from you the issues of Harper's magazine you have, for I want to read the articles on Holland that are illustrated by Boughton and Abbey. I shall send you a package with the old loose numbers I have containing illustrations by Howard Pyle and others, so that you can look through them at your leisure, and I shall add Erckmann-Chatrian's Histoire d'un Paysan, illustrated by Schüler, as well as a few illustrations by Green, which you'll remember I promised you. If you have some more duplicates, please send them along with the Harper's (at least if you can spare the latter for some four days, so that I can read them), and also Zola's little book about Manet, at least if you have finished it.

I am distressed to hear that your health is not yet what it should be; all the same I think that making progress with your drawings will reanimate you more than those baths or whatever other tricks they may perform at Soden. I think you will long to be back in your studio as soon as you have left it. I clearly remember how terribly melancholy Mauve was on his pilgrimage to a similar kind of works

- speaking with all due respect.

As you know, I am rather an infidel about such things, and I sympathize with what Bräsig, in Fritz Reuter's Dried Herbs, had to say about what this authority called “die Wasserkunst,”I think.[The literal translation is “water art,” but what is meant is “hydropathic tricks.”]

How beautiful Fritz Reuter's work is! I think you will admire that book by Erckmann-Chatrian.

Another thing I must tell you is that the other day I got hold of a marvelous old Scheveningen woman's cape as well as a cap, but the cap is not so beautiful. And I shall also get a fisherman's jacket with a high turned-up collar and short sleeves. I am immensely eager to see your charcoal drawing; perhaps when my brother comes here - I don't know exactly when - I shall go with him to Bra-bant, and then, as we are passing through Utrecht, and if I can manage it, I shall look in on you; but at any rate I shall try to come to you without that, for I am very curious to see it.

As for you, try to keep your promise to come to The Hague, for you will have to come here anyway for that wedding party, you know. If my recent luck with finding models holds out, I shall certainly make some more large drawings this summer.

I should like to go on working on those I have in hand, so as to raise them to a high standard against the time my brother comes here.

In Harper's Weekly I came across a very characteristic thing after Smedley, the black figure of a man on a white sandy road. He calls it “A Generation Ago”; the figure is some kind of clergyman, and perhaps I could describe my impression of it thus - Yes, that's what my grandfather looked like. I wish I had done it. In the same issues, after Abbey, two girls standing fishing on the side of a ditch with pollard willows. Both of these things in Harper's are only sketches in a review of an exhibition.

I should like to send you sketches of my drawings, but I don't have much time to spare.

I asked permission to make drawings in the old men's and old women's almshouse here, but they refused again. Oh well, there are more almshouses in the villages near by. But here I knew some fellows that I have used as models. But I went there to have a look, and among other things I saw a little old gardener near an old twisted apple tree, very characteristic.

Well, here comes my model. Adieu, send the Harper's if you can spare them, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 15-17 June 1883

Dear Theo,

Soon after I had dispatched my letter to you, I received a characteristic letter from Rappard; I am enclosing it for you to read because you used to know him but have not met him lately. Judging from the generally serious tone of his letter, you will agree with me, I think, that he has changed greatly for the better (though he was all right before). His drawings are confoundedly well done indeed, and he does honest work.

Well, just read the letter. I think his ideas are sound. Send me back the letter sometime.

I have another thing to tell you - I told you about my plan for a large drawing - well, I started it the very same day that I wrote you, just because Rappard's letter had stimulated me. I have worked on it since then, and it absorbed me so much that I worked at it almost through the whole of last night. I saw it clearly before me, and wanted to carry it through.

I made the composition even simpler, only one row of diggers. I sketched seven figures in it, five men and two women; the rest are smaller, on the second plane. It is the strongest drawing I have ever made.

As to the conception, my ideas about it are similar to those which Rappard expresses in his letter. Like him, I adopted the manner of some English artists, without thinking of imitating them, but probably because I am attracted by the same kinds of things in nature; they are reproduced by relatively few, so that if one wants to make them, one must seek a way to express what one feels and venture a little outside the ordinary rules to render them exactly as one wants. (Like Rappard, whose drawing had all kinds of machines in action, which hardly anybody else would think of attacking, and which are not at all *what one is accustomed to calling* picturesque.)

Do you know what Rappard's drawing is like? It is exactly like reading a description of a factory by Zola, Daudet or Lemonnier. I underlined a passage in his letter - that about *drawing in painting.* Well, it comes to about the same thing as what I said last year to some people who told me “Painting is drawing in colour.” I answered, “Exactly, and drawing in black and white is, in fact, painting in black and white.”

They said “painting is drawing,” and I said “drawing is painting.” But my technique was then too weak for me to express it in anything but words; now I say it less in words but more silently in my work.

Since you wrote me about your being somewhat in financial difficulties, I have really worked in a kind of fury, day and night.

This is now the fifth large one l have started; actually, it is the sixth, for I made the refuse dump twice. And what a lot of studies I had to make for them; you will see when you come.

Though Rappard has not drawn with printer's ink, I have done so occasionally and what he says is true: he works in a white passe-partout and then it looks more black. I work in a brown passe-partout with a black inner strip, the black of which has been made very deep, to keep the drawing light. He is somewhat wrong when he says that the English do not use printer's ink, for they work the drawings up by using an enormous depth of colour, compared with which the blackest charcoal becomes light. This strength of colour is obtained by using printer's ink or autographic ink, or lampblack, or neutral tint, and other blacks used in watercolours.

You must not be surprised that I undertook so many things in so short a time. In composing a drawing almost more than in painting thought and concentration play a part, and I for one get good results by plodding on for a day and half a night, as I did on that last one. In that way one can become productive, too - it absorbs one enormously. But just when one feels so much attracted by the work, one must stick to it till one drops with exhaustion, so to speak.

I am absolutely penniless; send the money somewhat sooner if possible.

I shall again sleep little tonight because of the drawing; but it is very cozy smoking a pipe in the night, when everything is quiet; and daybreak and sunrise are wonderful. Well, boy, send the money soon if you can. Good luck. Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 22 June 1883

Dear Theo,

It is not yet four o'clock. Last evening there was a thunderstorm and it rained during the night. It has stopped raining now, but everything is wet and the sky is grey, broken here and there by darker or lighter masses of neutral or yellowish white clouds which are moving across the sky. Because of the early hour the leaves look greyish and subdued in colour; along the wet road a farmer in a blue smock is approaching on a brown horse he has fetched from the meadow. In the background the city is a grey silhouette, also subdued in colour; however, the wet red roofs stand out strongly. It looks more like a Daubigny than a Corot because of the variety of colour in the ground and the green, the vividness of everything. I am sure that if you saw it, you would enjoy it as much as I. There is nothing more beautiful than nature early in the morning.

Your letter came yesterday and was not a little welcome. Many thanks. I was very hard up this time; I was absolutely penniless. The woman had no milk to nurse the baby those last days, and I too felt very faint. As a last effort I went in desperation to Tersteeg. I thought, “I have nothing to lose, perhaps it is a way to bring about a better state of affairs.” So I went there with a large sketch, about which I wrote you in my last letter. It has turned into a row of diggers, men and women, with lumps of earth in the foreground and a glimpse of some roofs of a little village in the background. I told Tersteeg that I understood perfectly well this sketch could not be anything for him, but that I came to show it to him because it was so long since he had seen any of my work and because I for one wanted to prove that I did not feel any ill will about what had happened last year. Well, he said that he did not hold a grudge, either; as to the drawing, he had told me last year that I ought to make watercolours, and he did not want to repeat himself by talking about it again. Then I told him that I had occasionally tried a watercolour and had several in my studio, but that I myself had more heart for another kind of drawing and increasingly favored vigorously drawn figures.

Then I told him that I felt guilty about having kept those drawing examples of Bargue's all the time, that I would have returned them long ago if what had happened last year had not prevented me from mentioning it, but that I came to settle that question, too. A few of them had been a little damaged by use, and as there were a few other things on my account at the time, I hoped he would he inclined, either now or later, to take a few of my drawings to balance that account, and I hoped he would approve of my having come to settle that affair. Well, he agreed to this, and I am glad the Bargues are returned now.

I told him that there were a great many things he had not seen in the studio. He said he was glad to see from the drawing that I was at least working, and I asked him if there had been any reason for him to doubt that I was working. Well, then a telegram came for him, and I went away. At all events the Bargues are off my mind, and I have thanked him once more for having lent them to me at the time, for they have been of great use to me. But, after all, I do not even really know whether he liked the drawing or not.

I should not be in the least surprised if he considered it crazy work, or absolutely absurd, because he said he would rather not have anything to do with it. But even if he does find it absurd or crazy, I don't think I should let it upset me, or take his opinion as decisive or conclusive.

I always think it possible that the time will come when Tersteeg will have another opinion of me, also of my actions now and last year. But I will leave it to time, and if he persists in thinking everything I do is wrong, well, I will take it in my stride and go my own way as if he did not exist.

For the rest, I will leave things alone, let's say, till you come here. I am not sorry I went there after all.

I was very glad to hear that things are going well with you. Have a good time, boy. Relatively speaking, I also have a good time, apart from many financial worries - many other worries too - but with my work I am in luck: I have been working with enormous pleasure lately, and with a firm feeling of “being on the open road,” as Rappard says of himself in the letter which I sent you. Yes, boy, one perseveres and works on without minding the rest, if one tries honestly and freely to fathom nature, and does not lose hold of what one has in mind whatever people may say, then one feels calm and steady and faces the future quietly. Yes, one may make mistakes, one may perhaps exaggerate here or there, but the thing one makes will be original. You have read in Rappard's letter the words: “I used to make things now in this, then in that style, without sufficient personality: but these last drawings have at least a character of their own, and I feel that I have found my way.” I feel almost the same thing now.

Some time ago I read a remarkable saying of Taine's (Essay on Dickens): “Le fonds du charactère Anglais c'est l'absence du bonheur” [the foundation of the English character is the absence of happiness]. I do not think that saying *quite* satisfactory and correct: it does not explain everything, but still it is remarkably to the point and contains much truth.

A typical English saying is Carlyle's “The result of an idea must not be a feeling but an *action*.”

That concept of life which leads a man to concentration - not primarily *to* attain material happiness, but above all to concentrate on his work, to do some good - has many examples in England, and is perhaps a national characteristic. Carlyle also says, “Knowest thou that worship of sorrow, the temple thereof founded some eighteen hundred years ago, now lies in ruins, yet its sacred lamp is still burning.” When I think of De Groux, for instance, or of what you have occasionally told me about Daumier, I find in them something of this “worship of sorrow.”

The drawing which I showed Tersteeg showed up very poorly in his little room; one must see it surrounded by other drawings: then it has quite a different effect. Well, yesterday I worked at it all day again to finish the figures better.

Since I wrote you last, I have made four more large studies for the potato digging. Here in the neighborhood they dig the potatoes with a short-handled fork, and the digger is kneeling. I imagine a fine thing might be made of those kneeling figures in a flat country in the evening - something that would have a certain sentiment of devotion; therefore I have studied it closely, and have already got a man sticking his fork into the ground (the first movement); another pulling out the potato plant (the second movement); then a *woman's* figure in the same action; and the figure of a third man throwing the potatoes into a basket.

I will start this drawing today or tomorrow, but among the men's figures I want one with a bald head.

For the studies which I have already finished, I had a young farm hand, a real type, with something broad and rough and *non ébarbé*[unpolished] about him.

Now about these drawings, Theo, I don't think I shall sell them. I still remember what Israëls said to Van der Weele about the latter's large picture: “You certainly won't sell it, but that must not discourage you, for it will give you new friends and enable you to sell other things.”

Someday, when I can afford it, I will make on canvas an elaborate sketch such as I have now made on paper, and try my hand at painting again. But I should have to take great pains with the models for it, otherwise it would certainly be a failure. I have a few things in mind that will do well painted in oil.

I had no answer from C. M. to my letter, and so I am not in a hurry to write again. So you see, Theo, there is very, very little chance of my selling anything. It was not pleasant going to Tersteeg, I assure you; but I did, thinking, Perhaps - perhaps he will be inclined to forgive and forget everything on both sides. But it was clear enough that he is not up to that yet; I believe it is still as you described it so well at the time, “sometimes he is aggravated by the way I shake hands with him,” or one of those little idiosyncrasies which make one dislike a person so much that one would rather avoid him.

I am rather hard up. Last year, you remember, every now and then I had something extra from you; now for certain reasons you have been rather straightened yourself since February or March, I think. I do not know how to keep things going; the expenses increase beyond my power, though I economize on everything, and the woman, too. The money from Rappard helped me briefly in buying the materials for those large drawings, but the large drawings bring many expenses on account of the models. Then there are the stretchers and the paper, etc.; and besides, I make a lot of small drawings, too. So the days drag heavily on, and are hard for the woman and me to get through because of the scarcity of everything

I told Tersteeg that I was very anxious to be on good terms with Mauve again, but he did not answer a word. My total impression of the visit to Tersteeg is that it would have been nicer if he had taken things somewhat lightly, as such a long time had passed; but there was a ponderousness in the air, and something of, "There you are, bothering me again - do leave me alone." He did not use those exact words, for he spoke very formally, but I think the meaning was quite obvious considering what *he might have said,* namely, "I agree to our making up, and I will come and look at your work"; or something like it.

But I may be wrong in this; I will let time pass over it again and hope for the best, and see whether it will redress itself. I must continue to work hard for the very reason that I hope some things will redress themselves and come out right.

The one thing I hope for more than anything else is that when you come, you will find that I have made progress and that there is some good in my work. From time to time you have written me that you found something in it; I don't think you were mistaken, or that Tersteeg is right, with his absolute indifference which is almost hostile. Yes, that is the very first thing which I value: that you who from the very beginning have done so much - nay, everything - for my work may continue to find some good in it. If I can bring this about, your visit would make me forget all the cares of the whole year.

There is one thing that gives me hope there is some character in the big sketch, namely Iterson remarked that various things in it "annoyed" him, and that he thought them "not so felicitous"; I think you can imagine Iterson with a bland and sort of wise face, his head tilted a little to one side, and speaking his mind sweetly and mildly with undulating emphasis. His observations rather amused me. Eerelman, the painter, was also present and seemed to be more or less in agreement with Iterson, which I thought very understandable.

I think you will agree with me that this may be a step toward making it up, even though Tersteeg should be unwilling at first. One or the other will have to make an overture, but now I am going to wait until I have had a talk with you.

If Tersteeg saw them, I imagine that among the many figures I have drawn there might be some of which he might say, “I should like to see this or that one in such and such a size in watercolour.” In such a case I would not refuse to try it, not for my own pleasure, but to sell something if possible. But these are not the only possibilities, for in the future I shall make things quite different from what I have made till now. I know from experience how one can have a dislike for someone's work, or be indifferent to it, and keep that up for a long time; then one day one unexpectedly sees a thing of his, thinks it over, and remembers his previous work, and says to oneself, “Wait a minute, that must be good after all.” And then one feels an interest, one can't forget it - and one has learned to like it.

I felt this, especially with English drawings: at first I didn't like them at all, and just like most people here, thought that the English were actually quite wrong; but that did not last, and I have learned to look at things from a different angle.

Do you know what I sometimes long to do? To make a trip to Brabant. I should love to draw the old churchyard at Nuenen, and the weavers.

To make, let's say, studies of Brabant for a month, and to come back with a lot of them for a large drawing of a peasant funeral, for instance.

Before I finish this letter, I repeat that, when you write in your last letter that you are having a good time, I can say the same to you; I have a great serenity and good spirits in regard to the work, and I have so much to do that it quite absorbs me. But the money is the damnedest thing, I have more expenses than I can cover.

Do you know what I was thinking of recently? Of that book on Gavarni that you have. I remember from it how Gavarni's drawings of London drunkards and beggars, etc., according to his own saying, only turned out well after he had lived there for some time, I think after a year, and in a letter he wrote of how it takes time to feel at home in new surroundings.

Well, I am starting to feel quite at home here now compared to the beginning, and I now find what I made here at first very superficial. And the very hope of expressing myself more and more strongly and more elaborately makes the present time seem good to me, for there is no lack of subjects or models (provided I can pay them). I am full of ideas and plans, and so the cares aren't overwhelming me yet.

But things must be paid for, and everything costs money, and the obstructions make it like cutting one's way through a hedge of thorns. It is a fact that I ought to take more models but can't; I try my utmost, and, so to speak, more than my utmost, to pay the expenses for it, but the household costs money too, and I can't make both ends meet. Qu'y faire?

Do you remember, perhaps from your time at The Hague, persons to whom I could show my work? I myself do not, except one, and that is Lantsheer, but he wants things to be very, very good, and for the very reason that I hope to sell him something *later on*, I should not like to show him anything now. Lantsheer is an uncle or some such relation of Rappard's. Rappard wrote me once that he had shown him a little sketch of mine, and that L. had liked it.

If someday I should have something which I thought suitable for him, I could contact him through Rappard. I do not like to go and see people to show them my work; if it were somebody else's work, I shouldn't mind it, but now it is my own. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I am almost sure that someday, when Rappard has seen the large drawings, he will speak to Lantsheer about me, even without my asking it.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 23-28 June 1883

Dear Theo,

It is true that I have written you often lately, but my letters harp so much on the same thing that I am angry with myself for not writing you in a somewhat more amusing way. It will come back someday - I think that when you have been in the studio again, there will be more animating subjects to write about. At least I hope so, and there will be, if you feel sympathy for what I am doing and what you have not yet seen.

This week I saw in Paris Illustré a fine reproduction of a drawing by Ulysse Butin, “La Mise à l'Eau.” Fishermen and women pushing a boat into the sea. I saw it at the very time when I happened to be thinking of Butin and of Legros, while I was drudging on a thing with a subject quite different from what they make, namely those kneeling potato diggers working with their short-handled forks; not long ago I wrote you about making studies of them. I now have a sketch of it on the easel with four figures, three men and a woman. I want something broad and audacious, with silhouette and relief in it. That is what I am seeking more and more.

I always remember the strong impression made on me by the first picture of Butin's I saw (one of his later ones). It was the one which he himself made an etching of later. I think it is called “The Jetty,” women on the lookout for boats which are expected to come into port on a stormy night. That was the first one I saw of his, and since then I have seen the one at the Luxembourg and several others.

I find him very honest and serious, and I believe that just when it seems he has drawn with a hasty hand, his drawing has remained après tout no less reasonable and correct. He is one of the men I do not know personally, and yet when I see his work, I can imagine how he did it.

Don't you like Blommers's picture at the salon, “November”? I didn't see the picture, only the reproduction. I think it looks exactly like a Butin, and it has more passion (and something dramatic) than Blommers's pictures usually have.

Right now I am working on no less than seven or eight drawings of about a meter in size, so you can imagine that I am up to my ears in work.

But I hope so much that my hand will become more skillful from this long period of drudgery.

So, for instance, my dislike for working with charcoal is disappearing more every day. One reason for this is that I have found a way to fix the charcoal and then work over it, for instance, with printer's ink.

Here follows a little sketch of potato diggers, but on the drawing they are sitting a little wider apart.

As I write you, I think of that evening - perhaps you remember it, though it is years ago - when you and I together spent an evening with Mauve, when he was still living near the barracks, and he gave us a photograph of a drawing of his, a plough.

Little did I dream at the time that I myself should become a draughtsman, nor could I think at the time that difficulties would ever arise between Mauve and me.

I always wonder at our not having made up, the more so because really, if one considers it thoroughly, there is hardly any difference of opinion between us. However, it is so long ago now that my good spirits with regard to my work and the confidence that it will come out right after all are beginning to return. I have experienced that before, notwithstanding everything, but one can't help getting upset and having a melancholy feeling when such persons disapprove of it or say that you are on the wrong track.

Will you write soon? As always, your letter will be welcome. Can you believe that it is not at all easier to draw a figure of about a foot high than to draw a small one? *On the contrary*, it is much more difficult, and getting it in that size, yet in proportion as strong as the little figures, is sometimes hard work, I assure you. Adieu, boy, have a good time and good luck in business. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, c. 2 July 1883

Amice Rappard,

I want to write you another letter while you are travelling. Thanks for the package of books. I should like to apply Zola's own words about Hugo to Zola's Mes Haines: “Je voudrais démontrer qu'étant donné un tel homme sur un tel sujet le résultat ne pourrait être un autre livre qu'il n'est.” [I wanted to demonstrate that given such a man writing on such a subject, the result could only be such a book.] And moreover Zola's own words on the same occasion: “Je ne cesserai de répéter: la critique de ce livre, telle qu'elle s'est exercée, me paraît une monstrueuse injustice.” [I won't stop repeating: the criticism of this book, as it is exercised, seems to me a monstrous injustice.]

I'll very gladly begin in this matter by saying that I consequently do *not* belong to those who think ill of Zola for writing such a book. Through it I come to know Zola, I come to know Zola's weak point - deficient ideas on the art of painting - préjugés instead of jugement juste in this special matter. But, my dear friend, shall I feel offended by a friend of mine because of a fault in his character? - far be it from me. On the contrary, I love him all the more for his fault. So I read the articles on the Salon with a very peculiar feeling; I thought him enormously mistaken, his ideas entirely wrong, except partly his appreciation of Manet - I think Manet clever too - but it is very interesting to read Zola's ideas about art, as interesting, so to speak, as a landscape by a figure painter, for instance. It isn't his genre, it's superficial - incorrect, but what a conception - not carried through - never mind - not quite clear - never mind - it makes one think and is original and at least sparkling with life. But for all that, it's wrong and most inaccurate and unjustified. It is very interesting to hear what he has to say about Erckmann-Chatrian. Here he doesn't shoot so wildly at random as when he talks about pictures, and his criticism hits the mark damned accurately at times. I take the greatest pleasure in permitting him to reproach Erckmann-Chatrian for mixing a certain amount of egoism with his *[sic,* their] morality. He is furthermore right in saying that when Erckmann-Chatrian starts *[sic]* describing Parisian life he *[sic]* gets too insipid because he is not at home with the subject. As for this criticism, however, there is the question by way of contrast, Is Zola at home with the subject of the Alsace? - and if he were, wouldn't he be more interested in Erckmann's figures, which are as beautiful as those of Knaus and Vautier?

As regards the “little mustard seed” of egoism in most of the characters - and Erckmann seems to side with them - Old Rabbi David and Wagner and Thérèse - I think here the somewhat egoistic Erckmann-Chatrian approach the sublime, and he *[sic]* is hors ligne because of this.

Zola has this much in common with Balzac, that he knows little about painting. Two types of painters in Zola's works - Claude Lantier in Le Ventre de Paris and another one in Thérèse Raquin - vague shadows of Manet, I think - a kind of impressionist. So much for that.

Well, Balzac's painters are enormously tedious, very boring.

Now, here I should like to go on talking about myself, but I am no critic. But I want to add this: I am glad he lands Taine one in the eye; Taine deserves it, for at times he is irritating with his mathematical analysis. But despite that he (Taine) arrives through it at some curiously profound statements. So I read one of his pronouncements - about Dickens and Carlyle - “Le fond du caractère anglais, c'est l'absence du bonheur.” [the foundation of the English character is the absence of happiness.] Now I won't insist on the greater or lesser correctness of these words, but will point out that such words are proofs of very deep reflection, of forcing the eyes to penetrate into the darkness until one has finally seen something in it, whereas anybody else would see nothing. I think those words beautiful, damned beautiful, and they mean more to me than a thousand other words on the -same problem, and so in this case I have the greatest respect for Taine.

Now I am delighted to be able to look through the Boughtons and Abbeys at my leisure. I think “In the Potato Field” the most beautiful of all, and the “Bell Ringers” by Abbey. Text somewhat dry, somewhat cluttered with stories about hotels and antique dealers - I enjoy reading it. Why so? - for the same reason that I read that book by Zola - because of the personality of the man who wrote it.

Have you noticed that Zola doesn't mention Millet at all? And yet I have read descriptions by Zola of a village churchyard and a deathbed and the funeral of a poor old peasant which were as beautiful as if they were Millets. Consequently this omission is probably due to his not being acquainted with Millet's work.

I also want to tell you that I have found an uncommonly beautiful sheet by T. Green, a brother or something of C. Green. It is a “feast” in a London foundling hospital, orphan girls of some kind sitting at the table. Oh, you'll be crazy about it.

By the same, a smaller one besides, “A City Congregation,” drawn as delicately, as exquisitely as “Braemar” by our friend J.M.L.R.

I have found two more sheets by this sphinx J.M.L.R. - whose name we have not been able to decipher so far, but whom I suppose to be a brother, or at least a relation, of W. M. Ridley - one “The Ascent of Mount Vesuvius” and the other “A Game of Football,” both of them good, but not so excellent as the “Braemar Coach.” I know a “Salmon Fishers” by him too and also “Volunteers in Camp”; the latter sheet gave me a clue to his name.

And further, by A. Hunt, “A Procession of Monks in the Snow,” as beautiful as a Legros; by W. M. Ridley, “London Bridge” and “Emigrants”; by Buckmann, two “Markets” drawn particularly broadly and boldly and in a wholehearted manner.

By Barnard, “Hampstead Heath” - “First to Come, Last to Go” - “How the Poor Live.”

By Hopkins, “Children on the Sea Beach,” very delicate of tone. By Millets [? - probably Millais] himself, a beautiful sheet, “Christmas Stories.”

By Birken Forster, “Winter Landscapes” and “Christmas Time,” very cozy.

Two important Gavarnis, first rates, “Forts de la Halle” [Porters of the Vegetable Market], “Dames de la Halle” [Women of the Vegetable Market] and “Les Étrennes” [The Gifts].

Then Régameys - beautiful Japanese motifs and a very large sheet, a masterpiece, “The Diamond Field,” and another large composition, “Le Boeuf gras” [The Fat Ox].

And by M. F. a sheet of medium size representing the treadmill in a prison, as beautiful as a Régamey.

By I don't know whom, a marvellous thing of the steelworks in Sheffield; it is called “The Fork Grinders.” It is in the style of Edmond Morin, that is to say, his most compact and concise style.

You see, it isn't so very much, but they are beautiful things, every one of them, and I consider them an important acquisition.

By *Howard Pyle*, a very fine “Figure of a Woman,” and also beautiful landscapes by I. Reud.

Perhaps there are more, but these are the most important.

If you have already gone away on your trip, then tell me how your drawing is getting on.

I am working on the “Potato Diggers”; I also have a single figure of an old man and then a series of rough studies done during the potato harvest - a man burning weeds, a fellow with a sack, another one with a wheelbarrow, *etc.*

When you have returned from your trip I hope you will take measures to pay me an early visit.

I have also done another “Sower,” perhaps the seventh or eighth study of that subject. This time I have put him in the open air on a large field with little clods of earth and a sky above it. I want very much to ask Zola a question that I should like to put to others too - “Just tell me, is it really true that there is no difference between a red earthenware dish with a cod in it, for instance, and, say, the figure of a digger or a sower? Is there or isn't there a difference between Rembrandt and Van Beyeren (technically equally clever), between Volton and Millet?”

Have you paid attention to that new magazine, Pictorial News? There are good things in it now and then, but most of them aren't worth much.

My dear friend, I wish we could meet more often, but qu'y faire! Do write again, if you have time and feel so inclined. I don't think the summer numbers of the Graphic and the London News particularly good. The Graphic has a beautiful Caldecott, however, which is the best one. And some things by Reinhardt, not of the best. London News, Caton Woodvilles again.

I suppose you will think the sheets I wrote about more interesting. “Diamond Field” by Régamey isn't striking at all at first sight, but the more you look at it the more you admire it. The T. Greens are masterpieces.

My brother wrote me a letter about an exceptionally fine exhibition in Paris, etc., “Les Cent Chefs-d'Oeuvre” [The Hundred Masterpieces].

Adieu, my dear friend, a pleasant journey, remember to write to me, *i.e.* if there is time for it. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 2 July 1883

Dear Theo,

Your letter and the enclosure were not a little welcome; the news that you are going to write a little more at length was no less welcome. I hope you will write me in detail about Les Cent Chefs-d'Oeuvre [The Hundred Masterpieces] - it must have been a good thing to have seen such a show.

And when one thinks how at the time there were a few persons whose character, intention and genius were rather suspect in the public's opinion - persons about whom the most absurd things were told, Millet, Corot, Daubigny, etc., who were thought of the way the village policeman views a stray shaggy dog, or a tramp without a passport - and time passes, and voilà “les cent chefs-d'oeuvre,” and if a hundred are not enough, then innumerable ones. And what becomes of the policeman? Very little remains of *them* except a number of summonses as curiosities. Yet I think the history of great men is tragic - though it's true that they did not meet only village policemen in their lives - for usually they are no longer alive when their work is publically acknowledged, and for a long time during their lives they are under a kind of depression because of the opposition and the difficulties of struggling through life. And so whenever I hear of such a public acknowledgement of the merits of such and such a one, I think the more vividly of the quiet, somewhat sombre figures of those who personally had few friends, and then, in their simplicity, I find them *even* greater and more tragic.

There is an etching by Legros, Carlyle in his study, which I often have in mind when I want to think of Millet, for instance, as he really was. Something like what Victor Hugo says about Aeschylus, “On tua l'homme puis on dit: élévons pour Aischylos une statue en bronze [They killed the man, then they said: Let us erect a bronze statue for Aeschylus], always comes to my mind when I hear of an exhibition of somebody's works. I care very little for “la statue de bronze,” not because I do not approve of public appreciation, but because of the thoughts about the man which accompany it: Aeschylus was simply banished, but here too the banishment was a death sentence, as it often is.

Theo, when you come to the studio someday, I shall be able to show you a collection which you certainly won't find everywhere. I can show you something which might be called the “Hundred Masterpieces” in wood engraving by modern artists. The work of men whose names are unknown even to most connoisseurs.

Who knows Buckmann, who knows the two Greens, who knows Régamey's drawings? Only a very few.

Seen together, one wonders at that firmness of drawing, that personal character, that serious conception and that penetration and artistic elevation of the most ordinary figures and subjects found in the streets, in the market place, in a hospital or an almshouse.

Last year I had already collected something, but what I have found since has far surpassed my expectations.

When you come, you won't pay too short a visit to the studio, will you? Since I wrote you, I have worked on those potato diggers. And I started a second one on the same subject, with the single figure of an old man.

Further, I am doing a sower in a large field, with lumps of earth, which I think is better than the other sowers I tried before.

I have at least six more of them, solely as studies of the figure, but now I have put him into surroundings more especially like a real composition, and I have carefully studied the earth and sky besides. Then I have studies of the burning of weeds, and of a man with a sack of potatoes on his back, and one with a wheelbarrow.

I think of Tersteeg's opinion that I must make watercolours; supposing I myself were wrong, and tried with all good will to change my mind, yet I cannot understand how these figures of the man with the sack, of the sower, of the old potato digger, of the wheelbarrow, of the man burning weeds, would retain their individuality if I made them in watercolour. The result would be very mediocre, the kind of mediocrity which I don't want to surrender myself to. Now there is at all events some character in them, something which - be it from afar - is in harmony with what Lhermitte, for instance, seeks.

Watercolour is not the most sympathetic means for him who particularly wants to express the boldness, the vigour, and the robustness of the figures. It is different when one seeks tone or colour exclusively, then watercolour is excellent. Now I must admit that one could make different studies of those same figures done from another point of view (namely tone and colour) and with another intention - but the question is, if my temperament and personal feeling primarily draw me toward the character, the structure, the action of the figures, can one blame me if, following this emotion, I don't express myself in watercolour, but in a drawing with only black or brown?

But there are watercolours where the outlines are very strongly expressed - for instance those by Régamey, those by Pinwell and Walker and Herkomer, which I think of very often (those by the Belgian Meunier); but even if I tried this, Tersteeg would not be satisfied with them. He would always say, “It is not saleable and saleability must come first now.”

Personally I think he means in plainer terms, “You are a mediocrity and you are arrogant because you don't give in and you make mediocre little things: you are making yourself ridiculous with your so-called seeking, and you do not work.” That is the real meaning of what Tersteeg said to me the year before last, and last year; and he still means it.

I am afraid Tersteeg will always be for me “the everlasting no.”

That is what not only I, but almost everyone who seeks his own way, has behind or beside him as an everlasting discourager. Sometimes one is depressed by it and feels miserable and almost stunned.

But I repeat, it is the everlasting no; in the cases of men of character, on the contrary, one finds an everlasting *yes*, and discovers in them “la foi du charbonnier.”

But for all that, life sometimes becomes gloomy, and the future, dark, because the work costs money, so the harder one works, the deeper one gets into debt, instead of the work helping one on, so that difficulties and expense may be surmounted by working harder.

I make progress with my figures, but financially I am losing ground, and cannot keep it up.

And of late I sometimes think it would be well to move to the country, either to the seaside or to a spot where the farm labour is full of character, because I think it would help me to economize.

Here I could also do what I want if I could earn a little more and go here and there to make studies. And the advantage here is that my studio is good, and that after all one is not quite outside the world of art; one can hardly do without some intercourse, without hearing and seeing something now and then.

I sometimes think of going to England. In London they publish a new magazine of importance, equal to the London News and Graphic - the Pictorial News. Perhaps I could find work and wages there, but who can give any security?

Recently I have not asked for particulars about the woman, as I myself feel assured that you love each other, which is the main thing, for as long as one knows this one thing, there is no need to ask for particulars.

I only hope you will come soon - a year is a long time not to see each other, yet to be always thinking of each other. Now on July 1 our little chap was one year old, and he is the merriest, jolliest child you can imagine, and I think this child's doing well and keeping her busy and occupying her thoughts are important in saving the woman herself. For the rest, I sometimes think it would be well for her to live in the country for a time, far from the city and far from the family; it would help to bring about a thorough improvement. It's true she has improved, but her family's influence is a bad drawback at times: I want to lead her to greater simplicity, whereas they are driving her to intrigues and duplicity.

Well, she is indeed what one may call an “enfant du siècle,” and her character has been so much influenced by circumstances that she will always show the consequences in the form of a certain discouragement and indifference, and want of a firm faith in something or other. Often, often I have thought it would be good for her to live in the country. But moving also brings a lot of expenses. And then I should want to be married before I moved if I went either to the country or to London.

I do miss the necessary intercourse with other people here, and I don't see any chance of improving this. After all, every place is alike to me, and I want to move as little as possible.

As soon as you have decided anything about your coming - do write me. I am in doubt about several things of late, and it makes me rather nervous and that will remain so till we have seen each other and spoken about the future.

Recently I have read articles by Boughton on Holland. They were the text accompanying illustrations by himself and Abbey, splendid things some of them. One thing I noted especially - a description of the isle of Marken - written in such a manner that I should like to go there, and who knows what a good thing it might prove to be if one settled someplace which was very picturesque.

But in such a case one must have at least one point of contact with the art world, for of course the fishing population hasn't the slightest notion of it, and one must have enough to live on.

Don't forget to write the promised letter about Les Cent Chefs-d'Oeuvre, and if you are very lucky in business, and could send me something extra, it would be very welcome.

As to living in the country - I love nature, yet there are many things that tie me to the city, especially the magazines, the possibility of reproduction.

Not to see any locomotives would mean no hardship for me, but never to see a printing press would be hard. Adieu, boy, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I have been reading Mes Haines by Zola; there are good things in it, though I think he makes great mistakes - he doesn't even mention Millet in his general survey. The following is quite true: “Observez que ce qui plaît au *public* est toujours ce qu'il y a de plus banal, ce qu'on a costume de voir chaque année, on est habitué à de telles fadeurs, à des mensonges si jolis, qu'on refuse de toute sa puissance les vérités fortes.” [Note that what pleases the *public* is always utterly banal, just what they are accustomed to seeing every year; they have got used to such insipidities, to such pretty lies that they repudiate vigorous truths with all their might.]

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 6-8 July 1883

Dear Theo,

If you feel the way I do, you will occasionally have a sudden urge to look up some fellow whom you haven't seen for a long time. I felt this way about De Bock, and I will tell you what I saw in his studio, because you used to know him even better than I.

The first thing I saw in the hall was a large sketch - an enormous windmill covered with snow, near a kind of ditch or canal. Half romantic, half realistic - a combination of styles which I don't dislike. But far from finished - though energetically put down with a fine, strong effect in it. In short, a thing one would always look at with pleasure, and I don't mind it's being unfinished. I should like that thing of his just as it is, in my studio, because it is so impressive.

Another sketch, the one of his picture for the Salon, was also good, but even more romantic.

Then there were some pictures more “blondly” brushed, several pretty studies. The impression he made on me was about the same as last year, perhaps just a little bit more positive and serious. Some sketches were riper and more correct in tone and colour than last year, and the grounds firmer, but in my opinion the relative proportions of the planes and masses are always left too vague; this correctness in proportions is the distinctive quality of Corot and Rousseau and Dias, Daubigny, Dupré. They all have this in common - that they are very careful about it - and their backgrounds are also very expressive, and not so detached.

But there are very good points in De Bock's work, and one would look at it with more pleasure if the things were put down in a less visionary way. He ought to be a little more realistic - then his work would show more genius.

Nor can I understand why he doesn't vary a little more; for instance, I have also done a few landscape studies this week, one yesterday at De Bock's, a potato field in the dunes; the day before, a spot under the chestnut trees; another one of a yard with heaps of coal. Well, it is relatively very seldom that I happen to draw landscape, but now that I am doing so, I immediately have three very different subjects. He who is decidedly a landscape painter, why doesn't he do that more, instead of always painting a dune with a little tree and a little bent. Very beautiful in itself, but there are so many things just as beautiful, and which one would suppose would attract him. Well, you know that as well as I do. I repeat, my impression of him is that he certainly is not losing ground.

In my last letter I wrote you I had thought of moving, especially to be even nearer the sea.

I spoke with De Bock about houses in Scheveningen, but I'd better not complain about my studio's rent being too high, when I compare it with the rents others pay; for instance, Blommers's old house is to let - rent 400 guilders - and I pay 170 guilders - a year. Moreover, the studio is not larger than mine, and as to comfort, I prefer to keep what I have now. De Bock himself pays as much as Blommers. And this tallies with what I heard last year about average rents. If I wanted to live near the sea, Scheveningen would be out of the question, and I should have to go to some more remote place, for instance, like Hook of Holland or Marken. But now I think I will ask De Bock to let me have a corner of his garret as a pied-à-terre, and to keep my drawing material there, so that I needn't drag it along every time. If one gets there tired already, the work slows down and the hand is not very firm (if one didn't have to work at once, one would of course not bother about that little fatigue). If one has to walk and to carry everything, one gets just tired and warm enough to be handicapped by it. So that pied-à-terre at De Bock's and taking the streetcar oftener would perhaps enable me to make drawings of the sea and Scheveningen more seriously than I have up to now.

De Bock promised to come and see me this week, and we shall talk it over again. He himself is thinking of moving; he has rented this house till May and said something about its perhaps being empty for a few months. We must wait and see. He repeatedly asked after you, and I said you probably will come to see him this summer. His large picture at the Salon has not been sold, of course. How did you like it? Opinion about it was very divided. When I have that pied-à-terre of his, I think I can manage to be at Scheveningen often this autumn. We shall see - but I long very much to work on the beach.

This week I made a study of a man towing a barge, and of a man carrying peat, and meanwhile I am always working on the potato diggers. I hope I will get on with De Bock a little now, perhaps it wouldn't harm either of us, and we might learn something from each other. He has bought a lot of antiques and his rooms look very nice, but I imagine it cost him a lot of money.

Will you write soon? I wrote you about De Bock, as I recently did about Rappard, so that you may know something about what the friends are doing. Rappard is away; he wrote to tell me that he is using printer's ink the way I told him to after all - and in this way, namely with turpentine, he got on much better. You know I've always said that my present studio was good, especially after the change. Indeed, when I think of moving, I would much rather arrange it so that I need *not move*, for in comparison with others I am very well off. Besides, one is attached to a house one has arranged oneself, and feels at home in it.

Try to send me something soon, boy, for I shall need it.

De Bock has also taken up Zola, and has read Le Nabob by Daudet too. Do you know Germinie Lacerteux by Jules and Edmond de Goncourt? That must be very good, in the manner of Zola; I shall try to get it.

I have ordered an instrument which will enable me to fix a charcoal drawing in the open air while working on it, then one can work it up more thoroughly. I am anxious to get it.

Near De Bock's, I found splendid potato fields in the dunes behind the lighthouse.

Adieu, boy, good luck and write soon. Goodbye, boy. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I have been absorbed these days with a drawing by Régamey, of a diamond mine; at first sight, no different from any of those superficial drawings which fill the magazines - one would just pass over it; but if one looks at it a little longer, it becomes so beautiful and so intriguing that one is quite fascinated by it. Régamey is clever - this reproduction is by Felix, who often reproduces the Japanese things.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 11 July 1883

My dear Theo,

I had been more or less on the lookout for your letter and was very pleased when it came. Many thanks for it.

What you write about the exhibition is very interesting. Which old painting by Dupré was it that you particularly liked so much? You must tell me when you next write. Your description of the Troyon and the Rousseau, for instance, has enough substance for me to get a fair idea of the way in which they are done.

There are other pictures from about the time of Troyon's Pré Communal that had the sort of atmosphere one might call *dramatic*, although there are no figures in them. Israëls got it quite right when he said of a Jules Dupré (Mesdag's large one), “It is like a figure-painting,” and it is this dramatic effect that lends the je ne sais quoi which makes one feel what you say about it: “It conveys that moment and that place in nature to which one can repair alone, without company.” Ruysdael's “Buisson” has it very strongly as well.

You must have seen those old Jacques in which it was slightly exaggerated, perhaps done slightly for effect - no, not really - which one used to admire for that very reason, even though the ordinary man in the street didn't rate them among Jacque's finest.

Speaking of Rousseau, do you know the Richard Wallace Rousseau, a lisiére de bois [edge of a wood] in autumn after the rain, a glimpse of meadows stretching endlessly into the distance, marshy, with cattle, the foreground very much in tone. To me that is one of the finest - very much like the one of the red sun in the Luxembourg. The dramatic effect in those paintings is something that, more than anything else in art, makes one understand “une coin de la nature vu à travers d'un temperament” [a corner of nature viewed through (the medium of) a temperament] and l'homme ajouté à la nature [man added to nature]. One finds the same thing in, say, portraits by Rembrandt. It is more than nature, something of a revelation. And it seems to me that it is as well to have great respect for it and to hold one's tongue when, as so often, people say it is exaggerated or mannered.

Oh, I must tell you that De Bock has been to see me - rather enjoyable. Breitner, who was totally unexpected because he seemed to have broken contact completely at one time, turned up yesterday. I was pleased, because - when I first moved here - it used to be very agreeable going out with him. I don't mean going out into the country but going out to look for characters and enjoyable experiences in the city itself. There isn't another person here in The Hague with whom I have ever done this, most find the city ugly and give everything in it a miss. And yet the city can be very beautiful at times, too, don't you agree?

Yesterday, for instance, I saw workmen in the Noordeinde busy pulling down the section opposite the palace. Men all white with plaster dust, with carts and horses. It was chilly, windy weather, a grey sky, the whole place full of character.

I met Van der Velden last year - one evening at De Bock's when we were looking at De B.'s etchings. I wrote to you then that he made a very favorable impression on me, although he had little to say and wasn't very good company that evening. But the immediate impression he made on me was that he is a solid, genuine painter. He has a square, Gothic head, - a touch of insolence or boldness and yet gentleness in his look, a sturdy, broad build, in fact the exact opposite of Breitner and De Bock. There is something virile and powerful about him, even though he doesn't say or do anything in particular. I hope to have closer contacts with him one day - perhaps through Van der Weele.

I was at Van der Weele's last Sunday. He was working on a picture of cattle in the milking-yard, for which he's done a number of substantial studies. He is going to the country now for a while.

By way of a change I did a few watercolours again in the countryside recently, a little cornfield and a bit of a potato field. And I have also drawn a few small landscapes as settings for a couple of figure drawings I am hoping to do.

These are the designs for those figure drawings, very sketchy. The top one is of people burning weeds, the bottom one shows the return from the potato fields. I am seriously thinking of painting a number of figure studies, chiefly with a view to working up the drawings.

What happy news that you plan to come to Holland at the beginning of August; as I've told you often enough, I look forward to seeing you very much.

I'm eager to hear from you how well up your woman is in artistic matters. I imagine in any case that much still remains to be done and encouraged in that direction. Tant mieux. In any case, I hope she will acquire some sort of scrapbook, for which I hope you will be able to find a few sheets from among the smaller studies. Sometimes there are sheets in a sketchbook which, although they are mere scribbles, nevertheless have something to say. I shall put a few things aside against her arrival.

I have talked it over with De Bock and I can store my things at his house when I do my studies in Scheveningen. I also hope to call on Blommers again in the near future. I spoke to De Bock about his painting at the Salon, “November,” the reproduction of which I admired so much in the catalogue. He must still have a sketch of it, and I should like to see that.

As for my going to London sooner or later, for a shorter or longer period, I agree there would be a better chance of doing something with my work over there. I also think that I could learn quite a lot if I could meet some of the people there. And I assure you I would not be short of subjects. There are bound to be beautiful things to do there at those dockyards on the Thames!

Anyway, there are several matters we must talk over when you come. I hope you won't be in too much of a hurry, there is so much we should discuss.

I really wish I could go to Brabant again in the autumn and do some studies there. I should particularly like to have some studies of a Brabant plough, of a weaver and of the village churchyard at Nuenen. But again, everything costs money.

Well, regards, and many thanks again for your letter and the enclosure. Look after yourself. Are you thinking of bringing your woman along to Holland or isn't that advisable yet? I wish you would.

Goodbye, my dear fellow, with a handshake,

Ever yours,

Vincent

I am adding a few lines to tell you some more about Breitner - I have just returned from his temporary studio here (as you know, he lives in Rotterdam at present). You no doubt know Vierge, or Urabietta, who draws for L'Illustration*?* Well, at times Breitner reminds me of Vierge, though not very often.

When he is good, his work looks like something done in a hurry by Vierge, but when he, that is B., does work that is too hurried or unfinished, which is what happens most of the time, then it is hard to say what it looks like, because it doesn't look like anything - unless it is strips of faded old wallpaper from I don't know what period, but anyway a most peculiar and probably very distant one. Just picture the scene, as I step into his garret at Siebenhaar's. It has been furnished in the main with various (empty) matchboxes, and for the rest with a razor or the like and a box with a bed in it. I could see things standing against the chimney, 3 endlessly long strips, which I took at first for sun blinds. But on closer inspection they turned out to be canvases

in this format:

As you see from the above illustration, the first one is a somewhat mystical scene, probably taken from Revelation, or so one might be inclined to think at first. But I am told it is artillery manoeuvers in the dunes. My considered opinion is that it is a good 4 meters long by ¾ meter broad.

The second one tells the story of a man leaning against a wall at the extreme left of the painting; while at the extreme right various ghostly female specimens stand gaping at him, care having been taken to leave a fair amount of space between these two groups. And I was also told that the man on the left was meant to represent a drunkard, which might well have been the painter's intention, and I have no wish to call that into question, though it could have been anything else.

The third one is almost better, and is a sketch of the market place he did last year, which seems, however, to have changed since then to represent a Spanish rather than a Dutch market, at least in so far as anything can be made out in it at all. What sort of wares are being sold in that market, where it may be - I, for my part, doubt it is meant to be on this globe, and to the naive spectator it would seem rather to represent a scene on one of the planets that Jules Verne's miraculous travellers were in the habit of visiting (by projectile). It is impossible to be specific about the sort of wares actually being sold, though seen from afar it could be enormous quantities of candied fruit or sweetmeats.

Now, you try to imagine something like that, but on ne peut plus absurd [as absurd as can be] and heavy-handed to boot, and you have the work of friend Breitner. From a distance it looks like patches of faded colour on a bleached, mouldering and mildewy wallpaper and in that respect it has some qualities, which to me are none the less positively objectionable.

I simply fail to comprehend how it is possible for anyone to produce such things. They are like something seen in a fever, impossible and meaningless as in the most preposterous dream.

I think it just shows that Breitner hasn't yet fully recovered and that he actually did do it while he was feverish, which in view of his illness last year is quite on the cards.

Last year, when I had recovered but couldn't sleep and was feverish myself, I too had moments when I felt like forcing myself to do some work, and I did do a few things, but thank God not too absurdly large, which later I couldn't believe I had done. That's why I believe B. will be all right again, but I do find this stuff ridiculous.

A watercolour study of some small birch trees in the dunes, which was much better and had nothing abnormal about it, lay crumpled in a corner. But his large things are no good.

At Van der Weele's I saw another very ugly one by him, as well as a very good head, but a portrait of Van der Weele he had started was another bad one. Thus he is hard at it making a fine old mess and on a very large scale. I do at times like the work of Hoffmann and Edgar Poe (the Fantastic Tales, Raven, etc.) but I find Breitner's stuff objectionable because the imagination behind it is clumsy and meaningless and has virtually no contact with reality. I think it's terribly ugly. But I look on it as the result of a spell of ill-health. Van der Weele also has two rather curious little watercolours of his, stylishly done, which have a touch, a certain je ne sais quoi, of what the English call “weird.”

I learned a lesson today thanks to that visit, namely that one is fortunate indeed if in present-day society one can live in fairly normal surroundings and has no need to resort to a coffee-house existence - from which one starts to see things through a growing fog of confusion. For I have no doubt that this is what happened to him. Imperceptibly he has strayed far from a composed and rational view of things, and so long as this nervous exhaustion persists he will be unable to produce a single composed, sensible line or brushstroke.

I wish I could provide him with some company and diversion, I wish I could share his ups and downs more often and perhaps cultivate his friendship a bit more. Do you remember the painting La folie d'Hugues v. d. Goes, by Wauters? In some respects Breitner reminds me a little of v. d. Goes's mental state. I don't want to be the first here to say so, but I believe that people have been talking along these lines about his work for quite some time now.

The cure for him would be to take a good long look at some potato plants, which have lately had such a deep and distinctive colour and tone, instead of driving himself mad looking at pieces of yellow satin and bits of gold leather. Well, we shall have to wait and see. He is intelligent enough, but he persists quand même [all the same] with a sort of eccentric parti pris [prejudice]. If he were merely departing from normality with a rational motive, well and good, but with him it is also a question of no longer taking trouble with his work. I think it is a very bad business and just hope he will come out of it all right, but he has badly lost his way.

Well, I shall be making a start in Scheveningen this week. I could have done with a little extra to buy some painting material.

I am going to have a few drawings photographed in cabinet size [6.5 x 4.5 inches] or a little larger (to see how they will look on a smaller scale) by a photographer who has taken photographs of drawings by Ter Meulen, Duchâtel and Zilcken. He does it for 75 cents, which isn't expensive, is it? I shall have him do “The Sower” and “The Peat Cutters” for now, the one with a lot of small figures, the other with 1 large figure. And if those come off, then if I should later have any drawings I shall be able to send you photographs of them, which you could show to, say, Buhot, to see if he thinks he can find buyers. They could reproduce those they want from the actual drawings, or else I could copy them onto their paper.

Regards once again, Theo, all the best. Write again soon. I am having those photographs done because we must keep going after Buhot & Cie, I must earn a bit of money so that I can start something new and also do some painting, as I am just in the mood for it now.

Mauve has fallen out not just with me but also, to name but one other, with Zilcken. The other day I saw Zilcken's etchings and just now at the photographer's I saw photographs of Zilcken's drawings. Leaving myself out of it, I must say that, going by those, it is beyond me what Mauve has against Zilcken. His drawings were good, not bad at all. It's just capriciousness on Mauve's part.

After all, I don't think it's very nice of C. M. never to have sent one syllable in answer to my letter, when I took the trouble to enclose two sketches of the drawings in question.

Nor do I think it nice of H. G. T., now that I, for my part, have tried to thaw the ice between us, not to come to see me. It's stuff and nonsense to say he's busy, for that isn't the reason, he could easily find the time to come round *once* a year.

I am adding another half-page to say something about Brabant. Among the figures I've done of working types there are several with what many would call a distinctly old-fashioned character, even in conception, for instance a digger who looks more like those one occasionally comes across on the carved wooden bas-reliefs of Gothic church pews than on a modern drawing. I think of the Brabant figures very often because I find them particularly appealing.

What I should tremendously like to do, and what I feel I could do, too, on the understanding that circumstances made patient posing possible, is the small figure of Father on a path across the heath; the figure rigorously drawn, with character, and as I have said, on a stretch of brown heathland crossed by a narrow white sandy path and a sky applied and suggested with just a touch of passion. In addition, Father and Mother arm in arm, let's say - in autumnal surroundings - or against a small beech hedgerow with withered leaves. I should also like to use Father's figure when I do a peasant funeral, which I fully intend to try, although it won't be easy.

Leaving aside less relevant differences in religious opinion, the figure of a poor village clergyman is for me, in type and character, one of the most sympathetic there is, and I would not be who I am if I didn't tackle it some day.

When you come, I should very much like to consult you about arrangements for a trip there. When you see my drawings of orphan men, for instance, you will understand what I want and how I intend to set about it.

I want to do a drawing that not quite everybody will understand, the figure simplified to the essentials, with a deliberate disregard of those details that do not belong to the actual character and are merely accidental. That is, it mustn't be, say, a portrait of Father, but rather depict the type of a poor village clergyman on his way to visit the sick. Similarly, the couple arm in arm by the beech hedge will be a typical husband-and-wife who have grown old together in love and fidelity, rather than portraits of Father and Mother, although I hope that they will pose for it. But they will have to understand that it is a serious matter, which they might perhaps not realize if the likeness isn't exact. And so they will have to be gently warned that if it comes off, they will have to adopt the pose I choose and not change it. Anyhow, it should turn out all right, and I don't work so slowly that it need be a big effort for them. And I for my part should set great store by doing it.

The simplification of figures is something that greatly preoccupies me. Anyway, you will see it for yourself in the figures I'll be showing you. Should I go to Brabant, then I don't think it should be some sort of an outing or a pleasure trip, but a short period of very hard work done at -lightning speed.

Speaking of expression in a figure, I am increasingly coming round to the idea that it lies less in the features than in the whole tournure [bearing]. There are few things I detest more than most of the academic têtes d'expression [facial expressions] - I would sooner look at Michelangelo's Night or a drunkard by Daumier or Millet's diggers and that well-known big woodcut of his, “The Shepherdess” - or an old horse by Mauve, *etc.*

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 13 July 1883

Dear Theo,

I want to chat with you before going to Scheveningen. I have gained my point with De Bock and have my pied-à-terre at his home; perhaps I shall also go to Blommers's occasionally. Now I intend to work principally in Scheveningen for some time, to go there early in the morning and stay there all day, or, if I must be at home, to be there at noon when it is too hot, and go back again in the evening. I trust this will give me new ideas and rest, not through idleness but through a change of surroundings and occupation.

For the rest, I am up to my ears in work. Today the almshouse man again posed for a thing that I suddenly felt I had to make before I started anything else. I must tell you that I went to the almshouse again on a visiting day after all. Then I saw the little old gardener, and have drawn him from the window.

Well, I could not let that go, and I have got as much of it fixed on paper as I can remember.

Last evening I received a present which pleased me enormously (from those two land surveyors - for there has been a second one since), namely a very characteristic Scheveningen jacket with high turn-up collar, picturesque, faded and patched.

I arranged my painting materials as far as I could, added what was necessary and laid up a stock of streetcar tickets, *etc.*

This morning I saw the negatives of the three photographs. I long to see the prints and I hope that in this small size they will be useful when we approach the illustrated press. I think I will also have a photo taken of today's drawing of that little gardener, for that figure is much, much more elaborate than in this scratch, and the surroundings are much less tame than they are here. I hope to be able to send you the prints of the photographs next week.

But, boy, I must ask you to try your utmost to send me some money; I am already penniless because of those expenses that were absolutely necessary for starting work in Scheveningen.

It needn't be much, but a little to get through the days and not to sit in the dunes without a penny to bless myself with.

The photographs are “Sower,” “Potato Diggers,” and ”Peat Cutters”; I think the last one is the best.

Don't you think it nice of those land surveyors? They are jolly, merry fellows, who have often been good company to me. They are really beginning to make nice sketches, but both have to take their final exams - one, for land surveyor, and the other, for civil engineer.

As soon as I have looked around Scheveningen a little, I shall take the woman with me occasionally, to pose or at least to indicate the place and the size of the figures.

I long so much for your coming, boy, I hope there will be a few things in my work which you will like, and that you will see some progress. De Bock saw some of last year's painted studies and liked them, but they please me less and less. I hope to make better ones this year.

The photographer will come to the studio next Sunday. I want to discuss with him which of the figures I have are most suitable for photographing. I should be at a complete loss if you absolutely could not send anything extra. I bought only the things strictly necessary for the paintbox, but hardly anything is left.

The Scheveningen jacket is a piece of good luck.

Some time ago I wrote you that perhaps it would be the same with me now as it was when I lived in The Hague years ago, that at first it was a miserable time but that later it became more pleasant; and now it has become better and more pleasant again. Now, adieu. Do what you can, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 22 July 1883

Sunday night
The Hague, 22 July 1883
Dear brother,

It may be feverishness, or nerves, or something else, I don't know, but I don't feel well. Perhaps I am thinking more than is necessary about that expression in your letter concerning various things; I hope so. And I have an uneasy feeling I can't shake off, though I have tried to overcome it.

There isn't any reason for it, is there? If there is anything, then tell me straight out what kind of obstacles there are.

At all events, write too, by return of mail if possible, whether there is anything or not. I can't help it if there is no reason for it, but all at once I'm in the dumps. It may be a reaction from my overexerting myself.

At all events, write soon, boy; did you get the photographs? I'm going to take a long walk to try to shake it off. Adieu,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

In fact, I have no real friend but you, and when I am in low spirits, I always think of you. I only wish you were here, that we might again talk together about moving to the country.

Except for what I told you about, there is nothing the matter with me, and things are going well - but perhaps I am a little feverish or something - I feel miserable. I had to pay money right and left - landlord, paint, baker, grocer, shoemaker, heaven knows what - and only a little is left But the worst is that after many such weeks, one feels one's resistance ebbing, and is overcome by a pervading feeling of weariness.

If you can't send anything at once, brother, at all events try to write me by return of mail if possible. And as to the future, if there is some danger, tell it straight out, “homme avisé en vaut deux,” it is better to know exactly what one has to fight against.

I have tried to work a little today, but suddenly I was overcome by a depression which I cannot exactly account for. At such moments one wishes one were made of iron, and regrets that one is only flesh and blood.

I had written you early this morning, but after I had mailed my letter, it suddenly seemed as if all my troubles crowded together to overwhelm me, and it became too much for me because I could no longer look clearly into the future. I can't put it any other way, and I can't understand why I shouldn't succeed in my work.

I have put all my heart into it, and, for a moment at least, that seemed to me a mistake.

But, boy, you know it yourself - what things in practical life must one devote one's strength and thought and energy to? One must take a chance and say, I will do a certain thing and carry it through. Well, then it may turn out wrong, and one may hit an impenetrable barrier when people do not care for it; but one needn't care after all, need one? I don't think one has to worry over it; but sometimes it becomes too hard, and one feels miserable against one's will.

And now I thought, I am sorry that I didn't fall ill and die in the Borinage that time, instead of taking up painting, for I am only a burden to you. And yet I cannot help it, for one must go through many phases to become a good painter, and what one makes in the meantime is not exactly bad if one tries one's utmost; but there ought to be people who see it in the light of its tendency and objective, and who do not ask the impossible.

Things are looking dark right now. If it were only for me, but there is the thought of the woman and the children, poor creatures whom one would keep safe, and feels responsible for.

The woman has been doing well recently.

I cannot talk about it with them, but for myself it became too much today. Work is the only remedy; if that does not help, one breaks down.

And you see the trouble is that the possibility of working depends on selling the work, for there are expenses - the more one works, the greater the expenses are (though the latter is not true in every respect). When one does not sell and has no other income, it is impossible to make the progress which would otherwise follow of its own accord.

The fact is, brother, that the general state of affairs oppressed me more than I could bear, and I am telling you my thoughts. I only wish you would come soon. And do write soon, for I need it. Of course there is nobody but you whom I can speak to about it, for it does not concern other people, and they have nothing to do with it.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 22 July 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, thanks for the enclosure, though I cannot repress a feeling of sadness at your saying, “I can give you little hope for the future.”

If you mean this only in a financial sense, I shouldn't mind it so much, but if it's in reference to my work, I don't quite understand why I deserve it. It comes just at the moment when I can send you the prints of the photographs of a few of my largest drawings which I had promised you before, but couldn't get because I had no money.

I do not know what you mean by that expression, how can I know it? Your letter is too short, but it hit me unexpectedly right in the heart.

But I should like to know what you really mean by it, whether you have noticed that I have made some progress or not.

You will remember that when you wrote me a month ago about the finances being bad, my answer was, “All right, that much more reason to do our utmost on both sides; do try to send me what's strictly necessary; for my part, I will do my utmost to make progress, so that perhaps we can sell something to the magazines.”

Since then I have started several larger compositions which have more in them than the studies of a single figure.

So now my first batch of photographs for you to show to some artists coincides with your “I can give you little hope for the future.” Has anything happened?

It makes me nervous, you must write again soon.

As you see, the photos are: *Sower, Potato Diggers, Peat Cutters*. I've had some others made: *Sand Pit, Burning of Weeds, Refuse Dump, Potato Digger*, one figure, *Coal Hewers*, and now last week at Scheveningen I have been working on *Mending of Nets* (Scheveningen fisherwomen).

And then two other large compositions of labourers in the dunes (one of which I showed to Tersteeg) which, though they still require hard work, are the things I should most like to finish.

Long rows of diggers - poor people employed by the municipality - in front of a patch of sandy ground, which must be dug. But it is enormously difficult to make. You may find the first conception of it in the “Peat Cutters.”

It wouldn't make me so melancholy, brother, if you hadn't added something which worries me. You say, “Let us hope for better times.”

You see, in my opinion that is one of those things one should beware of. *To hope for better times must not be a feeling but an action in the present*. My actions depend on yours in that if you should stop sending money, I couldn't go on and should just be in a desperate position.

Just because I felt the hope for better times strongly, I threw all my strength into the present work, without thinking of the future other than to trust the work would find its wages, though we must pinch ourselves as to food, drink and clothes more and more every week.

There was the question of Scheveningen, the question of painting. I thought, “All right, let's carry it through.” But now I could almost wish I had not started it, boy, for the expenses are heavy and I cannot meet them.

The weeks passed - many, many weeks and months of late - when the expenses were repeatedly heavier than I could afford, notwithstanding all my worrying and economizing and however much I racked my brains. As soon as your money arrives, I must not only manage to live ten days on it, but I have so many things to pay for at once that from the start those ten days which are ahead are bound to mean starvation. And the woman has to nurse the baby, and the baby is strong and growing, and it often happens that she has no milk for it.

And it happens to me, too: when I am sitting in the dunes or somewhere else, I have a faint feeling in my stomach because there isn't enough to eat.

The whole family's shoes are patched and worn out, and there are many more of such small miseries which put furrows in one's face.

Well, I should not care, Theo, if I could only stick to the thought, It will come out right, we must go on. But now your saying, “I can give you little hope for the future,” is like “the hair that finally breaks the camel's back” to me. The burden is sometimes so heavy that one extra hair is enough to make the animal sink to the ground.

Now what am I to do? I saw Blommers twice in Scheveningen and spoke to him, and he saw a few of my things and asked me to come and see him.

I made a few painted studies there, a bit of the sea, a potato field, a field with net menders, and here in the studio, a fellow in a potato field planting cabbage in the empty spots between the potato plants; and then I am working on the large drawing of the mending of nets.

But I feel my ardour vanishing, one needs to have a fixed point somewhere. When you say, “Set your hopes on the future,” it sounds to me as if you yourself had no confidence in me.

Is this true? I can't help it, my spirits are low because of all these cares. I only wish you were here.

You say that the effect of the lithographs is somewhat meager. I am not in the least surprised when I think of how a man's physique influences his work, and my life is too cramped and meager. Really, Theo, we ought to have had a little more to eat for the sake of the work, but I could not afford it, and it will remain so as long as I cannot breathe a little more freely.

Therefore, please do show the photographs to Buhot or somebody, if you cannot send more yourself, and try to get something accepted with his help.

I am almost sorry to have started painting again, for I wish I hadn't begun it if I can't carry on. I can't do without colours, and colours are expensive, and I can't get more on credit because I still owe a little to Leurs and Stam. And yet I love painting so.

While I was at it, some of last year's things caught my fancy again, and I have painted studies hanging in the studio once more.

The sea, which I love enormously, must be brushed in oil, otherwise one cannot get hold of it.

Look here, Theo, I only hope you won't get discouraged, for indeed, when you speak of, “giving no hope for the future,” it makes me melancholy. You must keep courage and energy to send the money, otherwise I'm on the rocks and cannot go on, for those who might be friends have become enemies and seem to want to remain so. Think it over well - that in fact I never did anything which accounts for this - at least, I cannot account for it - for instance, Mauve's or Tersteeg's or C. M.'s being so indifferent that they refuse to see my work or to speak a word to me. It is human to be angry about something, but it is not right to cling to that anger, even after a year has elapsed and after repeated efforts to make up.

So for today I finish with the question, Theo, when you spoke to me about painting in the beginning, and if we had then foreseen my current work, should we have hesitated in thinking it right for me to become a painter (or draughtsman, what's the difference?)

I do not think we should have hesitated about going on then if we could have foreseen these photographs for instance, should we? For surely it takes a painter's hand and eye to create such a scene in the dunes, in some form or other.

But now it often happens that I feel so downhearted when I see people behave so hostilely and indifferently that I lose all my courage. But then I cheer up again, and go back to my work and laugh at it, and because I work in the present, and let no day go by without working, I believe that there is indeed hope for me in the future, though I do not feel it, for I tell you, there is no space left in my brain for philosophizing about the future, either for upsetting me or for comforting me. I think my duty is to stick to the present with regard to me, too, and let us persevere as far as we can persevere, today rather than tomorrow.

Yet, Theo, you need not spare me if it's only a question of money - if only as a friend and a brother you keep a little sympathy for my work, saleable or unsaleable. If only I may keep your sympathy in this respect, I care very little for all the rest, and we must calmly and deliberately find ways and means. In case there is no financial hope for the future, I should propose moving to the country, to some village *quite in the country*, saving half of the house rent; and for the same money one spends here on *bad* food, we should have good, healthy food, necessary for the woman and the children - in fact, for me too. At the same time it would perhaps have advantages for taking models too.

You know I painted last summer - I have hung several of these studies on the walls again, because while making new ones, it struck me there was something in them after all.

That painting helped me indirectly in my drawing during the winter months and in the spring, and I carried this on as far as these last drawings. Now, however, I feel that it would be good to paint for a time, and that I need this to get a stronger tone in the drawings, also. I intended to paint the women sitting in the grass mending nets on a rather large scale, but after your letter I shall postpone it till I have seen you. I got more copies of the lithographs, but they are still weak; the man says he ought to have used more ink, and he will soon give me some even better ones. “N'importe,” I have tried the experiment of making a small-size sketch for illustration.

Oh, Theo, I could make so much more progress if I could spend a little more. But I can't find the way out, I am handicapped by expenses everywhere. When I read the biographies of other painters, I find that they all needed money and were miserable when they couldn't go on.

Do write soon, for I feel upset and doubt whether to dare go on with Scheveningen because of the expense of the painting materials.

Since then I have spoken to Breitner about the three compositions he had started on. It was indeed true that he had made them in a moment when he was not himself. He said he was sorry to have made them in such a manner, and showed me another composition of the drunkard and studies of common streetwalkers which were infinitely better. And I also saw a few watercolours he was working on and a picture of a smithy - all were done with a calmer and firmer hand and mind. I read a book he lent me: Soeur Philomène by de Goncourt, who wrote Gavarni. The story takes place in a hospital; it is very good.

I had hoped that you could send something; at all events - especially if you have no money - you must write me soon, for it is hard to keep courage the way things are. I think the drawings of which the photographs are taken not yet deep enough of tone; they do not sufficiently express the emotion roused by nature, but if you compare them with what I made in the beginning, with the figures I made at first, I think I am not mistaken if I see a current of progress, and we must not lose hold of this current.

So let us try to drudge on.

I only wish you could come here.

At all events write soon. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I do not approve, Theo, of spending more than one receives, but when it is a question of going on strike or working on, I vote for working on to the utmost.

Millet and the other masters worked on till writs were served on them, or some have been in prison, or have had to move from one place to another, but I do not see that any one of them gave up his work.

And I am only beginning, but I see it from afar, like a dark shadow, and sometimes it makes my work gloomy.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 23 July 1883

Dear brother,
Since I wrote you yesterday, I could not shake off an anxious, restless feeling, and it kept me awake last night.
It is, Shall I be able to go on or not? - that, in short, is why I'm worrying.

You have the photographs now, and you will be able to imagine my state of mind better with those in front of you than before you saw them. The drawings I make now are only a shadow of my intentions - but the shadow which already has a definite shape, and which I seek, which I aim at, is not vague, but consists of things taken from full reality, which can only be mastered by patient and regular work. The idea of working in fits and starts is a nightmare to me. Nobody can work without money; I think it's right to work with as little as possible, but the thought of being left absolutely without what's strictly necessary would make anybody depressed and melancholy.

Oh, Theo, the work brings its troubles and cares, but what is it in comparison to the misery of a life of inactivity?

So let's not lose courage, but comfort each other, instead of distressing or disheartening each other.

Now I have spoken to Blommers about my painting - he wants me to keep it up; personally I also feel that having finished those last ten or twelve large drawings, I have reached a point where I must change my course instead of making more in the same way.

What I wrote you about (which you wrote about, too, our thoughts having met again), the meagerness or what is called dryness, is the first thing to be conquered, lest it become a chronic disease. I really think it remarkable that you and I seem to have thought the same thing again, for though you wrote only a single word about it, it is immediately noticeable in the two lithographs and in the photographs, too. Except for that defect, they don't seem so bad to me.

I've been thinking of ways and means to conquer it, but see no other help than to renew my energy and also my physical strength, for I am afraid it is going the wrong way. I absolutely need some money, and must restore both my health and my paintbox; otherwise I am afraid things will crop up later which would be more difficult to redress. It is now just the beginning - and all the same, here and there the last drawings are less dry than before.

If in some way, Theo, I might find some help or sympathy, I think it would redress itself soon enough.

In many lives I could show you similar periods of dryness which have become completely overcome. I shan't cite examples, for you will find many of your own accord, if you think it over. Almost all the fellows who have gone through the École de Rome and who had been drudging assiduously on the figure for some time showed at the end of the course rather clever, rather correct drawings which are unpleasant to look at, however, because there is something of “une âme en peine” [a soul in pain] in them, which they later lost as soon as they could move and breathe a little more freely. Now I don't consider myself as clever as those people, but without being under the constraint of a definite course, just to perfect my drawing, I have forced myself to study the figure assiduously, and through that very strain, by constantly exerting myself, I have drifted into this dryness.

I wish you could come soon.

I repeat, it would be good if my circumstances were a little easier, not for my pleasure or comfort, but for the order and progress of the work. If you read this letter in relation to the photographs I sent you, I hope you will see that I myself am perfectly aware of the weak points in the drawings, and that I see how to remedy those weak points, and that I certainly do not refuse to work hard to conquer them; but at the same time, that I am confronted with the difficulty of how to get the necessary means for it. It's not your fault that I don't have them, but it isn't mine, either, and “que faire, que faire?”

Taking a rest is out of the question, but I think it would be a good thing to find distraction in a change of subjects and style. After these figure studies, I feel the need of looking at the sea, the bronzed potato foliage, the fields of stubble, or plowed earth. In order to save time I have not spared myself, pinched on everything just to work on, but now I am absolutely drained. I can draw no more bills on my personal needs, on that side not a drop can be squeezed out, there is sickness and dryness.

I submit for your consideration whether it is incomprehensible that I feel pretty hopeless when I think of the income getting even smaller, seeing that there is already the beginning of want.

I wish you would come soon.

I had hoped that some of the ten or twelve drawings might have been sold, but this too has come to nothing.

Well, I hope to keep courage after all, whatever may happen, and I hope that perhaps a certain frenzy and rage for work may carry me through, like a ship is sometimes thrown over a cliff or sandbank by a wave, and can make use of a storm to save herself from wrecking. But such maneuvers do not always succeed, and it would be desirable to avoid the spot by tacking a little. After all, if I fail, what does my loss mean? I don't care so much after all. But one generally tries to make one's life bear fruit, instead of letting it wither, and at times one feels that after all one also has a life of one's own, which is not indifferent to the way it is treated.

But it is beyond my power. If I don't have anything extra now and then, as soon as I receive the usual amount, I have to pay out so much that little is left for the ten days ahead, on the last of which one walks around with a very weak, faint feeling in one's stomach, and then such a path through the dunes gets the aspect of a desert.

And one feels oneself sinking, and one cannot get or pay for the necessary things. And then the inner struggle - shall I be able to go on and continue going along this road? What can I do about it?

At all events write soon whether you have found something in the photographs. You don't see anything absurd in them, such as one might infer from Tersteeg's remark that he “would rather have nothing to do with it,” do you? After all, I am too calm and collected for that.

Adieu, a firm handshake in thought,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 24 or 25 July 1883

Dear Theo,

Coming home from Scheveningen just now, I find your letter, for which many thanks.

Many things in it please me. In the first place, I am glad that the darkness of the future cannot change our friendship or interfere with it; further, I am glad that you will come soon, and that you find progress in my work.

The division of your income, directly and indirectly, among no less than six persons is certainly remarkable. But the subdivision of my 150 francs among four human beings, with all the expenses for models, drawing and painting material, house rent, is also rather remarkable, isn't it? If those 150 francs could be increased by the work next year - I reckon the year begins with your visit - that would be delightful. We must find ways and means.

It is a pity that my painting is not more advanced, yet I shall have to explain It to you all over again.

When you were here last summer, you gave me the money to get the necessary supplies. I had to pay Stam and Leurs then. I bought new things for which I paid cash, and set to work. Besides, after some time, you wrote that you expected some money to come in, and that then “the colours and the paintbox should not be lacking.” But it was not to be, for since that time you yourself had some bad luck, as you remember. However, in the beginning of the winter, or rather toward the end of autumn, I received some extra money. But there was Leurs to pay off again. I had continued painting through those autumn days even when it was so stormy in Scheveningen. Winter was at the door and I was afraid to incur new expenses, as there was more to pay for coal, etc., and little of the extra money was left.

Well, then I took models again, and certainly since then, at least up to now, it has been a period in which I feel I've made progress in the figure.

But it was absolutely impossible to buy colours or to make watercolours while making those figure studies, for you will remember that several times you expected to be able to send something, for instance in March, but then you yourself were obliged to get an advance.

And you had to provide for the woman, and there was the incident with H. P. v. G., and later business was rather slack.

Well, sometimes I tried to carry on when there was the least chance of managing it. I've borrowed money from Rappard, I've had an extra remittance from Father. But what was the result? It was like the beetle which is bound to a thread and can fly a little way, but is inevitably stopped by something. I began things, but after paying the bills, I was hard up for weeks at the end of the month, sometimes almost without a penny.

So that I haven't always been able to do what was, and is, in my mind. Well, we must not lose courage, we must try again.

I just came home with a few marine studies which might serve as a basis for watercolours, like that very small one of the last bathers which I once sent you in a letter. We shall do our utmost, but times are hard. What I have just started, what is really more necessary than anything else, is painting figure studies, but I don't see how I can afford it.

I have also had the studio altered.

As a matter of fact, I have been living on hope for a long time.

But you will come soon - that's a good thing; at all events you will see what I still have here then, and you will also see that I have not been idle.

But I must try to get some new strength; if that succeeds, it will be high time to use it.

For my strength is failing, it is abnormal for me to get tired when I've walked a short distance - *e.g.* from here to the post office - but that is actually the case. Oh, I don't give in of course, but I must try to remedy it. Still, my health is not thoroughly or chronically upset; it has not been caused by excesses, but by too long a period with insufficient and unsubstantial food.

Now, what is most pressing this year is the painting. I remind you once more of what I already wrote last year, which has slipped your mind, I think: here I have to pay the regular retail price for colours.

Wouldn't it be possible for you to get me colours from Paillard or someone, in a certain quantity at the wholesale price from the manufacturer himself? - Undoubtedly that would be a step toward the possibility of the colours not being lacking. And I should be very glad if we could arrange it so that you deducted 10 francs from your remittance every time. That would be 30 francs a month, 90 francs in three months, and I shouldn't have to trouble you for a few tubes every now and then, but if I had the net price list I could give a three-month order. Will you think this over? I think it would be a good arrangement. Paillard or Bourgeois or whoever it may be, it doesn't matter. As an art dealer, you might perhaps be entitled to the wholesale price.

I had another plan to try to get somebody else to let me have colours wholesale, but after talking it over with him, I heard he cannot do it.

You must try to come soon, brother, for I do not know how long I shall be able to hold out. Things are getting too much for me. I feel my strength failing. I tell you plainly that under such circumstances, I am afraid I shall never hold out. My constitution would be good enough if I hadn't had to fast so long, but it was always a question of fasting or working less, and I chose the former as much as possible, till I have become too weak now. How to bear up against it? It influences my work so obviously and clearly that I don't see the way to get on. You must not speak to others about it, brother, for if certain persons knew it, they would say, “Oh, of course it's what we foresaw and prophesied long ago.” And not only would they not help me, they would cut off all possibility for me patiently to regain my strength and to get over it.

Under the present circumstances, my work cannot be other than it is.

If I can get over my physical weakness, I shall try to make progress. Again and again I have put off taking some nourishing food because I had to provide for others and for the work. But now I am at my wits' end; no progress in my work can be expected before I get somewhat stronger. Recently I have seen only too clearly that my physical condition influences my work. I assure you that it is nothing but prostration from overwork and too little nourishment. Some people who have spoken of me as if I had some kind of disease would start it again, and that is slander of the worst kind; so keep it to yourself without speaking about it when you come here. But to a great extent I cannot help the dryness in my work, and it will change when I can get well again. What I most long for is your coming, so that we may look over the work together and see each other again.

Good-by, and meanwhile try to write a little more often, I need it so much. And many thanks for this last letter; have a good time if possible.

It will again be a question of fasting these next days till your letter arrives. Write as soon as possible.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 25 or 26 July 1883

Dear Theo,
This morning a man came who had repaired a lamp for me three weeks ago, and from whom I bought some crockery at the same time, which he forced upon me. He came to make a row because I had just paid his neighbor and not him, and accompanied it with the customary cursing, noise, invectives, *etc.* I told him that I would pay him as soon as I received money but that for the moment l was absolutely without a cent, but that was just pouring oil on the fire. I begged him to leave the house, and at last I pushed him out the door; but he, perhaps having waited for this, seized me by the neck, threw me against the wall, and then flat on the floor.

Now you see, this is the kind of small misery one has to face. Such a fellow is stronger than I, of course - he is not afraid. All the small tradesmen one has to deal with daily are of that same kind. They come of their own accord to ask you to buy from them, and want to have you for a customer, but if by chance the payment has to be put off for more than a week, they come to curse and make a row. Well, they are as they are, what can one expect? - they are sometimes hard up themselves. I am telling you this to show you that it is indeed urgent for me to make some money.

When I went to Scheveningen, I had to leave some people waiting for their money. I am rather harassed, brother, there is so much worry and care. I long for your coming, because I should like to settle the question of moving. To keep things going here, I ought to earn a little more. Life is impossible here, because of the little that's lacking.

As far as my work goes, I am not unlucky, because all these little miseries do not affect my energy and do not prevent my making a few more things. I left two small marines at De Bock's, one with a stormy sea, one with a calm one. I should love to go on with that kind of thing. Yesterday I painted a farm with a red roof under high trees. I think painting figure studies would help me in a great many ways. I started one of a boy in a potato field, and one in the garden near a fence of plaited rushes. I ought to be able to work at it with all my might. This morning's incident indicated clearly that it is my duty to find a way to go and live in a smaller house in the country, since it is impossible for me to earn a little more here. On the other hand the studio here is comfortable enough, and there is no lack of beautiful things to paint. The sea is another thing one does not find everywhere.

What I told you about my feeling rather weak is true. It has now settled into a pain between the shoulders and in the lumbar vertebrae, which I've already had at times, but I know from experience that one ought to be careful then, otherwise one becomes too weak and can't get over it so easily.

To a certain extent I let things take their own course. Things have been too much for me lately, and my plan to regain former friends by working sensibly and hard has fallen to pieces.

Theo, there is one thing we must settle - I don't mean that it will happen immediately, but the days might become even gloomier, and in that case I should like to make an arrangement.

My studies and all the work that is in the studio are absolutely your property. I repeat, at present there is no question of it - but it might happen - for instance because of my not paying the taxes - that they sold my things; but in that case I should like to bring my work safely out of the house. It's my studies, which I need for my later work, things which I've taken a lot of trouble to make.

Up to now no one on this street has paid taxes, though they are all down for various sums.

So am I, and twice the assessors have come to the house; but I showed them my four kitchen chairs and rough deal table, and told them that I could not be counted among those who ought to be taxed so high. If they found rugs, pianos, antiques in a painter's house, perhaps they were not wrong in putting such a man down for a high tax; but as for me, I couldn't even pay for my colours and had no articles de luxe but children in the house, so there was nothing to be got from me.

Then they sent me assessments and summonses, but I didn't pay the slightest attention, and once when they came to ask about them, I said it was simply no use, I'd lit my pipe with them. That I didn't have the money, and that my four chairs and table wouldn't bring anything - that even new, they weren't worth what they had assessed me for.

Since then, they have already left me alone for several months, and others here on the street haven't paid anything either.

But now that we mention it, in such a case, I wish I knew where to store my studies. Perhaps I could take them to Van der Weele's. And my painting materials too. I always feel a certain hope that when you come to the studio, you will find things that might appeal to somebody, though they may have no fixed market value. It's not my work that's the cause of the trouble.

After all, I don't feel discouraged at heart. On the contrary, I agree with what I recently read in Zola: “Si à présent je vaux quelque chose c'est que je suis seul et que je hais les niais, les impuissants, les cyniques, les railleurs idiots et bêtes.” [If at present I am worth something, it is because I am alone, and I hate the fatuous-minded, the impotent, the cynics, the idiotic and stupid scoffers.] But for all that, perhaps I should not be able to withstand the siege if I stayed here. I write about it because it's only the beginning, and the device of going and living more cheaply may bring relief - it is already decidedly urgent just to lower the rent.

Van der Weele has got the silver medal for his picture, which he richly deserves. I am glad he has it.

I have thought a great deal about that picture of Van der Weele's because I have seen it in various stages, and I have talked it over with him, and I liked it at once. I think, Theo, that if I can work on regularly and calmly, I, too, shall be able to make something of the kind in the future.

But at all events first I should have to go through a period of assiduous painting, and I must have the means for that which as yet I can't figure out how to get. Van der Weele has got the means by sacrificing half his time to things which he does not do for pleasure, but they keep his paintbox filled, and his larder, *etc.* Perhaps, perhaps, if something might come into my work which people would care to buy, I could manage too. I shouldn't care so much about the selling itself - if it weren't for being able to go on; I tell you frankly that out of all the ideas about art which I picked up during that period at Goupil's - though my taste hasn't changed - very few have stood the test when put into practice. Things are not made the way the art dealer thinks they are, and a painter's life is different, the study is different.

I can't explain it exactly, but Daubigny's saying, “Ce ne sont pas mes tableaux que j'estime davantage, qui me rapportent le plus” [Those of my pictures that I appreciate the most do not bring the most], is something which I believe now; but if I had heard it when at Goupil and Co., I would have thought that he only said it “par manière de dire.”

Adieu, boy, I am in rather a tough spot. You can see from what I told you about this morning's skirmish that people are very inconsiderate of me. They would probably stay more at a distance if one wore a top hat and the like. After all, one has self-respect, and such things are not pleasant. Well, I wish my work could bring some profit. Adieu, write soon, I long so much for your letters.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

The future would seem brighter if I were less awkward in my dealings with people. Without you, finding buyers for my work would be almost impossible; with you, it will eventually be possible. And if we do our utmost, it will stand firm and not perish. But we must stick together.

For my part, I have a great longing to see you and to talk the work over. Occasionally I talk with De Bock and other painters, but I don't take them into my confidence, and they needn't know everything.

Of course I don't mind things like this morning's little incident, but so many disagreeable things coming from the outside make one feel the need of just forgetting everything by talking with somebody who fully understands and sympathizes. Usually I keep things to myself, and try to fight it out alone. But that's not sufficient for a man of feeling, and one tries to find true friendship and confidence. Just because at times I feel my health failing and the strength to bear things dwindling, I tell you frankly that I'm sorely in need of having a quiet talk with you, and of seeing you again.

Keeping the studio going this year has been quite a struggle. Sometimes it has been awfully hard to go on with the work. And I must try to renew my strength.

And in the time which must elapse before we see each other again - do write a little oftener if you can, that must be possible. I must go on with my work, but a feeling of prostration overwhelms me again and again - a general faintness, a reaction after exertion, which keeps returning, and which I must try to overcome, otherwise it will get worse.

I wouldn't say this to De Bock or anyone - but I trust you enough to tell you, it isn't a question of losing courage or giving up, but of having spent more strength than could be spared, and of being more or less exhausted. All in all, the main thing is that a good understanding remains between us and that we keep our friendship warm. If bad luck comes, we'll brave it, but, brother, let's stick faithfully together. I am the gainer in all respects, for without you I shouldn't have been able to get as far as I have now. You don't gain anything by it, except the feeling of helping somebody to a career who would otherwise be without one.

And who knows what we may achieve together for the future?

Getting on with painting will continue to cause a lot of worry for a while, but when you see the studies, I hope you will see that it is no humbug.

I've written you so often recently about my lack of money because the need is great. One must not become too weak physically, and one's self-respect must not be too damaged. When things get too bad and one gets pressed too hard, it's one's duty to look around and try to improve one's circumstances.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 27 July 1883

Dear Theo,
To my surprise, I received another letter from you yesterday with a bank note enclosed. I needn't tell you how glad I was, and I thank you heartily for it. But they refused to change the bank note because it was too torn. However, they gave me 10 guilders on it, and it has been forwarded to Paris. If the bank refuses it, I'll have to pay back the 10 guilders - for which I had to sign a receipt - but if the bank changes it, I'll get the rest later.

In your letter you write about the conflict one sometimes has about whether one is responsible for the unfortunate results of a good action - if it wouldn't be better to act in a way one knows to be wrong, but which will keep one from getting hurt - I know that conflict too. If we follow our conscience - for me conscience is the highest reason - the reason within the reason - we are tempted to think we have acted wrongly or foolishly; we are especially upset when more superficial people jeer at us, because they are so much wiser and are so much more successful. Yes, then it is sometimes difficult, and when circumstances occur which make the difficulties rise like a tidal wave, one is almost sorry to be the way one is, and would wish to have been less conscientious.

I hope you don't think of me as other than having that same inner conflict continually, and often very tired brains too, and in many cases not knowing how to decide questions of right and wrong

When I am at work, I have an unlimited faith in art and the conviction that I shall succeed; but in days of physical prostration or when there are financial obstacles, I feel that faith diminishing, and a doubt overwhelms me, which I try to conquer by setting to work again at once. It's the same thing with the woman and the children; when I am with them and the little boy comes creeping toward me on all fours, crowing for joy, I haven't the slightest doubt that everything is right.

How often that child has comforted me.

When I'm home, he can't leave me alone for a moment; when I'm at work, he pulls at my coat or climbs up against my leg till I take him on my lap. In the studio, he crows at everything, plays quietly with a bit of paper, a bit of string, or an old brush; the child is always happy. If he keeps this disposition all his life, he will be cleverer than I.

Now what shall we say about the fact that at times one feels there is a certain fatality which makes the good turn out wrong and the bad turn out well.

I think one may consider these thoughts partly the consequence of overwrought nerves, and if one has them, one must not think it one's duty to believe that things are really as gloomy as one supposes; if one did, it would make one mad. On the contrary, it is reasonable to one's physique then, and later set to work like a man; and even if that doesn't help, one must still always continue to use those two means, and consider such melancholy fatal. Then in the long run one will feel one's energy increase, and will bear up against the troubles.

Mysteries remain, and sorrow or melancholy, but that eternal negative is balanced by the positive work which is thus achieved after all. If life were as simple, and things as little complicated as a goody-goody's story or the hackneyed sermon of the average clergyman, it wouldn't be so very difficult to make one's way. But it isn't, and things are infinitely more complicated, and right and wrong do not exist separately, any more than black and white do in nature. One must be careful not to fall back on opaque black - on deliberate wrong - and even more, one has to avoid the white as of a whitewashed wall, which means hypocrisy and everlasting Pharisaism. He who courageously tries to follow his reason, and especially his conscience, the very highest reason - the sublime reason - and tries to stay honest, can hardly lose his way entirely, I think, though he will not get off without mistakes, rebuffs and moments of weakness, and will not achieve perfection.

And I think it will give him a deep feeling of pity and benevolence, broader than the narrow-mindedness which is the clergyman's specialty.

One may not be considered of the slightest importance by either of the parties, and one may be counted among the mediocrities and feel like a thoroughly ordinary man among ordinary people - for all but one will retain a rather steady serenity in the end. One will succeed in developing one's conscience to such a point that it becomes the voice of a better and higher self, of which the ordinary self is the servant. And one will not return to skepticism or cynicism, and not belong among the foul scoffers. But not at once. I think it a beautiful saying of Michelet's, and in those few words Michelet expresses all I mean, “Socrate naquit un vrai satyr, mais par le dévouement, le travail, le renoncement des choses frivoles, il se changea si complètement qu'au dernier jour devant ses juges et devant sa mort il y avait en lui je ne sais quoi d'un dieu, un rayon d'en haut dont s'illumina le Parthénon.” [Socrates was born as a true satyr, but by devotion, work and renouncing frivolous things he changed so completely that on the last day before his judges and in the face of death, there was in him something, I do not know what, of a god, a ray of light from heaven that illuminated the Parthenon.]

One sees the same thing In Jesus too; first he was an ordinary carpenter, but raised himself to something else, whatever it may have been - a personality so full of pity, love, goodness, seriousness that one is still attracted by it. Generally, a carpenter's apprentice becomes a master carpenter, narrow-minded, dry, miserly, vain; and whatever it may be said of Jesus, he had another conception of things than my friend the carpenter of the backyard, who has raised himself to the rank of house owner, and is much vainer and has a higher opinion of himself than Jesus had.

But I must not become too abstract. What I want to do first is renew my strength, and I think when it has risen again from below par, I shall get ideas from my work, for trying to overcome that dryness.

When you come here, we shall talk it over. I don't think it's a question of a few days.

In a few days, when I shall have had some more nourishing food than recently, I think I shall get rid of my *worst depression*; but it is more deeply rooted than that, and I wish I could get to the point where I had plenty of health and strength, which is after all not impossible when one is out-of-doors a great deal and has a task one loves.

For it is a fact that now all my work is *too meager and too dry*.

Recently this has become as clear as daylight to me, and I haven't the slightest doubt that a general thorough change is necessary. I intend to talk over with you, *after you have seen this year's work*, whether you agree with me about some measures; and if you agree with me, I think we shall succeed in overcoming the difficulties. We must not hesitate, but “avoir la foi de charbonnier.”

I hope they will change the banknote. I'm so glad you have managed to send something, for I think it saves me from illness. I'll let you know how the story of the banknote ends. And it would be a good thing if you could send the usual again by the first of August. I always think that it is possible that we shall hit on another plan for the future when looking through the work together. I don't know what, as yet - but somewhere there must be work which I can do just as well as anybody else. If London were nearer, I should try there.

Know it well that I should be enormously pleased if I could make something that was salable. In that case I should have less scruples about the money I get from you, which after all you need as much as I. Once more many thanks, goodbye.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 29 and 30 July 1883

Dear Theo,
One of the causes of my sometimes thinking of moving might be eliminated in another way. Yesterday and the day before I have been strolling around the neighborhood of Loosduinen. I walked from the village to the beach, and found lots of cornfields there, not so beautiful as those in Brabant, but there must be reapers, sowers and gleaners, all those things which I have missed this year, which was the reason for my occasionally feeling the need for a change.

I do not know whether you have seen that region. I had never been there before. I painted a study there on the beach. There are some sea dikes or moles, piers, jetties, and very picturesque ones too, made of weather-beaten stones and wickerwork. I sat down on one of them and painted the rising tide till it came so near that I had to move my things in a hurry. Between the village and the beach are bushes of a deep bronzed green, tangled by the sea wind, and so striking that more than once one thinks, oh, now that's *the* “Buisson” by Ruysdael. A streetcar is running there now, so it is within easy reach when one has equipment or wet studies to carry home.

This is a scratch of the path to the beach.

My thoughts were with you all during the walk.

I know you will agree with me that the dunes around The Hague and Scheveningen have lost much of their typical character in the last ten years, and are getting another, more frivolous aspect, more and more each year.

Going back, not only ten, but thirty, even forty or fifty years, one comes to the period when they began to paint the dunes, etc., in their true character. At that time things were more Ruysdael-like than now.

If one wants to see things with a Daubigny, a Corot atmosphere, one must go farther, where the soil is almost untrodden by bathing guests, *etc.* Undoubtedly Scheveningen is very beautiful, but nature is no longer untouched there; however, that same untouched quality of nature struck me enormously during that walk I told you about.

This will give you an idea of the pier.

Rarely has silence, has nature alone impressed me in such a way recently. These very spots where nothing is left of what one called civilization, where all that is definitely left behind, these very spots are those one needs to get calmed down.

But I would have liked to have you with me, because I think you would have had the same impression of being in surroundings such as I imagine Scheveningen must of been at the time when the first Daubignys appeared, and I found those surroundings full of a strong, stimulating vigour inducing one to undertake some manly work.

When you come, it will perhaps be fun to go there together, with no civilization around us, only a poor rickety shell cart on the white road; and for the rest, shrubs that look, every one of them, like *the* “Buisson” by Ruysdael. The landscape itself very simple, flat: stretches of ragged dune soil, hardly undulating.

I think if we were together on that spot, it would put you and me into a mood such that we would not hesitate about the work, but feel decisive about what we have to do. Was it a chance harmony of my rather gloomy mood with those surroundings, or shall I find the same impressions there again in the future? I don't know, but when I again feel the need to forget the present and to think of the time when the great revolution in art began, of which Millet, Daubigny, Breton, Troyon, Corot are the leaders, I will go to that same spot once more.

I wish you could see it; perhaps when you come we might take a stroll there together - the streetcar brings one to Loosduinen in a moment, it even goes as far as Naaldwijk now. Those level grounds behind Loosduinen are exactly like Michel - and the lonely beach too.

Though, after our last letters, I think less about the future than about the present, and I still hope that when you come we shall decide that I shall make a number of small watercolours for you, and perhaps some small oil paintings, just as an experiment.

If I could only manage to have money enough to carry on my painting vigorously this year.

That walk, all by myself, far away in the dunes, has quieted me by making me feel as if I had not been alone, but had had a talk with one of the old painters from that time when Daubigny was beginning.

I shouldn't be surprised if you also remember that spot once you had walked there.

While writing this letter, I have started a watercolour of that bush; I painted a study of the other thing - the jetty - so at all events I have a souvenir of the walk, which I can show you when you come. And if you like, we can take a walk there together.

For the rest, I am not entirely myself yet; perhaps my stomach has become too weak, judging from the symptoms of dizziness, which is troublesome enough to make curing it urgent. But enough of this.

This is as far as I wrote yesterday. Now today - Monday - I can tell you that fortunately the torn banknote has been accepted in Paris, and I have lost but little on it, having cashed 23 guilders in all.

Now I have to talk something over with you which I hope you will approve of. In a previous letter I told you my definite opinion that it would be unwarranted for us not to try to profit by the wholesale prices of the colours, instead of always paying the regular retail price, in this way losing 33 1/3%. But because you didn't answer this year, I thought that it would perhaps be difficult to order things in Goupil and company's name that were destined for more private use, and on my side I made some arrangements, which I had already started tentatively before, in order to get the same thing without your being involved, and I hope for heaven's sake that you do not doubt its practicability.

You know that I give lessons to a land surveyor; well, his father has a drug store and deals in colours, has Paillard's colours in stock, and Mauve is a customer. I never got anything for those lessons to the son except many assurances of goodwill from the father. And availing myself of these, I spoke to him as follows: that undoubtedly he had in stock a certain number of unsaleable tubes. That I could use them, however, but would take them only at Paillard's wholesale price, provided that in the future he would sell me the popular tubes on the same terms.

At first he made some objections; then he looked over his stock, and we made the above arrangement. I take about 300 tubes from him, including several carmine and ultramarine, at *less* than Paillard's wholesale price (10 guilders less on the whole lot, which, at Paillard's wholesale price, would cost more than 50 guilders), so that those 300 tubes cost me 40 guilders. Besides, it gives me the right to order in the future all colours I need at Paillard's wholesale price, thus saving 33 1/3%. I have that reduction not only on the oil but also on the watercolours.

We can talk it over when you come. Of course I needn't take or pay for those 300 tubes all at once, but in as many installments as I like, monthly for instance. But I am glad of it, because 33 1/3% will make a great difference, especially in the long run. In this way it will be easier for me to continue my painting.

Today I have bought a tripod easel for sketching out of doors and canvas. The former is very convenient, because it keeps one from getting so dirty when one has to work on one's knees out of doors. For the moment I have about seven watercolours of this summer landscape. I used part of the money you sent to buy myself some nourishing food, but I do not have much appetite, as my stomach is upset, and I am afraid it will be some time before I get over it. I shall be glad when you come, I think it will be good for many reasons.

I hope you will be able to send the usual amount again by the first of August.

At all events I am glad I have some painted studies to show you when you come.

I have a model, a peasant boy, who lives here in the neighborhood, with whom I have already spoken about painting studies. For instance, he could manage to leave with me very early in the morning, and go quite far into the dunes. Adieu, all best wishes. Believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 2 August 1883

The Hague, c. 2 August 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter of yesterday and the enclosure. Fortunately they have also changed the other note for 23 guilders. So I have been able to pay off the most pressing debts, though not all, for there was so much to pay at once for the colours I had used in the meantime.

I wonder if you intend to do as you did last year, first go home for a few days, and then come straightway here. Promise me that you won't mention misgivings about the future at home, or the small chance of selling my work. At least not immediately; first let's talk things over and see what there is.

Theo, I am enormously eager to paint the potato diggers. I think it would be a good thing. And even if it weren't sold, it would help us make progress, as some people sometimes change their opinion when they have seen something they did not expect.

Well, I made a few studies for it already, but I haven't been able to take enough models; and I feel sure of doing them much better now if I could spend more money on them.

It is exactly the right time now, therefore there can be no question of taking a holiday, for I keep at work as best I can. But your idea of doing as Weissenbruch does is the same as mine. However, I literally *cannot* carry it out, because going to the polders for two weeks would cost me more than it would to stay home for two weeks, and I don't even know how to struggle through those first two weeks at home.

But for the rest, as I already wrote you, I am also quite absorbed in landscape; I am making landscape studies or marines to give myself a change from the figure and it does me good. But after all the figure calls me back, and so strongly that I try to do whatever circumstances allow; if I could go on as I liked, autumn would not pass without my doing those potato diggers.

I don't know whether the studies I paint from the drawings will be satisfactory, but “quand bien même,” I will try to make something of it.

Models are not easy to get at present, because there is a great deal of work in the fields; I wish I could spend more on them, for then it would be possible to overcome that difficulty. Well, as soon as I can possibly afford it - now it is absolutely impossible - I will try to get two fellows for a whole day out in the dunes to pose for the potato diggers. That would be the shortest and safest way.

In the days which must elapse before you come, I hope to paint a few more things. I don't feel entirely well yet, but fortunately the work is so animating that as long as I am busy, I don't feel the weakness so much; but it overtakes me occasionally during the intervals when I am not in front of my easel. Sometimes it's a kind of dizziness, and at times a headache too. Well, it's nothing but weakness. I have repeatedly put off taking more nourishing food because there were other things more pressing, but it has lasted a little too long.

But you will understand that the work is rather important, and I could not drop it now for the very reason that so much of it is already done. When you come, you will see for yourself that it is necessary to go on steadily. You are right in saying that what I wrote you about the finances weighs on your mind, but on the other hand, we cannot now be far from the moment when I shall make something that is saleable, even if it be for a small price.

The work becomes more and more clear to me.

And when I think it over, it is only a question of hurrying or slackening speed, and we shall make up for it later, even for the past; but after all it is a damn thorny, difficult and hard time we are going through now.

If it were possible for me to get enough money to have sufficient colours and models this season, things would clear up more than a little, I think. At all events, it's fine that you will be here soon.

Recently a very heavy care has fallen on my shoulders. Last year I repeatedly tried to paint figure studies, but the way they turned out made me desperate. Now I have begun again, and now there is nothing that keeps me from carrying it out, because drawing comes so much more easily to me than last year. I used to get in a muddle then whenever I lost hold of my sketch while painting; and it took me a long time to make that sketch, so that when I could only have the model for a short time, I made an absolute mess of it.

But now I don't care in the least if the drawing is wiped out; and I am now only doing them directly with the brush, and then the form stands out enough for study to be of use to me. Therefore I say that I see the way before me more clearly. I know that I'll have to make many studies, but they won't cost me more trouble than the drawings, and therefore a great deal of painting must be done this year, and then there will come more light. I am fully convinced of that. So next winter I intend to paint the same kind of studies of heads as those which I sent you a few drawings of. I would even do it at once now if it were not more important to get hold of figures in the field while the season is in full swing.

Van der Weele is out of town during the holidays - I heard he got the silver medal at Amsterdam for his picture, “The Loaders of Sand.” When he comes back to town, I hope to see a great deal of him, because I believe those potato diggers will intrigue him, and perhaps he would give me some useful hints for the execution of my plan. And Rappard, too, when he comes back.

The first two figures I painted this year were done in the way I tried last year, drawing them, and then filling in the outline. That is what I'd like to call the dry manner. The other way is to make the drawing last of all, and first find the tones without caring too much about the drawing, only trying to put the tones in their right places; and then gradually make the form and the subdivisions of the colours more exactly. That surrounds the figure with more atmosphere and gives it a mellower aspect, while the colours become more delicate for the very reason that one often brushes them over, and mixes one colour with another.

You will see the difference when the first two I made now remain in their present condition.

There is an exhibition of drawings which was held last year in the Gothic Hall, but I think it very meager this year; there is little one has not already seen before, and then generally of a better quality. I counted a few drawings by J. van Berg among the best there. Generally it is such that Schipperus and the like are among the best.

As to the painting of those potato diggers, I just saw Van der Weele's last picture being painted, and at Rappard's I saw all the studies for the pictures he made last year. So that I can well imagine beforehand what the difficulties I shall have to overcome for the ultimate picture will be.

If I can afford it, I shall make a few studies for it in the dunes before you come, namely, I shall go with my model to those fields behind Loosduinen early in the morning or in the evening twilight. I think I can make something of it.

The composition of the drawing will probably be altered a little, and especially the effect more thoroughly studied, but in general I would keep it as it is. I think the figures must stand out strongly, and all the rest in a violet-grey haze.

In the drawings I think the division of dark and lighter planes too complicated, the figures being partly light and partly dark, and the ground likewise. Either the ground and the figures must be brought more into harmony and form a dark silhouette against a light sky - or sky and ground must form together a misty grey whole, against which the toneful planes of the figures stand out.

Both these effects exist, but that of the drawing is not right the way it is now, for it is too dry, and too meager, and because the figures have too many tones in common with the ground, they do not stand out, and the sky is not part of it. Well, the tone must become quite different, but the composition needs very little alteration.

It gives me a certain restful feeling to think that we shall see each other soon, and can consult together about how to go on with the work. Meanwhile, I will try to make a few new things, and therefore I should very much like to receive the money a few days before the tenth if possible. Then I would try to make those studies in the dunes before you come. I cannot afford it now, as I had so much to pay. You remember what you wrote about the possibility of being disappointed in your share of the profits in business. Well, I hope that catastrophe will not occur, but we must consider it a piece of good luck if it turns out well, and we must not lose a minute of time that it is still before us.

I should be very astonished if, in the long run, some people did not alter their opinion about my doing or planning absurd things. I think you will see what I mean by the studies, and you will remember some of our previous talks on art. We must try to keep courage and persevere. A thing that gave me a good deal of courage recently is that though I had not painted for several months, I believe there is progress in the present *painted* studies compared to last year's. It is because matters of drawing and proportion which gave me a lot of trouble then have been mastered now, so that when sitting before nature, instead of having to think of two things at once, drawing and painting, I only have to think of the painting. Of course when intensifying the painting, one has to think of both at once, but even that is different.

Well, I shall live these days in the hope of your coming. If I have some luck with my painting, perhaps things will become a little easier.

The two weeks between now and your coming will not be easy to get through, however.

If possible, think of what I asked you, to send something a few days before the tenth, for then I could try to make those figure studies in the dunes before you come. Adieu and once more thanks for your letter, and good luck in everything; believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 4-8 August 1883

Dear Theo,

As I look forward to your arrival, there is hardly a moment when my thoughts are not with you.

These last days I have gone on to paint several studies, so that you may see them at the same time. And that change of work does me good, for though I cannot do literally as Weissenbruch does, and go and stay in the polders for a few weeks, yet I do do something like it, and to look at the green fields has a calming effect.

Besides, I decidedly hope in this way to make progress in terms of colour. The last painted studies seem to me firmer and more solid in colour. So for instance a few I made recently, in the rain, showing a man on a wet, muddy road, express the sentiment better, I think.

Well, we will see when you come.

Most of them are impressions of landscape, I dare not say as well done as those that sometimes occur in your letters, because still I am often checked by technical difficulties - yet there is something in them, I think - for instance, a silhouette of the city in the evening, when the sun is setting, and a towpath with windmills.

For the rest, it is miserable enough that I still feel very faint when I am not hard at my work, but I believe it is receding. I will decidedly try hard to lay up a reserve of strength for I shall need it to carry on the painting of the figure with a firm hand.

While painting, I feel of late a certain power of colour awakening in me, stronger and different from what I have felt till now.

It may be that the nervousness of these days is linked up with a kind of revolution in my way of working, for which I have been seeking and of which I have been thinking for a long time already.

I have often tried to work less dryly, but it always turned into the same thing over again. But now that a kind of weakness prevents me from working in my usual way, this seems to help, rather than to hinder, and now that I let myself go a little, and look more through the eyelashes, instead of concentrating on the joints and analysing the structure of things, it leads me more directly to seeing things more like adjacent contrasting patches of colour.

I wonder what it will lead to, and how it will develop. I have sometimes wondered why I was not more of a colourist, because my temperament decidedly seems to indicate it - but up till now it developed very little.

I repeat, I wonder how it will develop - but I see clearly that my last painted studies are different.

If I remember rightly, you still have one from last year, of a few tree trunks in the wood.

I do not think that it is really bad, but it is not what one sees in the studies of colourists. Some colours there are correct, but though they are correct they do not have the effect they ought to have, and though the paint is here and there laid on thickly, even so the effect is too meagre. I take this one as an example, and now I think that the last ones which are less thickly laid on are nonetheless becoming more potent in colour, as the colours are more interwoven and the strokes of the brush cover one another, so that it is mellower and more for instance like the downiness of the clouds or of the grass.

At times I have been greatly worried that I made no progress with colour, but now I am hopeful again.

We shall see how it will develop.

Now you will understand that I am very anxious for your coming, for if you also sawthat there is a change, I should not doubt that we are on the right track. I dare not quite trust my own eyes as regards my own work. Those two studies, for instance, which I made while it was raining - a muddy road with a little figure - they seem to me exactly the opposite of some other studies. When I look at them I rediscover the sentiment of that dreary rainy day; and in the figure there is a kind of life, though it is nothing but a few patches of colour - it is not summoned by correctness of drawing, for there is in effect no drawing. What I mean to suggest is that in these studies I believe there is something of that mysteriousness one gets by looking at nature through the eyelashes, so that the outlines are simplified to blots of colour.

Time must pass over it, but at present I see in several studies something different in colour and tone.

Recently I often think of a story I read in an English magazine, a tale about a painter, in which there appears a person whose health suffered also in a time of trouble, and who went to a lonely place in the peat fields, and there in that melancholy setting found himself again, and began to paint nature as he felt and saw it. It was very well described in the story, evidently by a person who was well up in art, and it struck me when I read it, while now of late I sometimes think of it again.

At any rate I hope we shall soon be able to talk it over and consult together. If you can, write soon, and of course the sooner you can send the money, the better it will be for me.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours, Vincent

For no particular reason, I cannot help adding a thought that often occurs to me. Not only did I start drawing relatively late in life, but it may well be that I shall not be able to count on many more years of life either.

If I think about it dispassionately - as if making calculations for an estimate or a specification - then it is in the nature of things that I cannot possibly know anything definitely about it.

But by comparison with various people with whose lives one may be familiar, or by comparison with some with whom one is supposed to have some things in common, one can draw certain conclusions which are not completely without foundation.

So, as to the time I still have ahead of me for work, I think I may safely presume that my body will hold up for a certain number of years *quand bien même* [in spite of everything] - a certain number between 6 and 10, say. (I can assume this the more safely as there is for the time being no immediate quand bien même.)

This is the period on which I count *firmly*. For the rest, it would be speculating far too wildly for me to dare make a definite pronouncements about myself, seeing that it depends precisely on those first, say, ten years as to whether or not there will be anything after that time.

If one wears oneself out during these years then one won't live beyond 40. If one conserves enough strength to withstand the sort of shocks that tend to befall one, and manages to deal with various more or less complicated physical problems, then by the age of 40 to 50 one is back on a new, relatively normal course.

But such calculations are *not relevant at present*. Instead, as I started to say, one should plan for a period of between 5 and 10 years. I do not intend to spare myself, to avoid emotions or difficulties - it makes comparatively little difference to me whether I go on living for a shorter or longer time - besides I am not competent to manage my constitution the way, say, a physician is able to. And so I go on like an *ignoramus*, one who knows just one thing: *within a few years I must have done a certain amount of work* - I don't need to *rush*, for there is no point in that, but I must *carry on working* in complete calm and serenity, as regularly and with as much concentration as possible, as much to the point as possible. The world concerns me only in so far as I owe it certain *debt* and *duty*, so to speak, because I have walked this earth for 30 years, and out of gratitude would like to leave some memento in the form of drawings and paintings - not made to please this school or that, but to express a genuine human feeling. So that work is my aim - and when one concentrates on this idea, everything one does is simplified, in that it is not muddled but has a single objective. At present the work is going slowly - one reason more not to lose any time.

Guillaume Régamey was, I think, someone who left behind no particular reputation (you know there are two Régameys, F. Régamey paints Japanese people, and is his brother), but is nevertheless a personality for whom I have a great respect. He died at the age of 38, and one period of his life lasting 6 or 7 years was almost exclusively devoted to drawings with a highly distinctive style, done while he worked under some physical handicap. He is one of many - a very good one among many good ones.

I don't mention him to compare myself with him, I am not as good as he was, but to cite a specific example of self-control and willpower, sustained by one inspiring idea, which in difficult circumstances nevertheless showed him how to do good work with utter serenity.

That is how I regard myself, as having to accomplish in a few years something full of heart and love, and to do it with a will. Should I live longer, tant mieux, [so much the better] but I put that out of my mind. *Something must be accomplished* in those few years, this thought guides all my plans. You will understand better now why I have a yearning to press on - and at the same time some determination to use simple means. And perhaps you will also be able to understand that as far as I am concerned I do not consider my studies in isolation but always think of my work as a whole.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 11 August 1883

Dear Theo,

I was very glad to hear that you are on your way. Thanks for your letter and the enclosure.

I needn't tell you how I long for your coming. Recently I have been far from well - always the same thing, at times palpitations of the heart, too. I am afraid it will eventually turn out that the heart is affected. Well, I don't know much about it, but I do know that you must not mention it at home, or to anybody else, for fear of their getting wrong ideas about my circumstances.

The only thing I want it is to make some good work "quand bien même," and there is a chance of doing this if we keep our serenity, whether the future is dark or not.

If I knew what train you would be on, I should meet you at the station. And in case you came while I was out, the woman could tell you where I am, for in order not to miss you, I go no farther from home than to be the Binkhorst just across the way, to paint a few studies.

I wonder what you will say about the work, whether you will find something in it or not. Well, we shall see.

All the time I am planning a large picture of the potato diggers, though it might not be finished until next year, and only half finished this season. I think the composition might stay the way it is, and I just might get started.

I am not competent to ascertain to what extent my illness has a physical cause, or if it is only the consequence of overstrained nerves. It sometimes seems to me that I ought to have seen you between times and discussed the work, but now you have come at last, and I am quite sure that at all events our being together will calm me down.

I hope we shall take some nice long walks together, too.

Did I tell you that at Loosduinen I found thornbushes exactly like the "Buisson" by Ruysdael? I intend to make studies for the potato diggers in that neighborhood.

I hope to be all right again soon. I will try as hard as I can, for I hate being unable to go on with full vigour. When I wrote Rappard that I did not believe my only aim in life could be to preserve my health, I meant that there are circumstances when one has to choose between one's work and having nothing to eat, or between eating and dropping one's work (namely, when the work brings expenses and for the moment yields no profit).

In some cases I prefer the former, and do not think I am wrong, for our work remains, but we do not, and the main thing is to create; I would rather have a few years of that than years of brooding over it and putting it off. And I said to Rappard then that for my part I thought there was truth in the mysterious saying, “whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for the Gospel's sake shall find it.”

Adieu, boy, I hope to see you soon. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 14 August 1883

[Postcard]
Dear Theo,
I just received a letter from home (thank Father for it, please - I hadn't received the letter when I wrote,) and I see you intend to leave Breda 2:15 Friday. Please let me know if you change your plans, for I want to come and meet you at the station. If you are in no hurry, we must make the most of the time we can be together. I am working on a painted study for the potato diggers. I hope it will turn out well [F 009, JH 385].

I along very much for your coming; have a good time. A handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Do look at what's going on in the fields in Brabant, and try to get a glimpse of a weaver's interior in the village - they are so picturesque.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 17 August 1883

[After Theo's visit]
Dear Theo,
Coming home just now, the very first thing I want to do is to beg a favour of you - a favour which I do not doubt is necessary, because it will show you that my intentions are the same as yours - it is: do not hurry me in the various things we could not settle at once, for I need some time to decide.
As to my relative coolness towards Father, I will explain that to you now that you mention it.

About a year ago, father came to the Hague for the first time since I had left home seeking peace which I didn't find there, either. I was already living with the woman then, and said, “Father, as I cannot blame those who disapprove of my conduct, given the prevailing conditions, I purposely avoided those whom I think would be ashamed of me. And you understand, I do not want to worry you, and as long as my affairs are not straightened out and I have not found my way, don't you think it would be better for me not to come home?”

If Father had answered something like, “No, that's carrying things to far,” I would certainly have felt more warmly towards him; but Father's answer was something between Yes and No: “Well, you must do as you think best.”

So, presuming they will be more or less ashamed of me, which fits in with what you said, I was not very keen on correspondence - neither was Father, and neither his letters nor mine have been a very intimate. This “entre nous,” only to explain things, not to draw any further conclusions.

There are to things to be done when somebody stretches only a finger: one is to seize the whole hand, to obtrude oneself; the other is to drop the hand that is not held out warmly and cordially, or to disappear of one's own free will where one is only tolerated.

Have I been mistaken, “qu'en sais-je?”

There is a bond between you and me which continuous work can only strengthen in the course of time - this is art, and I hope we shall continue to understand each other after all.

I am afraid I have said something to you about my work which I ought to have said differently, and I have a vague feeling of having hurt you by something, because there seemed to be something amiss when you left.

I hope it will redress itself.

About my work, what is becoming more and more clear to me since I first noticed it is the dryness of execution.

This would alarm me if I did not think it a natural consequence (which I have also discovered in the early work of a great many very sympathetic persons) - a natural consequence of the great strain of overcoming the initial difficulties. And looking back on the last years, I see them full of troubles; but when these troubles have been overcome, I hope another period of work will follow.

That fault is so persistent, and correcting it is so urgent, that we must try to take such measures as will bring us a period of peace. That must be the first thing, otherwise it will remain as it is. As my work is, so am I. You must bear with me a little. I do not know whether you think it would be better to go and see people like Herkomer, Green or Small *now*, or to *wait* till the work as well as myself have quieted down a little. I should prefer the latter; perhaps things will clear up within me soon, but for the moment I had better not get myself involved in the complicated London business.

As to the few things you said to me when you left, I hope you will not forget that, for instance, your remarks about my clothes, etc., are rather exaggerated. Is it indeed as you say? Well, I am ready to plead guilty, but it seems to me it is an old point of discord which has turned up again, rather than one founded on recent observation, except when I'm working out-of-doors in the fields or in the studio.

If you really want to help me in this, you must not hurry me.

Last year I was, so to speak, quite without any social contact.

And it's true that I haven't paid the slightest attention to my clothes.

If that's the only thing, it's not so difficult to correct, is it? Especially now that I have that new suit of yours.

I just wish with all my heart that they would bear with my shortcomings, instead of gossiping about them.

If it puts me in a bad mood, it's because I've heard so much about it already. At one time I dressed well, at another, less so; it is like the story of the farmer, his son and the ass, the moral of which you know, that it is difficult to please everybody.

Coming from you, it surprised more than it angered me, because you know how much worry it has caused me already, and that it has become a bit of gossip that will never die out, what ever I do. Well, at all events, I now have that new suit of yours, and the old one, which is still quite good. So for the present that's the end of it, and no more about it.

And now I will tell you once more what I think about selling my work. My opinion is that the best thing would be to work on till art lovers feel drawn towards it of their own accord, instead of having to praise or explain it. At all events, when they refuse it or do not like it, one must bear it calmly and with as much dignity as possible.

I'm so afraid that the steps I might take to introduce myself would do more harm than good, and I wish I could avoid it.

It is practically always so painful for me to speak to other people.

I am not afraid of it, but I know I make an unfavorable impression. The chance of changing this is sometimes destroyed by the fact that one's work would suffer if one lived differently. And by sticking to one's work, things will come out right in the end. For instance, take Mesdag, a real mastodon or hippopotamus, but he sells his pictures. I am not that far yet, but the man I mention also began late and worked his way along an honest, manly path, wherever he may be in other respects. I don't leave things undone from laziness, but rather to be able to work more, putting aside everything that does not belong directly to the work.

If I were only a little more advanced, so that my work were more saleable, I should decidedly say, I leave the business part to you, I won't have anything to do with the selling. I will live quite outside that circle.

But now, alas, I cannot say that yet, and that is not your fault, but in the interests of both of us and for the sake of peace I beg you to have patience.

I am awfully sorry that I am a burden to you - perhaps things will clear up - but if you stagger under it, tell me so plainly. I would rather give up everything than put too heavy a burden on your shoulders. Then I shall definitely go to London at once to work at “n'importe quoi,” even carrying parcels, and I will leave art till better times, at least the painting and having as studio. When I look back on the past, I always run up against the same never quite cleared up fatal facts which occurred in the months from August, 1881 till February, 1882.

That is why I can't help mentioning the same names. Which seemed to astonish you.

Dear brother, don't think of me as anything other than an ordinary painter who is confronted by ordinary difficulties, and do not think the worries at all unusual.

I mean, don't think of the future as a darkness or as a dazzling light; it will be better to believe in the grey.

I try to do the same, and think it wrong of myself to deviate from it. Goodbye.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

About the woman - I don't doubt but you will understand that on my part I do not want to be brusque.

I must refer again to what you said on leaving, “I begin to think more and more like Father.”

Well, that may be so. You speak the truth, and for my part - though I don't exactly think and act in that way - I respect that character, and perhaps know its weak points, but also the good ones. And I think that if Father knew something about art, it would undoubtedly be easier for me to talk with him and to agree with him. Suppose you become like Father, plus your knowledge of art - all right - I think we shall continue to understand each other.

I have quarreled with Father very often, but the bond between us has never quite been broken.

Well, let nature simply follow its own course in this - you will become what you must, I too will not remain exactly the same as I am now; let's not suspect each other of absurd things and we shall get on together. And let's not forget that we have known each other from childhood, and that thousands of other things can bring us more and more together.

I am a little worried about what seemed to worry you, and I doubt if I know exactly what was the matter, or rather I believe it is caused less by one definite thing than by the fact that there are some points in which our characters differ, and that you understand one thing better, I another.

I think it would be well for us to try to stick together.

One thing - if I become too much of a burden to you, let the friendship remain, even though you help me less in money matters. I shall grumble now and then - but it will be without any mental reservation and more to give vent to my feelings than expecting or demanding that you do everything, which you know I wouldn't do, boy!

I feel guilty about having said things that I should like to take back after all, or wish to have left unsaid - or even if you should admit that there was a grain of truth in them, they ought to be considered as very exaggerated. For know it well that the main fault, the one compared to which all the others fade into nothing, which will remain so whatever the future may be, is a feeling of gratitude towards you.

Further, if I am less happy in the future, I would in no case - I repeat, in no case - you understand - even if you had quite withdrawn your help - I would never consider it your fault.

It would be superfluous to say this if, under the influence of my nerves, which were too upset, I had not expressed myself to the effect that in the past you might have done more. Forget that, please, consider it unsaid. I think if certain things will come right, time will bring them so, if I am calm. But in my nervousness, I put the blame now on one thing, then another. It's the same with other things that I will not repeat now, though I always remember afterward even what I said in my excitement, and to a certain extent there is always a grain of truth in it; but not all principles are absolute, and in nervous excitement they often seem more important than they are. As for me, though it seemed something was the matter when you left, I'll drop it.

Indeed, I am thinking of what you said and of what I wrote you about my clothes; I am not reluctant, and think you are perfectly right when you say that if I ever went to see Herkomer, or others, they would notice my appearance - but I know that myself without your saying so. Further, what you said about Father - now there has been occasion to write more often to him than usual, and you will read the letter yourself. And so it is with everything. In short, when I give an opinion about persons, circumstances, a society in which I do not move, you may understand that I do not always speak justly, but let my imagination roam without regard to reality, and that I see things in a very fantastic way, just as things may appear strange when seen against the light.

You who are nearer to them do not understand how it is possible for them to appear this way, seen it at a distance and from behind. And even if I should see things quite incorrectly, anybody who thought about it would perhaps understand that given such and such circumstances, I could hardly speak differently. Things went wrong during a short period, and that short period cannot but continuously occupy my thoughts and I think it natural for that moment to cause a reaction even in the future, because, although people avoid each other on purpose, inevitably they must in time face each other again.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 18 August 1883

Dear brother,

I wish you were able to see that in several things I must be consistent.

You know what an “erreur de point de vue” [error in one's point of view] represents in painting, *viz.* something far different and far worse than a faulty drawing of such or such a detail. A single point decides the greater or lesser gradient: the development more to the right or left of the sideplanes of the objects throughout the whole composition.

Well, in life there is something like this.

When I say I am a poor painter and have still years of struggle ahead - my everyday life I must arrange “à peu près” [approximately] like a farm labourer or a factory hand does; then this is a fixed point, from which many things result, which one tears from their roots, when one considers them otherwise but comprehensively. There are painters in other circumstances who can and must act differently.

Everyone must decide for himself. If I had had other chances, had been in different circumstances, and if no decisive things had happened, of course that would have influenced my actions. Now however, and “à plus forte raison,” [with all the more reason] if there were even the slightest question of it being considered arrogance on my part to assume a right to which I had no claim - even if I had this right as a matter of course - the mere suggestion of the thing would have made me withdraw of my own accord from any intercourse with people who occupy a certain rank in life, even my own people.

So this is the fact: My firm resolve is to be dead to anything except my work. But it is very hard for me to speak about those things, simple in themselves, but which unfortunately link up with much deeper things.

There is no anguish greater than the soul's struggle between duty and love, both in their highest meaning. When I tell you I choose my duty, you will understand everything.

A simple word said about it during our walk, made me feel that absolutely nothing is changed in me in that respect, that it is and remains a wound which I carry with me, while it lies deep and cannot be healed. After years it will be the same as it was the first day.[Kee Vos].

I hope you understand what battle I have had to fight within myself of late.

The upshot was this: *quoiqu'il en soit* [be that as it may] (not taking the *quoi* as interrogative, for I have not the right to consider it so) I will do my utmost to remain an honest man and doubly attentive to *duty*.

I have never suspected *her*, nor do I suspect her now, nor shall I ever suspect her, of having had any but right and proper financial motives. She went as far as was reasonable, other people exaggerated. But for the rest, you understand that I do not hold any delusive convictions about love for me, and what we talked of on the road remains between us. Since then, things have happened that would not have taken place, if at a certain moment I had not had to face in the first place a decided “no,” and secondly a promise that I would not stand in her way. I respected in her a sense of duty - I never have suspected, shall never suspect her of anything mean.

Of myself I know this one thing, that it is of the greatest importance not to deviate from one's duty, and that one should not compromise with duty. Duty is absolute. The consequences? We are not responsible for them, but for the choice of *doing* or *not doing* our duty, we are responsible. This is the direct opposite of the principle: The end justi-fies the means.

And my own future is a cup that may not pass away from me except I drink it.

So “Fiat voluntas.” [Thy will be done]

Regards - good luck on your journey - write soon - but you know now how I shall face the future, with serenity, and without a line on my face to betray the struggle in my very depths -

Yours, Vincent

You will understand, however, that I must avoid everything which might tempt me to hesitate, so that I *must* avoid everything and everybody that would remind me of *her*. In fact that idea has made me this year sometimes more resolute than I otherwise would have been, and you see that I can do it in such a way that nobody understands the real motive.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 19 August 1883

Dear Theo,
I am writing a letter to Father at the same time as this one, in which a few things are set forth which now I need not write twice. Be so kind as to read Father's letter. In this letter for you, I say again that more and more it seems to me that not looking too far or aspiring too high is the most practical and direct way to make progress with my work. It is stimulating to think of London, know this well, but the question is only, is it to be done now? Is now the right moment? In fact, isn't it better to say to myself straight out: “Don't think yourself ripe enough yet, because what you want and mean to do does not yet seem comprehensible enough to those who see it - as they are, so to speak, more or less frightened by it; keep on going - work faithfully and firmly after nature. Seek it once more in nature only, on the heath or in the dunes, and for the present don't mind that those who have seen it don't think much of it yet. Don't go on showing it, don't think of immediate approval in London - it must get even better.” I say all these things to myself, and after thinking over what I write about the woman, you too will perhaps find there are reasons for hesitating about going to London directly. I cannot decide yet.

But a simple thought, which seems good to me just because of its simplicity, is that I should take no step other than going and living more cheaply someplace in the country where the scenery is striking. I am anxious to know whether Father and you can comprehend my feelings about staying with the woman. I should wish it were possible that, instead of sending her out into the street again, we might return her promise to better herself with a cordial pardoning and forgetting.

It is better that she be saved than that she be ruined.

This morning she said to me, “As to what I did before, I do not even think of it, and have not mentioned it to Mother either. I only know that if I have to go, I shall not earn enough, especially as I shall have to pay board for the children; and if in that case I walk the street, it will be because I must, not because I want to.” I think I wrote you once what passed between us when she was in the hospital and I had not yet decided whether I should take her into my house or not. She never asked anything then either, which contrasts very much with her more ordinary behaviour.

I cannot say exactly what her expression was, but it was something like a sheep that would say, “If I must be slaughtered, I won't try to defend myself.” At any rate, something so pathetic that I can only pardon fully - aye, feel guilty myself - rather than accuse her. However, I kept this to myself, and made her promise several things: that she would be more orderly, more zealous, pose better, not go to her mother, *etc.*

And now I have completely forgiven and forgotten, without reservation, and I take her part just as I did before.

It is a heartfelt pity which is so strong that everything gives way before it, and I cannot act otherwise than last year in that hospital, and I say now as I did then, As long as I have a crust of bread and a roof over my head, it is yours. It was no passion then, it is no passion now; it is understanding each other's vital wants. Knowing now, however, how her people upset her last year, and fearing she might fall back again, I should like to live with her someplace in a little village where she could see nothing of the town and could live a more natural life. However, I have known from the beginning that her constitution required *years* to recover, and so there is still hope.

Well, the little boy really dotes on me. Now that that he is beginning to crawl and stand, he is always at my side wherever I go in the house.

Look here, Theo, by acting according to what we feel, firmly and resolutely, I think we may fall into mistakes, may meet with deceptions several times; but I think we shall be saved from a great evil and from despair if we ask what our duty is - and do what ought to be done as well as we can.

Now about the work, I do not doubt it has its faults, but neither do I doubt that I am not entirely wrong, and that I shall succeed, though it be after a long period of seeking.

And I believe that it is dangerous to expect success anywhere else but in the work.

I wish I had, for instance, Mauve or Herkomer for a friend. However, I believe that isn't the most important thing, neither would they consider it the most important. By working on faithfully, it may last a longer or a shorter time, be more or less successful; sooner or later one will meet among the painters the lifetime friend, as for instance M. or H. might be.

And perhaps it will come sooner if one goes on working quietly than if one goes begging for it, or visiting people, which for me has the smaller chance of success because of some eccentricities in me which you notice even more than I, though I occasionally notice them myself too, but I do not think them so bad that I should not be astonished at the continuous obstacles when trying to get some people to have some confidence in me. Suppose my faults are as bad and as obvious, for instance, as the woman's: then I should wish that some people did for me what I am now doing for the woman - and have already done several times - forgive, not just partially, but completely, as though nothing had happened or would happen again. If you have perhaps said something to C. M. about my leaving the woman, please take it back immediately; I cannot do a thing which will prove to be cruel or unmerciful. I do not know whether I shall be happy with the woman in the future, maybe not, it certainly won't be perfect; happiness is not anything we ourselves are responsible for - but we are responsible for how far we heed conscience.

Adieu, boy, let me hear from you while you are still at Nuenen.

I cannot speak differently.

Just read Father's letter.

If I deserted the woman, she would perhaps go mad, but because I have already often found the way to calm her in her fits of unbearable temper, by quieting a fear which oppressed her, because in the course of this year she has learned to understand that she has found in me a true friend, on whom she can lean in her weakness, who understands her troubles, it has given her a feeling of rest when I am with her; and I hope she will improve in time, especially if she is no longer attracted by what draws her back to the past, of which she had better not be reminded.

Moving to the country would be a good thing, but at the same time it must be an economy measure. She has been told, for instance, that I should leave her because of the children. That isn't true, it would never be my reason, but it is one of the things which upset her and make her wish she did not have children.

Theo, as a matter of fact she does improve, but one has to show her the same thing over and over again, and she can make one feel discouraged; but when - which rarely happens - she tries to say what she means and thinks, it is wonderful how pure she is, notwithstanding her depravity. As if, far deep in the ruin of her soul and heart and mind, something had been saved.

And in those rare moments her expression is like that of a “Mater Dolorosa” by Delacroix or like certain heads by Ary Scheffer.

That's what I believe in, and now that I have seen it again, I respect that depth of feeling and won't mention her faults.

I hope, boy, you will see a few beautiful sunsets over the silent quiet country, far away from the city, before you go back.

As to the change of residence, I know that I could find it in more than one place. But of course we do what must be done, in all calmness, and we shall write each other about it yet.

Adieu, have a good time and know that whatever the future may bring, I have hope for better times.

Yours sincerely, Vincent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 20 or 21 August 1883

Dear Theo,
You will understand that I am longing to hear from you whether you have read my letter. As for myself, I think the cheapest way will be the most reasonable one for me under the circumstances - I think I shall have to move to a village.

If you can continue to send the 150 francs a month, I think it will be almost or entirely sufficient.

Dear brother, there doesn't seem to be a little more ease in store for me. I will try not to complain, I will bear what I can.

Though I stick to my conviction that my work really demands more, and that I also ought to be able to spend a little more on food and other necessities, if I must do with less, so be it. After all, my life is perhaps not worth the money, why should I worry about it? And it's really nobody's fault, neither is it my own.

But I hope you will be convinced of one thing - that it is impossible to do more than stint oneself even in food, clothes, every comfort, every necessity. When one has skimped in everything, there can be no question of unwillingness, can there? You know very well that if somebody said to me, Do this or that, make a drawing of this or that, I should not refuse, yes, I would even make several trials with pleasure if the first one did not succeed. But nobody has said it - or only so vaguely, so generally, that it puts me out rather than helps me.

As for my clothes, dear brother, I put on what was given me, without wanting more, without asking for more. I have worn clothes I got from Father and from you, which sometimes do not fit me the way they ought to because of the difference in our sizes. If you will drop the matter of defects in my attire, I shall remain content with what I have, and even be grateful for little, though of course later I hope to remind you of it and say, “Theo, do you remember the time when I walked about in a long clergyman's coat of Father's?” *etc.* It seems to me that it is infinitely better to take things as they are *now*, and laugh over them later, when we have made our way, rather than quarrel about them now.

For the moment I have the suit you brought for me to wear when I go out, and more things that are still quite presentable. But you must excuse my not putting them on in the studio or when I work out-of-doors - it would be spoiling them recklessly, for one always gets some stains on one's clothes while painting, especially if one tries to catch an effect even in rain and storm.

My idea about earning money is as simple as can be - it is that it must come through my work, and that nothing can be gained by going to speak to people about it.

Yet whenever there is a chance, I try to catch it - as, for instance, what I told you about Belinfante, about Smulders, but up to now fortune has favoured me but little. Well, never mind, if only you do not upset me by suspecting me of unwillingness.

For I think if you consider things seriously, you will not doubt my working hard, and besides, if you should insist on my going to ask people to buy from me, *I would do so*, but *in that case* I should perhaps get melancholy.

If possible, let me go on as I have up to now. If not, and if you want me to take my work around to different people, I shall not refuse to do so if you think it better.

But, brother dear, human brains cannot bear everything; there is a limit. Look at Rappard, who got brain fever, and had to travel as far as Germany to recover. Trying to go and speak to people about my work makes me more nervous than is good for me. And what is the result? Rejection, or being put off with fair promises. It would not make me nervous if it were you, for instance - you know me and I am used to speaking with you.

I assure you, I feel less energy for my work when I have been among people. If we do not lose time now because of that kind of thing, we'll make slow but sure progress, and I do not know a better way. In no case would I refuse any serious order, whether to my liking or not. I would try to do it the way it is wanted - do it over again if necessary.

Well, I have made up my mind *in no case* to become impatient, even if people purposely put obstacles in my way.

I cannot say more than that, and if you were to order something yourself, you could make more than one trial. I am at your disposal.

I think there is a difference between now and the past. In the years gone by there used to be more passion both in making and in judging work. They deliberately chose this or that direction, they energetically took the part of one or the other. There was more animation. I think now there is a spirit of capriciousness and satiety; people are generally more lukewarm. For my part, I already wrote you some time ago that it seemed to me that there had been a sharp decline since Millet, as if the top had already been reached and decadence had set in. This has influenced everybody and everything. I am always glad that I saw the collection of drawings by Millet in the Hôtel Drouot when it was there.

At this moment you are in Nuenen.

I wish, brother, there were no reasons for me to be absent. I wish we were walking there together in the old village churchyard, or looking in at a weaver's. Now that cannot be - why not? - oh, because I feel I should be a trouble-fête [killjoy] in my present mood.

I repeat - I do not quite understand it, and think it is going a little too far - when you as well as Father feel ashamed just to walk with me. For my part I stay away, though my heart longs for us to be together.

Because I cannot spare that one little moment of seeing you or Father without mental reservations, only for the sake of indissoluble ties, I wish we would never again speak about the question of manners or clothes when we meet again. You see that in everything I withdraw as far as possible instead of pushing myself forward. But don't let decorum breed a general estrangement. That one bright moment - of seeing each other once a year - must not be darkened. Adieu.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I do not hesitate about the work.

You have read Fromont Jeune et Riszler ainé, haven't you? Of course I do not find you in Fromont Jeune, but in Riszler ainé - in his being absorbed in his work, his resoluteness *there,* for the rest a simple fellow and rather careless and short-sighted, wanting little for himself, so that he himself did not change when he became rich - I find some likeness to myself.

All my ideas about my work are so well ordered, so definite, that I think you would do well to accept what I say: let me go my own way, just as I am. My drawings will become good, even if we continue as we did till now; but as their turning out well depends a little on the money for my obligations and expenses - and not just on my efforts - be as liberal as you can about the money, and if you see a chance of finding any help from others, don't neglect it. But in fact, I have said everything I have to say in these few lines.

You must not let my conduct when I left Goupil's deceive you as to my real character. If business would have meant to me then what art does now, I would have acted more resolutely. But then I was in doubt whether it was my career or not, and I was more passive. When they said to me, “Hadn't you better go,” I replied, “You think I had better go, so I shall go” - no more. At the time more things were left unspoken than said aloud.

If they had acted differently then, if they had said, “We do not understand your behaviour on this or that occasion, explain it,” things would have turned out differently.

I already told you, brother, that discretion is not always understood. “Tant pis,” perhaps. Now I think it is better that I have the career I have, but when I left Goupil's there were motives other than my attire, at least on my part.

There was a kind of plan then to give me a position in London in the new gallery, in the picture department, for which, in the first place, I didn't think myself qualified, and in the second place, I didn't like it. I should not have minded staying with Goupil if my work had been other than entertaining visitors.

In short, if they had asked me then, “Do you like this business?” My answer would have been, “Yes, sure.”

“Do you care to stay?” “Yes, if you think me worth my wages, and do not think me a nuisance or injurious to your interests.”

And then I should perhaps have asked for a position in the printing office, or that one in London, but a little modified, and I think I should have got it.

But they did not ask me anything, but just said, “Vous êtes un employé honnête et actif, mais vous donnez un exemple mauvais pour les autres.” [You are an honest and active employee, but you set a bad example to the others.] And I did not say anything in reply because I did not want to have any influence on my staying or not.

But I could have said a lot of things in reply if I had cared too, and such things as I believe would have made it possible for me to stay.

I tell you this because I do not understand why you do not know that the reason then was quite another than my manner of dressing.

Now - to you - I say what I do not doubt it is right to say, as my profession is my profession and I do not waver, but must stick to it. So I tell you this: not only do I wish to keep things as they are between us, but I am so grateful for our relation that I pay no attention to the question of being richer or poorer, having an easier or a more difficult life - silently accepting the fact that I am content with every condition, and that I resign myself to everything and put up with everything, if it must be.

The only thing I do not want you to doubt is my good will, my zeal - and further, I want you to credit me with some common sense, and not suspect me of doing absurd things, and I want you to let me go on living quietly in my own way.

Of course I must experiment to find things, and suffer failures, but in the end the work will come out all right.

To have patience till it turns out well, not to give up before the end, not to doubt - that is what I wish you and I together would do and continue to do. I do not know to what extent we shall have financial success if we stick to that, but I feel sure of one thing, that - *provided there is cooperation and harmony* - we shall be able to continue as long as we live, sometimes not selling anything, and having hard times, then again selling and living more comfortably. That's the long and the short of it. Success depends on our will to stay together: as long as that remains, it is possible.

Now I mention Riszler ainé again (I think you know the book, otherwise you must read it, and you will see what I mean) and I call your attention to the fact that the man's appearance was more or less like mine, that he spent his life working at his designs and machines in the garret of the factory, not caring about or minding anything else, his greatest luxury being to take a glass of beer with an old friend.

Mind, the plot of the novel does not matter at all here, other things in the book of no consequence, but I called the character to your attention, Riszler ainé's way of living, *without arrière-pensée of anything else in the story*. In fact, only to explain to you that I think little of my clothes because my way of working - my way of doing business, if you like - is a personal thing, is *not* having to go to see other people. The few friends I shall make later on will take me as I am, I hope.

I think you will understand this, and that it does not make me angry when things are said to me about my clothes. No, it makes me inwardly more and more calm and concentrated, and it would take entirely different things to make me angry. Wherever I go, I should always be about the same - perhaps everywhere I should really make a bad impression at first. But I doubt if that impression should remain forever with those persons to whom I should speak about it intimately.

Well, from this moment I am again quite absorbed in my work. Do for me what you can, think yourself about what can be of use to us and hasten the success. I do not doubt your goodwill and your friendship.

Goodbye, have pleasant days and write soon. Adieu.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 21 August 1883

Dear brother,

Your letter came today and comforted me in many ways. My thanks for speaking to C. M. - I will write to thank him myself, and send him a few studies, but for the rest - especially about the woman - *nothing*. One more thing, however. One of these days I shall write you a letter; I shall write it carefully and try to make it short, but say everything I think necessary. You might keep that letter then, so that in case you should meet somebody who might be induced to buy some of my studies, you could tell that man my own thoughts and intentions exactly. My thought in this being especially: one of my drawings taken separately will never give complete satisfaction in the long run, but a number of studies, however different in detail they may be, will nevertheless complement each other. In short, for the art lovers themselves it is it in my opinion better to take a number of them than just a single one. As to the money, I would rather deal with an art lover who buys cheaply but regularly than with one who buys only once, even if he paid well then.

Perhaps you might, either in your own words or in mine, propose to C. M. what we discussed last year; the result might be that because of my expressing myself more clearly, he might like the idea better.

Well, more about this later on.

Now I still have to tell you of a visit from Rappard, who saw the large drawings and spoke warmly of them. When I told him that I felt rather weak, and that I thought making the drawings might have had something to do with it, he did not seem to doubt the probability.

We spoke about Drenthe. He is going there again one of these days, and he will go even farther, namely to the fishing villages on Terschelling. Personally I should love to go to Drenthe, especially after that visit from Rappard. So much so that I have already inquired if it would be easy or difficult to move the furniture there.

The furniture can be sent by Van Gend & Loos, even the stove and the bed, by taking half a van; then few or no packing cases are needed.

Of course I am thinking of it because, though those things of mine are of little or no value, it would be very expensive to buy them all over again.

My plan would be to go with the woman and the children.

Of course there will be the moving and travelling expenses.

Once there, I think I would remain permanently in that country of heath and moorland, where more and more painters are settling down, so that perhaps, after a time, a kind of colony of painters might spring up. Life is so much cheaper there that I think I should economize at least 150 or 200 guilders a year, especially on rent.

And having paid my debts with the money from C. M., I think it might be good to act quickly.

In fact, I think it would be superfluous for me to go there first to gather information.

I have a small map of Drenthe before me. On it I can see a large white space devoid of any village names. It is crossed by the Hoogeveen canal, which suddenly comes to an end, and I see the words “peat moors” written right across the blank space on the map. Around that blank space, a number of small black dots with the names of villages and a red one for the little town of Hoogeveen.

Near the boundary, a lake - the Black Lake - a name to conjure with - I picture all sorts of workman dredging the banks. Some of the village names - such as Oosterheuvelen [Eastern Hills] and Erica, also exercise the imagination. Well, tell me your opinion about the possibility of a quick move to that region.

If it happened, I should begin by acting on Rappard's information based on his experiences there, then I would follow his advice to go more to that secluded part of which I told you how it looked on the map.

I am now trying to get a more detailed map of Drenthe, indicating the different terrains.

We should have an immediate cash outlay, but in the long run we should economise a lot, I think. But more important, I think, I should be staying in a country which would certainly stimulate me and make my mind receptive to all that is serious, so that my work can only improve by it.

What would the expenses be? I shall figure that out more exactly for you one of these days.

I suppose the whole family will be counted as 2 ½ persons, but they can demand the fare for three.

The railway expenses are not given in the timetable, but I suppose it will be under 10 guilders a head.

According to Van Gend & Loos, half a van to Assen is 20 guilders. But one would have to spend a few days in an inn, which would cost a guilder per person per day.

Here the rent especially, and the high cost of living, too, are murder. And the heaviest expense, the one for models, would be different over there: either I should have more and better models for the same money, or just as many for less money.

I suppose if I settled down there, Rappard would visit that same neighbourhood even more often than now, so that we could profit a little from each other's company. As I told you, it was especially since his visit and our talking about the work that my mind became fixed on Drenthe.

Of course if it must be, I can also look for a cheaper house here, and I think it beautiful here too, but yet - I should like to be alone with nature for a time - far away from the city.

I can hardly tell you how pleased I am with what you say about my work, I am glad you are of the opinion that it would be the wrong policy to undertake some outside job at the same time.

This leads to half measures, which make one half a man.

The most important thing is to get that “quelque chose de mâle” [something manly] *more and more* into my work.

I don't believe you will need to take back that you notice something of it already, especially if I regain my strength.

It is very troublesome that my stomach is upset by even the most ordinary food, and if I followed my inclination, I should only care to eat - sour apples. I don't indulge myself in this, but my stomach is weaker than it ought to be.

I expect another letter from Rappard about Drenthe. At all events I will write you again soon, also about another plan of staying quietly here, when I have had information from my landlord about the house at Voorburg, which he says I can perhaps get cheaply.

Adieu, again many thanks.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 22 or 23 August 1883

Dear Theo,

This morning I was at Van der Weele's and saw the studies he had brought from Gelderland. And my longing to go to Drenthe was not lessened by what I heard from him. As luck would have it, he knew of one of the villages I had in mind - the landscape there is beautiful and full of character.

I told him again that I was sorry I had not learned more about painting this year.

His answer was, “Oh, don't bother about that: in the first place, everybody has his own weak points - if he learns from somebody else, he often acquires his master's faults in addition to his own; go your own way quietly, without worrying about that.” Well, at heart I think exactly the same, except that I should think myself too conceited if I was not always ready to learn something from others. But it may be considered a piece of good luck if one can hear or learn something from somebody else this way.

You will get a small proof of how infirm the woman's character is when I tell you that notwithstanding her recent positive promise not to go to see her mother again, she has been there after all. I told her that if she could not keep such a promise for even three days, how could she expect me to think her capable of keeping a promise of faith forever.

For I think this very mean of her, and must also suppose that she belongs more to those people than to me. Then she says that she is very sorry again, but - tomorrow she will do it again, that's what I am beginning to think, but she says - “Oh no.” In this sense I am almost sorry that I take things seriously. When I made her promise, I said to her, “It is a kind of prostitution when you go there for three reasons: first, because you used to live with your mother, and she herself encouraged you to walk the street; second, because she lives in a slum, which you, more than anyone else, have reason to avoid; and finally, your brother's mistress lives in the same house.”

She is worrying about many things, this I know; now and then she worries so much that one feels compassion for her - except that she might have trusted me completely - a long time ago, or rather from the very beginning - and she hasn't, although I told her she could from the first, and showed it, too. She preferred to listen to and believe people who told her that I should desert her, which - if it should come to that in the end - would be her family's fault, because she takes their view of things, at least more their fault than hers, for the family never stopped upsetting her with this talk.

However, it isn't absolutely impossible that when, for instance, she has been living in the country for some time, away from all that family, she will stay straight; but who can assure me that out there she won't say, “What a miserable hole, why did you bring me here?” She makes me afraid of such things, even when I try my utmost to avoid the extremity of leaving her.

What Zola says seems to me to be true: “Pourtant ces femmes-là ne sont point mauvaises, leurs erreurs et leurs chûtes ayant pour cause l'impossibilité d'une vie droite, dans les commérages, les médisances des faubourgs corrompus.” You know what I mean, from L'Assommoir.

I know there is difference too, but there are also similarities between my attitude toward her and that passage in L'Assommoir where the blacksmith sees how Gervaise goes wrong but hasn't the slightest influence on her; because of her hypocrisy and her inability to see things clearly, she cannot make up her mind what course to choose.

I pity the woman more than ever, because I see she is more restless than ever. I think she has, for the moment, no better friend than me, who would help her with all my heart if she would let me. But she does not seek my confidence, and makes me absolutely powerless by trusting those who are really her enemies. I am amazed that she doesn't see that she acts wrongly - or doesn't want to see it, for that's what sometimes I think. The period when her faults made me angry is over, I went through it last year. *Now* when I see her falling into the same errors, I'm no longer astonished, and if I knew it would save her, I think I would put up with them. Because my opinion of her is such that “quand bien même” I do not think her bad, she has never seen what is *good*, *how can* she be good.

I mean she is not responsible, like somebody who understands the distinction between good and evil. That understanding only comes to her very vaguely and confusedly through intuition. I think if she knew what was right, she'd do it.

What you said - that you believe it would do her good to leave me - is a thing which I myself would think probable if she didn't go back to her people - in the first place - and secondly, if she didn't have to leave the only thing that keeps her relatively straight - her children. It is a case which I see no solution for. I don't know whether you understand my explanation, but it's like this - “au fond” she wants to stay with me and is attached to me, but she does not see how she estranges herself from me, and when I say something about it, she answers, “Yes, I know it quite well, you don't want me to stay with you.”

Well, that's in her *good* moods, and the *bad* ones are even more exasperating.

Then she says openly, “Yes, I am careless and lazy, and I have always been that way, and it can't be helped,” or, “Yes, it's true I'm a whore, and the only end for me will be to drown myself.”

When I think of that neglected character of hers, half or rather entirely spoiled - one might almost call it dragged through the gutter - then I say to myself: “After all she cannot be different than she is,” and I should think myself stupid and conceited if I condemned her in big solemn words. Perhaps you will better understand now than before, how I came to apply to her what Father Bienvenue in Victor Hugo's Misérables used to say to ugly, even venomous insects, “Pauvre bête, ce n'est pas sa faute qu'elle est ainsi” [Poor beast, it isn't its fault that it is like that], and you will understand that I am so anxious to save her that if, for instance, I could do so by marrying her, I would marry her even now. But would it save her? If once in Drenthe she kept nagging, “Why did you bring me here?” we should not have advanced much.

It is impossible to explain such a matter fully, any more than it is possible to understand it fully. But this much you will understand. She is an intensely unhappy creature, and because of her erratic temperament, little fitted for regular employment, whatever it may be. And for that matter, in Leyden they said she should not be *allowed* to do heavy work. And moreover, there is the fact that nursing the baby has been very exhausting because of the weakness of her constitution, which, as I see it, is another reason for putting up with a great deal of laxity on her part.

I am keeping this letter back for a few days. In the meantime father sent me a letter. My intention in writing Father the letter which you read at home was first to let Father know, and you too, that the reason I do not write much to the people at home is that it is the simplest thing to do as long as there are motives for avoiding mentioning things. But seeing that there was the question of my not being confiding enough, I wanted to show them that is not my intention to hide my motives, but to let people understand for themselves that it was better to be silent about many things. I doubt whether Father has inferred *this* from my letter. Well, never mind. He assumed it to be more of a complaint on my part, or a request for advice, which the letter certainly was not; it was simply intended to explain my motives in acting as I did, so that no doubt of my frankness could remain.

The thing I hope you will not object to, under the circumstances given - is the necessity of going on, and, after mature consideration, my intention of staying with her if she herself does not make it absolutely impossible - I repeat, the thing I hope you will not object to, is my immediate carrying out the plan of going to Drenthe. Whether the woman goes with me or not depends on herself - I *know* she is deliberating with her mother. I do not know *what*. I do not ask, either.

But if she wants to come with me, do let her. Leaving her would mean driving her back to prostitution - how could this be done by the same hand that tried to save her?

For my *work* and as an *economy* measure, Drenthe is the best thing we can do, in my opinion, and I think you will see it in the same way. So leaving her out of the question for the moment, we shall execute that plan if you approve of it. At the time of departure I shall say to the woman, “Will you come or stay?” *If* she comes with me, I think I shall have more influence on her there, and make her behave better.

Today I sent a number of studies to C. M.

I am very glad about your revised opinion about my work - your revised opinion tallies with Rappard's - Van der Weele also thinks there is something in my work. Personally, I believe that in every painter's life there is a period when he makes absurdities, and for myself, I think that period is already a long time behind me. Further, I think that I am making progress slowly but steadily, and that the better work I do later will cast a reflex on the work I am doing now, and will show more clearly that even now there is already some truth and simplicity in it, and as you yourself express it, a manly conception and perception.

So that if you now find something in a study, you will not have to retract that opinion, and later better work will never make you indifferent to the first.

Last year Weissenbruch already said something like that to me - go your own way quietly, and in your old age, you will look back on your first studies with satisfaction.

The main thing now is to paint a great deal. That, and again saturating myself in nature's serenity on the heath, will bring us victory in the end - do not doubt it - and progress from month to month.

I'm very busy painting these days; I have several studies of the wood. Adieu, and write soon.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

It will be the same with the painted studies as it is with the drawings. Later, when I shall have made more progress, people will see that a certain figure, a certain bit of scenery, already bears a personal character.

Well, if things go well, I hope to send you some studies from Drenthe this autumn.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 2 September 1883

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. I want to answer it at once. What you write may be true - we have already talked it over, I often thought so myself - that if the woman were obliged to leave me, to shift for herself, she would stay straight. But as she has two children, it's a very difficult case, but what shall I say? - it is something which she is bringing about herself, but which the *circumstances bring about even more*. I underline the latter.

Do you know what I have done? Today I had a quiet day with her. I talked it over with her seriously, explaining to her fully what my situation is, that I *must* go away for my work, and *must* have a year of few expenses and some earnings, in order to make up for a past that has been rather too much for me. That I foresaw that if I stayed with her, I should very soon be unable to help her any more, and should get into debt again here, where everything is so expensive, and there would be no way out. So that, in short, she and I must be wise and separate as friends. That she must get her people to take the children, and that she must look for a job.

And it is so evident that I cannot go on here that even she understands it. And as we are both hard up at present, and make things worse by staying together, we agreed to separate for a time or forever, depending on how things turn out. I add “or forever,” because she has in her children, and I in my work, an object to live for, “quand bien même,” and we shall have to do things against our will, and perhaps we shall not be able to be as good as we might wish.

I told her, “perhaps you will not be able to stay quite straight, but go as straight as possible; I will try to do the same, but I know beforehand that my course in life will be far from safe.”

So I said, “As long as I know that you are trying your best and are not losing hold of *everything* and that you are good to the children, as you know I have been to them - if only you act so that the children always find a mother in you, though you are just a poor servant, though you are just a poor whore, with all your damned faults, you will always be *good* in my eyes. And though I do not doubt for a moment that I have the same kind of faults, I hope I shall not change in this respect, that when I see a poor woman with a swollen belly, I shall always try to do what I can to help her.” I said, “If you were in the same condition as when I found you, well, you would find your home with me - a shelter in the storm as long as I have a piece of bread and a roof over my head; but now is different, the storm is over, you can go straight without me, I think - well, you must try to. For my part, I must also try to find a straight path, I must work hard; you do the same." That's the way I said it.

Oh brother, you see how it is, we would not part if we didn't have to. I repeat we would not part if we didn't have to. Haven't we forgiven each other's faults time after time, and made it up again? We know each other so well that we can see no evil in each other. Is it love? I do not know, but there is something between us that cannot be undone.

As to what must be done now - you see I do not want to waste my time either, I want to work on, straight on, vigorously - as to painting, I want to do what must be done. I know that I cannot be wrong in this, that is to say, I do not know what the result will be for her or for me if I pushed on vigorously, but it will certainly turn out better if I cut myself a path alone than if we both came to a dead stop by staying together and frustrating each other.

Now to get back to the subject of Drenthe.

Can you find a way for me to get the money to go there alone? Perhaps I could leave the furniture here, renting a corner of an attic from my landlord.

But the sooner the better. I want to be free of that heavy rent, you see, and I want to leave here as soon as possible. It is necessary for my work. Drenthe, Katwijk, Brabant, never mind which, to live with a farmer for a time, far, far away in the country - far away, alone with nature.

And then I must paint a great deal, and be able to spend a little more on painting materials.

I have talked everything over with Van der Weele again. He spent an afternoon in the studio, and has seen my studies one by one; we have corrected several of them together, so he could show me some points of technique.

Well, he has given me some useful hints. And one of these days before I leave, he will again devote some of his time to showing me a few things.

Wisselingh also came to see me one morning. It was very pleasant - he said I was more advanced than he expected - we lunched together and talked about old times.

He encouraged me greatly, so did Van der Weele, but the painting cannot be avoided. I must - let me say it frankly - try to paint a hundred serious studies. You see I must *carry this through*. And those studies must have practical subjects too. Characteristic bits of nature. Wisselingh will buy something from me some time, perhaps very soon, and we agreed that this autumn already, or toward winter, when I have been quite in the country for a time, I shall send him something, and shall continue to do so, so that he will keep in touch with me whether he buys or not.

I said to him, “Write me about what I send you, then I will continue in the line you think you can use.”

As to C. M., I sent him more than twenty studies, so I think he cannot be dissatisfied - besides, he can exchange them for others later. As you haven't much to spare yourself, I want to suggest that you explain the thing to him - that it would be good for me to go to the country to paint on regularly for a time. That we shall try to do so without his help, but that it would be of such great importance if, in case of need, he did not entirely withdraw his help in the future.

You see, there is no possibility of making both ends meet and yet doing what the work demands as to painting. A farmer in Drenthe charges a guilder a day for board and lodging. In the beginning I should like to keep in touch with the woman as much as possible, and send her a little money; but even so the cares will be less heavy. The studio must be dispensed with for a time, the furniture stored in a corner of a garret until better times. And then, without luggage, without company, on the road to study. Write me soon what you think of it. I wish you would write what you think as soon as you read this letter.

Tomorrow I will give my landlord notice, and arrange with him to store my things here somewhere.

The woman is going to look for a job. And meanwhile I am working as hard as I can. As to my going somewhere else, I shall wait for your letter, and then we shall see what we can do. I hope it will be a way to overcome the difficulties. Adieu, boy, all good wishes, have some luck in business, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, c. 4 September 1883

Dear Theo,

I received your letter just now, coming home from the dunes behind Loosduinen, wet through, for I had been sitting in the rain for about three hours on a spot where everything was reminiscent of Ruysdael, Daubigny or Jules Dupré. I came back with a study of twisted, gnarled little trees, and another one of a farm after the rain. Everything is already bronze coloured. Everything is what one can see in nature only during this time of the year, or when one looks at some pictures by Dupré, for instance; and it is so beautiful that one's imagination always falls short of it.

You write about your walk that Sunday in Ville d'Avray; at the same moment on the same day, I too was walking alone, and I too want to tell you something about that walk, when our thoughts probably met again. As I wrote you, I had spoken to the woman - we felt that in the future it would be impossible for us to stay together, nay, that we should make each other unhappy, yet we both felt how strongly we are attached to each other and then I went far out into the country to have a talk with nature. Well, I walked to Voorburg and from there to Leidendam. You know the scenery there, splendid trees, majestic and serene, right next to horrible green toy summerhouses and all the absurdities the heavy fancy of retired Dutchmen can invent in the form of flower plots, arbors and porches. Most of the houses very ugly; some, however, old and stately. Now at that very moment, high over the meadows, boundless as the desert, one mass of clouds after the other came sailing on, and the wind first struck the row of country houses with their clumps of trees on the other side of the canal, bordered by the black cinder path. Those trees were superb; there was drama in each figure I was going to say, but I mean in each tree. But the scene as a whole was even more beautiful than those scourged trees viewed apart, because at that moment even those absurd little summerhouses assumed a curious character, dripping with rain and disheveled.

It seemed to me an image of how even a man of absurd deportment and conventions, or another one full of eccentricities and caprice, may become a dramatic figure of a peculiar type, if only real sorrow strikes him - a calamity befalls him. And the thought crossed my mind, how at moments when today's deteriorating society is society seen against the light of a renewal, it stands out as a large, gloomy silhouette.

Yes, for me, the drama of storm in nature, the drama of sorrow in life, is the most impressive.

A “Paradou” is beautiful, but Gethsemane is even more beautiful.

Oh, there must be a little bit of light, a little bit of happiness, just enough to indicate the shape, to make the lines of the silhouette stand out, but let the whole be gloomy.

I must say that the woman is bearing up well. She is unhappy about it, as I am, but she is not disheartened and keeps busy. I had just bought a piece of material to make canvases for my studies, and have now given it to her to make underwear for the kids, and some of my things can be altered for them too, so that she will not leave me empty-handed. So she is very busy sewing these things.

When I say we part as friends, it is true - but the parting is final, and after all I am more resigned than I thought I'd be, because her faults were such that it would have been a fatal thing to be bound together, for me as well as for herself, because one is, so to speak, responsible for one another's faults.

But I ask myself anxiously - how will she be in a year?

I shall certainly *never* take her into my house again, but I do not want to lose sight of her, for I am too fond of her and the children.

And for the very reason that it was and is a feeling other than passion, this is possible too.

I hope the Drenthe project will be carried out.

You ask me what I should need.

I need not tell you that I intend to work hard. I must do that in order to renew myself. And no painting materials whatever are available down there, so as to stocking up on them, the more one has of the really useful things, the better. Good materials are never thrown away, and though they are expensive, one makes up for it later, and a lot of painting must he done in order to make progress. I hope to waste very little of the time I shall spend there, and hope to have models often, which probably will be much cheaper there.

And life is cheaper and I shall be able to do more with the 150 francs there than here.

But I can arrange all this according to the circumstances. I wish I could have a large amount to spend, because I need so many things that others have, and which one can hardly do without.

My intention is to make so much progress in painting in Drenthe that when I come back I might be admitted as a member of the Society of Draughtsmen. This is again in reference to a second plan to go to England.

I don't think it wrong to speculate, if only one doesn't do it in thin air, or on too unsolid a basis. This in regard to England.

I certainly expect it will be easier for me to sell there than here, that's true, so I sometimes think of England; but I do not know to what extent my work will please the English art lovers, and as I do not know this, I will first make a small positive start in selling before I shall think it advisable to try it there. Once I have sold a few things here, then I shall hesitate no longer, but start sending things or go there myself.

But as long as I sell absolutely nothing here, I could easily be mistaken in the right moment if I were not wise enough to wait till I see an opening here. I hope you will approve of this idea; that would comfort me, for in England they are very serious once they start something: whoever catches the public's fancy in England finds faithful friends there. Take, for instance, Ed. Frère and Henrietta Browne, who remain as interesting now is they were when their work was little known there.

But to have success, one must give good work, and be sure of keeping up the standard of what one has set.

I was glad to see from your letter that you approve of the Drenthe plan; that's enough for me, the advantages it will bring will be apparent later. For me, it is directly connected with my trying to become a member of the Society of Draughtsmen, and then going to England - because I know for sure that if I succeed in putting some sentiment into the subjects out there, they will find sympathy in England.

Well, I must carry out the Drenthe plan, be it with more or less money. As soon as I can pay the fare, I shall go, even if I have only a small supply of painting materials.

Because the moment of the autumn effects is already there, and I must catch some of them.

But I hope I shall be able to leave something behind for the woman, to help her through the first weeks. But as soon as I *can* go, I *will*.

I tell you that I intend to help the woman a little at first; I *may* not do much, nor can I, but I mention this only to you.

And you may depend on it that whatever may happen to her, I neither can nor ever will live with her again, for she is incapable of doing what she ought to do.

I also dropped Father a line to tell him that I had parted company with her, but that for all that, my letter to Father about my continuing to be true to her and being willing to marry her remained a fact. And another fact is that Father avoided the issue at the time, and did not reply to the fundamental question. And I do not know how it will appear to me in later years - for instance, whether this might not have been better than leaving her; now we are too close to the facts to get the right view of the basic interrelation and consequences of all the things.

I do *hope* everything will come out right, but her future as well as my own looks gloomy. I am inclined to believe there is some latent good in her still, but the trouble is, it *ought to have been* roused already. Now, as she has nobody to rely on, it will be more difficult for her to follow her good impulses.

Now she never cared to listen; *then* she will long to speak with me, and I shall no longer be there. As long as she was with me, she had no other standard of comparison, and in other surroundings she will remember things which she does not care for and which she did not pay attention to. *Now* by contrast she will be reminded of them.

Sometimes it is an anguishing thought, that we both feel it is impossible for us to struggle along together in the future, and yet are *so* much attached to each other. Of late she has been more trustful with me than usual, and she has refused to play some ugly tricks which her mother had instigated. Things of the kind you mentioned when you were here, of starting a row and the like.

You see there is a seed of more seriousness in her, if that might only stay. I wish she could marry, and when I tell you I am keeping an eye on her, it is because I advised her to do *that*.

If she could only find a man who was not altogether bad, that would do; the foundation that was laid here would then develop, namely that of a more domestic, simpler disposition; and if she sticks to that, in the future I need not leave her quite to her fate, for then I at least remain her friend, and a true one.

Write soon again and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 6 or 7 September 1883

Dear Theo,
In my last letter I could not give you any details about my plans, which I can do now to some extent. I begin by telling you about the woman, that what I already suspected has proved true, that she was already making arrangements for the future, even *before* I had decided to leave her. I had to decide to leave her for the very reason that I was almost sure *then* as I am *now* that I know exactly what her plans are.

Now that the decision has been made, I want to carry out my plan of moving promptly and firmly.

The first measure was to give my landlord notice - that has already been done.

The second measure concerns my furniture, which would only be a burden to me, and cause expenses at a time when I do not know exactly where I shall settle down. It will remain here in the house *in the garret*; I made an arrangement with my landlord about it.

You will ask me if I intend to come back to The Hague? No, but for instance in half a year, or a year, I shall again have to come into contact with some painters here when I have made progress in my work and when I have a lot of studies of the real countryside.

And then for a studio, I shall probably take a very comfortable room, or preferably an outbuilding, from this same landlord, at his own place in Voorburg, not in The Hague; it will be cheaper than living in town, which I shall not readily do again.

So I am rid of all the extra ballast, and at the same time I know where to go when I come to a point (of course not now, but for instance in a year) when a temporary return here would be advisable. Why? For instance, I could become a member of the Society of Draughtsmen by that time, which is one of the things I might desire then and might be able to attain.

You will agree that The Hague is a very remarkable place. It is in fact the art centre of Holland, and at the same time the surroundings are very varied and beautiful, so that one can always work there. And so - though certainly not for the present, but let's say in a year - there will perhaps be a reason for a longer or shorter stay here. And through this arrangement about the furniture, I remain in touch with somebody who knows me and who, as soon as I ask it, can help me get a house. So I am a free man, without ballast, and I can leave when I want. And I can do more now with your 150 francs than when there were so many demands on me. And as I am for once a little freer of the cares that were getting too much for me, I am in a more hopeful mood.

In this way the expenses for the journey are greatly simplified. The only drawback, shadow, or whatever you want to call it, is that I myself had hoped the woman would improve in Drenthe, and now I have misgivings. It is certainly her own behaviour that decided this action of mine, but if I had been able to find the means, I should have taken her with me to Drenthe in a last effort to save her. Well, I had to decide, as each week's delay took me deeper into the labyrinth, without additional benefit to her.

If I should take my furniture, half a van to Drenthe would cost, according to a more detailed estimate by Van Gend & Loos, something over 25 guilders; pick-up and delivery is extra, though that would not amount to so very much.

Besides, I should need some cases, which I should have to buy, and that would be another expense.

It would be convenient to have my things with me, but it is too expensive, especially if one does not stay in the same place.

First I should like to have a look at Katwijk, to make a few marines, and because that is at all events within reach, even if I should have to put off the journey to Drenthe because of the money.

Oh, Theo, you will understand how I feel these days, so very melancholy about the woman and the children - but it could not be helped; at the same time, all my thoughts are concentrated on the work, and I feel a great energy, because now I can do things which were impossible before.

Dear brother - if you could know my feelings exactly, how I spent part of myself on the woman, forgetting every other thing, just concentrating on saving her, if you could feel exactly my melancholy view of life - which, however, does not make me indifferent to it, on the contrary, I prefer feeling my sorrow to forgetting it or becoming indifferent - if you could feel exactly how I find my serenity in “worship of sorrow” and not in illusions, the perhaps, even for you, brother, my inmost soul would be different and more detached from life than even you can imagine now.

I shall certainly not speak much about the woman any more, but I shall continue to think of her very often. From the very first, helping her has been a question of all or nothing. I could not give her money to live by herself, I *had* to take her into my house if I wanted to be of any use to her. And in my opinion, the right thing would have been to marry her and take her with me to Drenthe, but I admit that she herself, as well as the circumstances, make it impossible; she is not nice, she is not good, but neither am I, and there was a serious affection just the way we were, notwithstanding everything.

I must set to work, and hope to hear from you soon. Adieu, a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I add another little word - you ask me how much I need; I have been thinking it over, and it is impossible for me to say what I absolutely *need*; for that would not be little. So let's see what is within our reach and make that do. Probably what is within our reach will be below what is “au fond” necessary, but in life it is already something to be able to carry out one's plans partially. And I tell you that I shall be satisfied with what you can spare. Life is cheaper out there, and I shall be able to economize more than here; and after a year these economies alone will already have helped me on.

Once there, I can have colours sent by parcel post, so if *possible*, yes, then of course I'll stock up in advance; but if not, I shall not put off the journey for that reason.

I hope that the past year will prove to have been sound after all, for I have not neglected my work; on the contrary, I have corrected a number of weak points. Of course there are more to be corrected, but these will get their turn now.

What I wrote you in my last letter, that the woman had immediately broken certain promises, was bad enough, for she had tried to get a job as servant in a whorehouse, which her mother had set her on to. The woman herself was soon very sorry about it, and has given it up, but it was very, very weak of her to do it *just at that moment*; but she is like that - at least up to now - she hasn't the strength to meet such a proposal with an absolute *no*.

Well, she forces me to take measures which I had put off again and again. But on that occasion I saw a kind of crisis within her, as it were - I hope it has been a “hitherto but no further.” And it is a fact that she herself considers our separation something which may have good results. And because she is too hopelessly close to her mother, these two must go together, either the wrong way or the right.

Now the plan is that she will live with her mother, and they will take turns going out as charwomen, and try to earn a living honestly. That is their intention, and they have already found a few houses; I have placed some advertisements, and they go out to look for places daily and are beginning to like it.

I will go on placing advertisements as long as it is necessary, and do all those things which can be useful to them. And if I *can do so*, I shall pay a few weeks rent and a loaf a day for them before I go, to give them more time to carry out that plan well. But I did not yet *promise* them that I intend to pay these things for them, because I do not know whether I shall be able to do so. It will depend on circumstances.

And for her I decidedly advise a marriage of convenience with a widower, for instance, but I have told her that in that case she must be better to him than she was to me.

And that she herself knows quite well in what respects she failed in her duty toward me, that she should be *sensible* this time, and *learn from it that I do not reproach her with it in the least, because I know improvement or reform does not succeed at once, but goes in what may be called stages*. Therefore, if only she stays at the point she has reached now, and does not permit herself to slide back, she need not take her shortcomings to me to heart, nor lose courage; only she should try to make amends by being better to somebody else.

And for the time being she fully understands all this, and I hope to keep it alive. Losing courage and letting things slide is the foible of both of them, but at the same time they are patient in the matter of starting anew; the woman especially is getting this way, and although I know her faults are numerous and troublesome enough, I also know that au fond there is some good in her, which makes up for *everything*, and therefore I do not despair of the future. *For such a one miséricorde, mercy, should lie in nature itself*. It is something I should wish to believe fully, and I think it ungodly of myself not to be completely convinced of it and in addition to be resigned to leaving all the things undone which it is not in my power to do; however, I am unable to drop *everything* I have been at great pains to set right. Write soon, won't you?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 7 or 8 September 1883

Dear Theo,

My things are packed, and I can leave here as soon as I have the money. It is best to act as quickly as possible, for one cannot work in such a moving time, and I shall not feel at ease till I am settled somewhere in the country.

So if you can send some money about the tenth, I hope to be able to start - if not at once for Drenthe, I shall go and stay in a nearby village for a few days.

I hope it will turn out as you suppose - and, in fact, more or less as I do too - that it will bring about a change for the better in the woman.

But I'm afraid that it won't, and that she will fall back into the old ways. Judging from my intimate knowledge of her, I say she is too weak, especially in mind and will power, to continue on the right road.

When I spoke to you about it during your visit, I had already resolved to make a decision, but I thought there were two ways, and the choice of *how* depended more on her than on me.

If she had really wanted to struggle on with me in such a way that it had been more than mere words, but an avoidance of those faults that have made things unbearable, I believe - however many cares we might have had, however poor we might have been - it would have been a better fate for her than what she may now expect. But I have come to think of her as something of a sphinx, incapable of saying Yes or No. And if you should ask me what I think she will do, and how she will go on, I can only answer: “Certainly not as straight as she might have.”

These last days I have seen clearly that her going out to look for a job was only make-believe, and that she is probably waiting till I am gone before beginning something they do not mention to me. That much more reason for me to start at once, for otherwise it would end in her delaying on purpose. And that's another trick of the mother's.

This plan is again a corruption of what they started a few days ago; it will almost certainly lead to nothing but wretchedness. But I should be crazy to help them as long as they are not straightforward with me, shouldn't I? So I intend to start abruptly, and to let a few weeks pass. Then I will write them and see how things are.

I too am beginning to believe that I must go away to make them realize the gravity of the situation. But such an experiment is dangerous, for they can spoil a great deal even in a short time.

Why, oh why, is the woman so foolish?

She is entirely what Musset has called “un enfant de siècle” - and I can't help thinking of the ruin of Musset himself when I think of her future. In Musset there was something noble and idealistic; well, in her too there is a “je ne sais quoi,” though she certainly is no artist.

If only she was one a little. She has her children, and if these become more her chief interest than they are now, there will be some steadiness in her; but even that is not what it ought to be, though her mother love, imperfect as it is, is in my eyes the best trait in her character.

I am sorely troubled by the thought that after I have gone away she will regret a number of things and want to do better and then be in need of me. In that case I shall be willing to help, but not unless I can instill in her what you told me the woman you met expressed thus, “Tu m'as trouvée bien en bas, *il faut que je remonte.*” [You have found me very low down, *it is necessary that I rise.*] But instead of *it is necessary that I rise*, she may say, *The abyss attracts me*.

I once heard there had been an affair between Musset and George Sand. George was resolute, positive, and hard working; Musset was lâche, indifferent and even neglected his work. It came to a crisis and a break between those two characters. After that, a desperate effort by Musset, and remorse, but not before he had sunk even more deeply into the mud; and in the meantime George Sand had arranged her affairs, was quite absorbed in a new work, and said, “It is too late, it cannot *be helped now*.”

These things bring so much agony of the soul, and make hearts shrivel up with pain - more than anybody suspects.

Theo, my mind will not be easy about her when I go; on the contrary, I am anxious, because I know that she will wake up only when it is too late, and will have an ardent desire for something simpler and purer only when the moment to attain it has past.

When I see that sphynxlike quality in her, I know of old what it means, in her as well as in others, and that is a bad sign.

And that melancholy staring into the abyss is just as fatal, and the way to avoid that is to work hard.

And, Theo, now - she drops her hands into her lap too often already - melancholy, if it is to be conquered, must be conquered by hard work, and he who does not feel that is undone forever, and goes straight to the dogs. I have told her so, often enough. At times she took it a little to heart.

But now, you see, she is very near the abyss.

It shall not be my hand that pushes her over the edge, but I *cannot* keep standing by forever, to draw her back.

A human being must have enough common sense to exert himself when others help him and warn him.

I know there are cases in which melancholy seems to prevent it, but later on he quietly does what he should do, and recovers in the end. If only she is like this, all is well, and she will be all right. Nothing is more effective than the presence of a friend during the period of recovery from melancholy. To have one at such a time means a lot, even though the friend be poor. Well, she will always find one in me, and though the fact is that she used to be and still is very malicious at times, *nevertheless* it will be so.

She will stand in need of help, and so…I shall be ready to help, even after I am gone, provided I see some willingness and energy. Those people (in her family) who have tried to estrange her from me did something that might well be as wicked as murdering her and her children, only they did it out of obduracy and stupidity; if it weren't for them, she would have made better progress.

Try to let me have the money about the tenth, at least enough so that I can leave here, for that would be wise.

But don't let it get you into trouble yourself. I will act according to circumstances and will let you know at once what I have done. If it is not enough for Drenthe, I shall go to Loosduinen for a few days and wait there. I have found even more beautiful things in Loosduinen, old farmyards - and in the evening there are some splendid effects there. I might send my things ahead or leave them in the luggage room.

But now is just the moment to give up the house, and as soon as your letter arrives, I shall leave here; it will be a hint for the woman to put her shoulder to the wheel. I will place a few more advertisements, but they have done nothing but dawdle these last two days, and I'm afraid they have changed their plans entirely.

Adieu, Theo, I wish things were fixed already, for days like these are hard and of little profit.

I wish you good luck and prosperity. Believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I hope you have not fallen ill, I had the same thing some time ago, but it has disappeared again. Perhaps eggs are the best thing to restore the stomach, at least if weakness is the cause.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

The Hague, 10 September 1883

Dear Theo,
I just received your letter with the enclosed 100 francs. And I shall start for Hoogeveen in Drenthe. I shall go farther from there, and I shall write you my address from there.

So in no case write to The Hague any more.

And I would ask you to let C. M. know that I am leaving here, because, as you say, he might write me. If he has done so already, it might be best for him to ask the post office for the letter back, because not knowing what my next address will be, I can only give it to the post office or to my landlord later on.

Friend Rappard has also started on his trip, has left Drenthe already, has almost reached Terschelling. He wrote to me from Drenthe: “The country has a very serious character, the figures often reminded me of studies of yours. As to the living there, one certainly can't live more cheaply anyplace else. And I think the southeast corner (the part I mentioned to you) the most original.”

Theo, I certainly have a very melancholy feeling on leaving, much more than would be the case if I were convinced that the woman would show energy, and if her willingness were not so doubtful.

Well, you know the main facts now.

For my part, I must push on, otherwise I should break down under it, without benefiting her any further.

Unless she becomes more active of her own accord, that is to say, steadily energetic and not doing things by fits and starts, she will stay on the same unsatisfactory level, and even if she had three friends to help her instead of just me, they would not be able to achieve anything unless she co-operated wholeheartedly.

But the children I am so fond of? I could not do all that was necessary for them - if only the woman had been willing.

However, I shall not bore you with it any longer, for I must go on, “quand même.” Prudence compelled me not to risk taking a supply of colours with me, as out there I shall have to pay for my luggage immediately when it arrives, and for lodging and railway fare. But if we are lucky enough to get something from C. M., I shall have some things I have selected sent me by parcel post. The sooner this can be done, the better.

So if you hear anything, write to me as soon as you know my address, and of course I agree to the proposed arrangement of sending only part of the 100 francs if you are hard up, awaiting a more favourable moment.

I cannot help thinking that perhaps C. M. will do nothing at all.

At all events, brother, it was very energetic and wise of you to send this at once, for now I can go there already and look around a bit, and even without help we shall certainly be able to manage there.

Therefore many thanks, and rest assured that it will prove to have been a good measure. My intention is to stay there, for instance, till you come to Holland next year. I should not like to miss your visit then. But in this way I should see all the seasons of the year and get a general impression of the character of things in that part.

I have provided myself with a home passport, valid for twelve months. With this I have the right to go where I want, and to stay in a place as long or as short a time as I like. I am very glad that I can hurry on now, for in this way we help ourselves. I reckon 50 francs for board and lodging there, and the rest for the work; that's a great difference from what I could do here. So even if we have no help from others, we shall not mark time.

Goodbye, I still have a lot to do today - so please drop a line to C. M. I shall send you my address soon, perhaps tomorrow night if all goes well.

Adieu, a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Not long ago you wrote me, “Perhaps your duty will make you act differently.” That is a thing I thought over at once, and because my work so indubitably demands my going away, my opinion is that my work is my duty, even more immediate than the woman, and that the former must not suffer because of the latter. Last year it was different, *now* I am *quite* ready for Drenthe, but one's feelings are divided and one would like to do both things, which *is not possible* under the circumstances because of the money and, more than that, because she is unreliable.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 11 and 12 September 1883

Hoogeveen, Tuesday evening
Dear Theo,
I have just arrived here.

From the train I saw some beautiful bits of the Veluwe, but everything was dark by the time we arrived in these parts. So I do not know much about it yet. I am sitting in a large inn-parlour, like those in Brabant, where a woman is sitting peeling potatoes, rather a pretty little figure.

I have been talking to the people here, and one of these days I shall go by barge down the whole Hoogeveen canal, through the peat fields, straight across the southeastern corner of Drenthe.

From here to the north there seems to be a beautiful heath right up to Assen. You can imagine I am rather curious to see it all.

Everything came off well at The Hague. That land surveyor [Furnée] came to say goodbye at the station.

Of course the woman and her children were with me to the last, and when I left, the parting was not very easy.

I have provided her with all kinds of things as well as I could, but she will have a hard time.

I have taken only a very few colours with me, but nevertheless some, and I hope to begin the attack soon. The colour of the Veluwe was rich.

I shall wait here for your next letter. I am staying at a village inn quite near the station.

The address is: A. Hartsuiker, Innkeeper, Hoogeveen.

Later I may go farther into the heart of the country, but I must wait till I have some stock of colours.

I shall write more soon; for the moment I've seen nothing but what I tell you, the scene through the carriage window and the barroom here, which is nothing special.

I only want to tell you I am here.

Goodbye, tomorrow I am going out investigating. A handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

When you receive this, be so kind as to mail a postcard at once to see whether it reaches me all right. I got up very early this morning because I was rather curious. The weather is splendid, the air is clear and bracing, as in Brabant. Here at the inn I saw a stable fitted up differently from those in Brabant. Perhaps I shall make something of it someday, at least if I stay here.

Well, the country around here is for the greater part meadowland, with little trees here and there. I think I did well to choose Hoogeveen as my starting point. At least it is rather curious that I already heard, on the very first evening, how I can travel through the whole peat district, as far as the Prussian frontier and the Black Lake on the barges. I shall soon write you more about it than I can today. As soon as I have more colours, I shall begin that excursion and will go from one village to another.

But my address will still be here, and I shall leave my things here even if I am absent for some time and do not know exactly where I shall be.

I have arranged to pay a guilder a day while I'm here, and I can leave my trunk, etc., in the garret while I'm away. In the village harbour I saw very quaint peat barges, and figures of bargemen's wives dressed as they are here in the hayfield - very picturesque.

Further into the country it will be even more beautiful; but for the present I see very good things even here.

So drop me a line soon at the address: A. Hartsuiker, Innkeeper at Hoogeveen.

The village, or little town, is just a long row of houses along the harbour, many new houses and a few more beautiful old ones.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 15 September 1883

My dear Theo,

Now that I have been here for a few days and have done a good deal of walking about in various directions, I can tell you more about the area in which I have ended up. I am enclosing a quick little scratch of the first study I painted here, a cottage on the heath. A cottage made entirely of turfs and sticks. I have seen the inside of some 6 or so like this, too, and more studies of them will follow.

I can't convey the way they look outside in the dusk or just after sunset better than by reminding you of a certain painting by Jules Dupré, which I think belongs to Mesdag and shows two cottages, their moss-covered roofs standing out surprisingly deep in tone against a misty, hazy evening sky. *That could have been here.*

Inside, these cottages, dark as a cave, are very beautiful. There are drawings by certain English artists who have worked on the moors in Ireland that portray most realistically what I have found here. Alb. Neuhuys does the same with somewhat more poetry than is apparent at first sight, but he never does anything that is not basically true.

I saw some superb figures in the country - striking in their sobriety. A woman's breast, for instance, has that heaving movement which is the exact opposite of volupté [voluptuousness], and sometimes, when the creature is old or ailing, can arouse compassion or respect. And the melancholy which things in general have here is of a healthy kind, as in drawings by Millet. Fortunately, the men here wear short breeches, which show the shape of the leg and give the movements more expression.

To mention one of the many fresh impressions and feelings I have gained on my exploratory outings, let me tell you for instance about the barges drawn by men, women, children, white or black horses, laden with peat, *in the middle of the heath*, just like the ones you see in Holland, say on the Rijs-wijk towpath.

The heath is magnificent. I've seen sheepfolds and shepherds more beautiful than those in Brabant. The ovens are more or less as in Th. Rousseau's four communal [communal oven], and stand in the gardens under old apple trees or among the cabbages and the celery. Beehives, too, in many places.

One sees many individuals who have something wrong with them - I think it can't be very healthy here, perhaps because of foul drinking water. I have seen a few girls of perhaps 17 or even younger with something lovely and youthful about them, whose features were striking, but more often than not they look fané [faded] at an early age. Still, that does not detract from the fine and noble bearing of some of the figures, even if they do appear quite faded when seen from close to.

There are 4 or 5 canals in the village, to Meppel, to Dedemsvaart, to Coevorden, to Hollands Veld. Following them, one now and then sees a curious old mill, farmhouse, boatyard, or lock. And always the bustle of peat barges.

To give you an example of the true character in these parts: as I sat painting that cottage, two sheep and a goat came and started to graze *on the roof* of the house. The goat climbed up on to the ridge and looked down the chimney. The woman, who had heard something on the roof, rushed out and flung her broom at the said goat, which leaped down like a chamois.

The two hamlets on the heath where I went and where this incident occurred are called Stiufzand [Shifting Sand] and Swartschaap [Black sheep]. I have been to various other places too, and you'll have some idea now of how primitive it all is here - Hoogeveen is après tout [after all] a town and yet right next to it one has shepherds, those ovens, those turf huts, *etc.*

I often think with melancholy of the woman and the children, if only they were provided for; oh, it's the woman's fault, one might say, and it would be true, but I am afraid her misfortunes will prove greater than her guilt. I knew from the beginning that her character was spoiled, but I hoped she would improve; and now that I do not see her any more and ponder some things I saw in her, it seems to me more that she was too far gone for improvement. And this only increases my feeling of pity, and it becomes a melancholy feeling because it is not in my power to redress it.

Theo, when I meet on the heath such a poor woman with a child on her arm, or at her breast, my eyes get moist. It reminds me of her, her weakness; her untidiness, too, contributes to making the likeness stronger. *I know that she is not good,* that I have an absolute right to act as I do, that I *could not* stay with her back there, that I really *could not* take her with me, that what I did was even sensible and wise, whatever you like; but, for all that, it cuts right through me when I see such a poor little figure feverish and miserable, and it makes my heart melt inside.

How much sadness there is in life, nevertheless one must not get melancholy, and one must seek distraction in other things, and the right thing is to work, but there are moments when one only finds rest in the conviction: “Misfortune will not spare me either.”

Goodbye, write soon and believe me,
Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 17 September 1883

Dear Theo,

Your letter just arrived, so I know that the mail will reach me regularly.

Some days ago I wrote you a line to tell you a few things about the country around here. Everything is beautiful here, wherever one goes. The heath is much vaster than in Brabant, at least near Zundert or Etten - a little monotonous in the afternoon, and especially when the sun shines, but I would not miss that very effect, which I tried vainly to paint several times. Nor is the sea always picturesque; but those moments and effects, too, must be studied if one does not want to be deceived in their real character. Then the heath is sometimes far from attractive at that hot midday hour - it is aggravating, monotonous, and wearying like the desert, as inhospitable and hostile, so to speak. Painting it in that blazing light and rendering the planes vanishing into infinity makes one dizzy.

However, one must not suppose it has to be taken sentimentally; on the contrary, that is what it hardly ever is. In the evening when a poor little figure is moving through the twilight - when that vast sun-scorched earth stands out darkly against the delicate lilac hues of the evening sky, and the very last little dark-blue line at the horizon separates the earth from the sky - that same aggravating, monotonous spot can be as sublime as a Jules Dupré. And the figures, the men and the women, have that very same characteristic - they are not always interesting, but when one looks at them with patience, one is sure to discover the Millet-like quality.

Yesterday I found one of the most curious cemeteries I ever saw. Imagine a patch of heath surrounded by a hedge of thickly grown little pine trees, so that one would think it just an ordinary little pinewood. There is an entrance, however, a short avenue, and then one sees a number of graves overgrown with grass and heather. Many of them marked with white posts bearing the names.

Herewith a sketch [JH 396] of the study I painted of it [Lost]. I am making another study of a red sun between the little birches in a marshy meadow, from which the white evening haze is rising, and beyond which one can just see at the horizon a bluish-grey line of trees with a few roofs.[Lost]

It is a pity you have not heard anything from C. M.

Of course he *need* not do anything, but I think it rather rude never to send a word in reply.

But you must understand one thing - it is increasingly apparent to me that we are living in a time in which things have got rather mixed up (I personally don't think it *rather* but enormously mixed up, but I won't force that opinion on you). As to C. M., he as well as many others would be very polite to a stranger, but “on ne hait que ses amis.” [One only hates one's friends.] And as he is quite absorbed in the ebb and flow of trade and the art-dealing business, he is so engrossed by very abstract things that a very natural thing, such as, for instance, the fact that I have spoken to him and still do speak to him about my affairs strikes him as disagreeably as an open door that lets in a draught, for his thoughts are far, far away - always - and he knows no better than to free himself rather roughly, just as one slams the draughty door.

You will say that I suppose him to be very inconsiderate. Well, that is exactly what I do suppose, though I do not doubt that he *can* be very pleasant, but only when he has his attention fixed on the matter, which is certainly *not so* in my case, the more so because he seems to have certain unshakable opinions about me which I do not think I must try to change.

I hope to send you studies from here soon, when I have got some together; and just think over whether some of them would perhaps be the thing for Wisselingh.

My money is almost gone, and strictly speaking I had hoped to be able to lay in a small stock of colours and other materials, but well - we must cut our coat according to our cloth - though it's a pity there isn't a little more cloth. But by working on patiently, things may be mended. I am very glad though that I am here, for, boy, it is very beautiful.

I am longing to hear more from you. Perhaps I understand some things a little, but, above all, I know and trust you have acted well.

As for acting well, our circumstances sometimes make us different from what we should be if our intentions were not thwarted.

Personally, I would rather have stayed with the woman, though it would have been doubly difficult; but as far as I could see, it was impossible under the circumstances. And if I constantly imagine her as a phantom, it is not as a reproachful one, but I am melancholy because I did not have the means to act toward her as I should have wished. Times are hard, and you will have your share of it.

When I came here, I had with me a number of half-used tubes and a few new ones, just enough for about six studies, but certainly no more. So with the next money I will order some at once, enough for a few more studies. For the rest, I am drawing, but you know quite well that painting must be the main thing as much as possible.

I don't know how I shall manage to get the money changed here. If it can't be done here, I might get it changed in Assen, but if you could arrange it so that, say, twice - till I know my way around better and have found a bank in Assen, where I have not yet been - if twice you could send me Dutch money or, for instance, a postal order, that would be a good thing; otherwise, I might not know how to manage.

I hope you will be able to send no later than September 20, for I paid a week in advance as soon as I arrived here, so another will be due, and I shall have to pay again.

On the back of the page you will find a sketch of the little churchyard. The colouring there is very unusual. It is very beautiful to see the real heather on the graves. The smell of turpentine has something mystical about it, the dark stretch of pine wood border separates a sparkling sky from the rugged earth, which has a generally ruddy hue - fawn - brownish, yellowish, but everywhere with lilac tones.

It was not easy to paint. I will try some more aspects of it; with snow, for instance, it must be very curious.

I had already heard something about Liebermann, but your description, especially of his technique, gives me a better idea of him. His colour must be *infinitely* better than Henkes's (you express it very well ”slate colour dissolving into greyish-yellow and greyish-brown”). I understand it perfectly. *That* way of painting is delightful if one has mastered it. And the reason I want to paint a great deal is just because I should like to have a certain firmness and system in my technique (though I have heard many people say you must not have a system).

But he and several others have it, all right. From your description I see that he, Liebermann, must work somewhat in Herkomer's manner. Especially in systematically carrying through and analyzing those patches of light and shadow caused by sunbeams coming through the leaves, which dazzle many an eye.

The other day I saw the large engraving after Herkomer's “The Last Muster.” I suppose you have seen it too - what a manly thing! I should love to see the “Fille d'un mineur” by Jules Breton. There is still a coal mine in Courrières. When I went there on a rainy day, the miners were just going home through the mud, like a caravan of chimney sweeps; I remember one with an old capote, but the women, at least the ones I saw, did not wear men's clothes the way they do in the Borinage, where the “loques de fosse” [the “pit rags”] are the same for everybody.

Well, boy, your letter will be very welcome again. If you have not done so already, write a little word to C. M. to tell him that I am now *alone* here in Drenthe, and mention something about my plans. But if he does not answer, I think I must give it up.

Thanks for all the trouble you have taken.

It is beautiful grey weather this morning, no sun for the first time since I got here; but for all that, it will be just as fine, so I am going to set out. The people with whom I board are excellent; the man works at the railway depot, the fellow has something De Groux-like about him - a face that sometimes has the colour of red cabbage, a real coolie; the woman, very active and neat; 3 children. Probably they will give me a back garret for a studio. Goodbye, brother, best wishes, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

You know the address is: A. Hartsuiker, Innkeeper, Hoogeveen.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 22 September 1883

Dear brother,

I just received your letter, many thanks for it.

I will tell you a few more of my experiences here. In the first place, I had a letter from Rappard from West Terschelling, and he is very hard at work there, first having been here in Drenthe at Rolde, in the neighbourhood of Assen. I hope to go and see him there this winter, and make a few studies - unless it is difficult to cross to Terschelling; as far as I can make out, the journey there and back will cost about 3 guilders.

But it is certainly worth that much to be with a painter again, and it will break my solitude.

I long very much for your next letter, which I hope will come soon. Do not forget to tell me the result of your approach to C. M., whether you have told him I was here and if that letter also remained unanswered.

If so, I shall most certainly go and call on C. M. someday - not now, of course - to ask him to explain why he didn't answer. I will not write to him, but I am firmly resolved not to put up with his not answering, especially not answering *you*, and in addition, his not answering *me*.

I have never pretended that he was obliged to do something, nor do I now. I consider what he did or might do a favour, for which I have always thanked him; and for my part, I have given him studies for it, at least fifty in all, with the right to exchange them later.

This being so, I certainly need not put up with insults, and it is a decided insult that he did not acknowledge the receipt of the past packages of studies. Not a syllable.

And if it should happen that *your* letter remains unanswered too, then it would be cowardly to let the matter rest, and in that case I shall and *must* demand an explanation, and, as I said, even if I have to postpone it for some time, I shall do so very resolutely and by means of a personal visit. I would certainly not drop the matter in case he should be unwilling to receive me, for I am firmly resolved to get satisfaction. If he is willing to give it, all right then; but if he should refuse (I did not make use of a single discourteous expression in addressing him, I only wrote in a very cool vein), *if* he should refuse, then I shall tell him to give me - and I *have a right* to tell him so - an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and then in my turn I shall insult him without restraint, quite cold-bloodedly.

Listen well, brother, understand this once and for all - however desirable it may be to get some financial help, this is far from being the principal thing. The principal thing is that he goes too far in losing sight of my rights as a human being. Even if I were a stranger (I never mention our relationship, I never count on that), I could not endure being treated as a reprobate, being judged or accused of things without being heard myself. I have the right, *the full right*, to *demand* an answer, and I must take it as a gross insult if he remains silent.

I must speak about this without reserve, seeing that until now I had thought matters would come out right of their own accord, and I should receive a few words in reply. But this suffering in silence has its limits, and, as I said, beyond these limits it would be cowardly and unmanly of me not to make a stern protest.

So I beg you simply to tell me the result of your letter, then I shall know for myself what to do. I will not say another word about it, and even if more than a year passes over it, I will retain - just as untarnished, clear and bright as at this moment - the same conviction that I must have an explanation, and I will not rest before I have settled this matter with him in some way or other.

I believe you will approve of this feeling, even more so if you knew exactly what happened between him and me years ago, when I was very skeptical about the plan of studying, whether the promise to carry it through was sincere and well considered. I then thought that they had made the plan rashly and that I had approved of it rashly. And in my opinion it always remains an excellent thing that a stop was put to it then, which I brought about on purpose and arranged so that the shame of giving it up fell on me, and on nobody else. You understand that I, who have learned other languages, might have managed also to master that miserable little bit of Latin - which I declared, however, to be too much for me. This was a blind, because I then preferred not to explain to my protectors that the whole university, the theological faculty at least, is, in my eyes, an inexpressible mess, a breeding place of Pharisaism.

That I did not lack courage, I tried to prove by going to the Borinage, where life was certainly much harder than it would have been for me if I had become a student.

I thought that C. M., for instance, might have understood me better, and I have all the more reason to think him inconsiderate when I think how he has treated me with a certain suspicion since then. *Then* and *now* I have kept back a lot of things I might have said, but when the time comes for me to attack him, he will feel in his conscience, whatever he may say, that neither in the past nor at present have I ever committed a base action towards him, so that there are no reasonable grounds for this insult of not answering. The more so as it would have been better if, from the moment I went to The Hague, we had let bygones be bygones, and all had been forgiven and forgotten, and we had decided to be on good terms with each other, as I told His Honour at the time. But, brother, I do *not* say peace *at any price*, and I prefer an unpleasant explanation to a poor-spirited letting things slide, whenever this would really be poor-spirited.

But be assured that I shall not mention you, although it is a fact that if he will not undo his insulting you (I have the impression he is inaugurating the same policy toward you), it makes my resolve to have it out with His Honour inexorable, and it is my firm intention to tell him a lot of home truths. Only I promise you that I shall seem to be speaking for myself alone, as if I did not know anything about you.

I have the deepest contempt for this mysterious, sphynxlike silence, and I hereby declare to you, I find it anything but straight and honest or upright. It may be like the general politics of the present day, I know that very well, but you know that I don't agree with the general politics of the present day, because I consider them mean and carrying all the signs of decadence which will lead to a regular periwig and pigtail period! One might almost weep over what is now spoiled on every side; what our predecessors gave their honest labour to is now neglected and abandoned in a cowardly way. The time we live in is perhaps outwardly a little more respectable than the one that is past, but the nobleness is disappearing too fast, so that one no longer expects from the future the same great things which they did in the past. Well, everybody must find his own way.

Now, to change the subject (but it was necessary to deal with this matter, though I do not like writing about it in the slightest), I come back to my experiences here. The more I walk around here, the better I like Hoogeveen, and I do not doubt that it will remain so.

Even without C. M.'s help. And I am afraid this will be the case, in the long run it will be cheaper here than in The Hague. But without C. M.'s help, I shall have to stint myself for a certain time before I can carry out my plans. And perhaps, after all, nothing will be lost by it.

But the fact is that I need money, and a supply of colours and various other things, before I can expect any good results from a ramble through the southeast corner of Drenthe.

But in six months, for instance, I hope to have saved up enough, and in the meantime I shall be able to make some things here. So for the present I will not go farther, but stay here and work in the neighbourhood. I will try to save some money for two trips, one to the southeast district, one through the moors between here and Assen. And I hope to combine the visit to friend Rappard with the latter excursion northward, and to stay awhile in Terschelling, at his inn called “The

Shiplet."

It would be too reckless to undertake these two excursions if one did so without a stock of materials and without taking the necessary precautions. But with patience they will be possible, for I see clearly enough that I have fewer expenses here than in The Hague. And before undertaking them, I want to pay back Rappard, though it may be that later I shall borrow some more from him after having seen him, and when I know for sure that it will help me make something in particular.

At first I had some bad luck with my models on the heath; they laughed at me, and made fun of me, and I could not finish some studies of the figure I had started because of the unwillingness of the models, notwithstanding that I had paid them well, at least by local standards.

However, I did not give up, and on that same spot I concentrated on one single family, from which I can now have an old woman, a girl, and a man, and I hope they will remain willing. I have made a few studies of the heath which I shall send you when they are dry, and I have also started a few watercolours. And I began some pen drawings too, just with a view to painting, because with the pen one can enter into such details as are impossible in painted studies, and it is advisable to make two studies, one solely drawn for the composition and one painted for the colour. That is to say, if it is possible and circumstances permit, this is the way to put vigour into the painted studies later on.

The heath is splendid, and there are marshy meadows that often remind me of Th. Rousseau.

Well, I can tell you that the country air and life here are doing me a lot of good. Oh, if only the poor woman could have enjoyed it too. I think of her with such tender regret - though my common sense tells me clearly that it is impossible under the circumstances.

I am worried about her because I have not heard anything, and must conclude that either she did not want or was not able to do the things I advised her to do. I can hardly even write to her, because in the first place, as long as she continues to live in Bagijnestraat, I know that my letter will probably be opened by her brother or her mother; and in the second place, as long as she lives there, I do not *want* to have anything to do with them, *not even with her*. Well, perhaps I may hear something yet, but if not, it will give me a melancholy feeling. I had hoped to have news from an address other than Bagijnestraat, namely that she had started a small laundry with her mother.

Oh, Theo, if she hadn't had any family, she would have behaved so much better. Women of her kind are certainly bad, but in the first place they are infinitely - oh, infinitely more to be pitied than condemned; and in the second place they have a certain passion, a certain warmth, which is so truly human that the virtuous people might take them as an example, and I for my part understand Jesus's words when He said to the superficially civilized, the respectable people of His time, “The harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.”

Women like her can be thoroughly bad (I do not speak here of the Nanas, hot blooded and voluptuous, but of the more nervous, reflective temperaments among them), women like her quite justify Proudhon's saying, “La femme est la désolation du juste” [Woman is the desolation of the just]; they do not care at all for what we call reason, and they act straightway and wickedly against it. I know that, but on the other hand they have that truly human feeling, so that one cannot but like them and cannot but spare them, and it makes one feel there is some good in them, a something very good even though one cannot define it otherwise than as a “je ne sais quoi qui fait qu'on les aime après tout” [I don't know what makes one like them after all].

Gavarni was quite serious when he said, “Avec chacune que j'ai quittée, j'ai senti quelque chose se mourir en moi.” [With every one of them whom I have left I felt something die within me.] And the most beautiful saying and the *best* I know about women is the one you also know, “O femme que *j'aurais* aimée” [O woman whom I *might* have loved], and one should like to enter eternity with it - without wanting to know any more about it than that. I know that there are women absurd enough to be entirely governed by ambition (they do even more harm with it than men). Lady Macbeth is the archetype of such; these women are dangerous, and notwithstanding their charm, one must avoid them, or one becomes a scoundrel, and in a short time finds oneself face to face with a terrible evil one has committed and can never repair. But that was not the case with the one whom I was with, though she was vain, as we all are at times; the only thing I felt in the beginning was, Poor, poor, poor creature, and I still feel it at the end. Bad? que soit? but who is there that is good in these times? What man feels himself so pure that he can set himself to judge? Far from it. Delacroix would have understood her, I say, and I sometimes think God's mercy will understand her even better.

As I told you, the little boy was very fond of me, and when I was already on the train, I still had him on my lap. And so I think we parted from both sides with inexpressible sadness, but not more than that.

I tell you, brother, I am not good from a clergyman's point of view. I know full well that, frankly speaking, prostitutes are bad, but I feel something human in them which prevents me from feeling the slightest scruple about associating with them; I see nothing very wrong in them. I haven't the slightest regret about any past or present association with them. If our society were pure and well regulated, yes, then they would be seducers; but now, in my opinion, one may often consider them more as sisters of charity.

And *now*, as in other periods when civilization is in a decline, the corruption of society has turned all the relations of good and evil upside down, and one falls back logically upon the old saying, “The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”

Like you, I have visited “Père Lachaise.” I have seen there graves of marble, for which I have an indescribable respect. I feel the same respect before the humble tombstone of Béranger's mistress, which I looked for on purpose (if I remember correctly, it is in a corner behind his own), and there I particularly remembered Corot's mistress too. Silent muses these women were, and in the emotion of those gentle masters, in the intimacy, the pathos of their poetry, I always feel a woman's influence everywhere.

I am speaking rather seriously in this letter, not because I think Father's feelings and opinion wrong in everything - far from it; in many things you will do well to follow Father's advice. We spoke about Father during your visit here, as you will remember, and also at the moment of your departure - but I can now express in clear terms what I felt only vaguely at the time: *If* you speak with Father, then think of Corot at the same time; then you will be able to avoid certain extremes, to which Father is far too much inclined; but as I see it, provided there is less inflexibility, Father's advice is generally sound, and I myself have taken it more than once. But I just want to point out that Father and many others *do not know* that besides their own righteous lives - for Father's life is righteous - there are other righteous lives in a milder spirit, like Corot's, Béranger's, for instance. At all events you, and I too, feel this more strongly. Because Father and others *do not know this*, they are often hopelessly mistaken in their judgement of certain things, mistakes of the kind that, for instance, C. M. makes, who feels sure that De Groux is a bad man, in which, however sure he may be of it, he is mistaken.

I will tell you another thing now, to prove to you that I am not speaking abstractly, but about things of foundation and substance.

Do you want an example of somebody who origionally possessed an ordinary good Dutch character and feeling, and yet has since modified that feeling, having thought better of it, and who, I think, will modify it even more? Then I mention as an example Rappard, who now is already much more gentle and humane than when I first became acquainted with him. In my opinion, he has improved greatly, though he was good already; but I am afraid that not everybody will think so, and that he has been in conflict about it already. It is true he was good already, but still he became dissatisfied with *that*, and is now deeper and more humane than he was. It has not made his life easier - he used to have less inner struggle - I am sure of that, for I used to call him jokingly “the tranquil conscience,” and teased him about it, which I no longer do at all now, because I see a revolution has taken place in him. He is a *little less* elegant, and he is much less superficial as a man, and a certain germ of genius has begun to develop, and he has sailed clear of the cliff of “withering.”

As to people who honestly seek the best, I think what Hugo says so true: *Il y a le rayon noir et il y a le rayon blanc.* [There is a black ray and there is a white ray.] In my opinion, Father has more the rayon noir and Corot has more the rayon blanc, but both have a rayon d'en haut.

So I do not call anybody we mentioned bad, quand même I do not; but I say that the rayon noir has a perilous side. And as I have more than once thought over what you said on the station platform when you went away, I now say by way of explanation of what I could not find words for at the time: I know Father is Father, but there is something apart from that, namely what we may call the rayon blanc. And in this I find more positive, more veritable peace, and my attention is much more fixed on it.

As to Millet, he is, above all others, the man who has this white light. Millet has a gospel, and I ask you, isn't there a difference between a drawing of his and a nice sermon? The sermon becomes black by comparison, even supposing the sermon to be good in itself.

I know that you too are having a hard struggle these days, though I do not know exactly how or what it is. At all events I tell you exactly what I think about some things out of sympathy, because I, too, have had a hard struggle, and have it still.

And more and more I wish this white light were yours. Thanks for what you sent me, and a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 24 September 1883

[Postcard]
Dear Theo,
Today I send you by parcel post three studies which I hope are dry enough; however, if they stick to the sheet of paper I put over them as a precaution, sponge them off with tepid water. The paint on the smallest one especially has sunk in a lot. In a week or so brush it over with the white of an egg, or with a little varnish in a month, to restore the colour. I send them to you to give you an idea of the work, which will be better as I go along, you know.

I forgot to reply to what you wrote about sending the money; for the present I beg you to send it by postal order, as you did last time, till I have found an exchange office; but deduct the expenses.

I had a letter from home. Father had been unwell after having a fall. I hope it is not more serious than they wrote - do you know anything more about it?

Last week I went farther into the peat fields - splendid scenery. I think it is more and more beautiful here, and I intend to stay in this neighbourhood from now on. For it is so beautiful here that it will require a lot more study to render it, and only very elaborate work can give an exact idea of the way things are basically in their serious, sober character. I have seen superb figures, but I repeat, a scenery that has so much nobility, so much dignity and gravity, must be treated after deep reflection and with patience and steady work. Therefore, I must attack things as if I had come here merely to get a glimpse of them; but if everything goes well, and if we have some luck, it goes without saying that I shall stay here for good.

Do write again soon. I long to hear from you, for I feel gloomy, notwithstanding the beautiful scenery. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Remember me to Wisselingh when you meet him, and tell him I am here.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 26 September 1883

Dear brother,

As I feel the need to speak out frankly, I cannot hide from you that I am overcome by a feeling of great anxiety, depression, a je ne sais quoi of discouragement and despair more than I can tell. And if I cannot find comfort, it will be too overwhelming.

I take it so much to heart that I do not get on better with people in general; it worries me a great deal, because so much of my success in carrying out my work depends on it.

Besides, the fate of the woman and the fate of my poor little boy and the other child cut my heart to shreds. I would like to help them still, and I cannot. I am at a point where I need some credit, some confidence and warmth, and, look here, I find no confidence. You are an exception, but it makes me feel even more how hopeless everything is just because you have to bear the brunt of it all.

And if I look at my equipment, everything is too miserable, too insufficient, too dilapidated. We have gloomy rainy days here, and when I come to the corner of the garret where I have settled down, it is curiously melancholy there; through one single glass pane the light falls on an empty colour box, on a bundle of worn-out brushes; in short, it is so curiously melancholy that fortunately it also has a comical aspect, enough not to make one weep over it, but to take it gaily. For all that, it is very disproportionate to my plans, very disproportionate to the seriousness of my work - so here is an end to the gaiety.

What can I say? Last year ended with an even greater deficit than I told you, for I have already paid off more than I told you about, *including Rappard*, but there is a new debt to Rappard, and that weighs on me most because he is a friend, and though for the moment I have paid off everything that was the slightest urgent, I am faced by the fact that I cannot buy colours because I still have to pay for the old ones, or, rather, I dare not take anything on credit, because after some time that would run up a high bill again. You know yourself how we were not exactly in a mood to say more during your visit, but now I declare to you that The Hague has been too much for me, and that I had put off the separation again and again, for one unshakable reason, even though the deficit was unavoidable if I persisted.

Rather than part from her, I would have risked another effort by marrying her and going to live in the country - not, however, without telling you how things were. But I felt sure that this was the straight way, notwithstanding even temporary financial objections; not only might it have saved her, but it would also have put an end to my own great mental anguish, which has now unfortunately been doubled. And I would rather have drained the cup to the dregs.

I do not say I should have been happier or unhappier if either Father or you had been able to feel the same way, and if our rôles had been reversed, you in my place, I in yours, I do not know whether I should have been able to act differently than you have done; but I repeat, it might have saved her. So I look upon it as a decision which did not depend on you both, but on myself (except that I cannot give myself my father's permission to marry, this one point lies beyond my power, and Father replied to my direct question with generalities, in which no vestige of permission could be found). And so I *have* decided, for the very reason that I was already in debt, and that the future was dark - but this decision brings little relief, and does not remove the exhaustion brought about by a year of too many cares, and a bleeding heart and a void and feeling of disappointment and melancholy also remain which are not easily cured.

It is true I am here now, and as to the finances, I have almost made up the deficit, and after a time I will have made it up entirely, and nature is beautiful here, more so than I expected.

But I am far from being suitably and comfortably settled, for the glimpse I gave you of my little garret is taken from nature.

If I had known everything beforehand, I would have gone to these parts with the woman last year, when she left the hospital; then there would have been no deficit, and then we should not have parted, for she is less guilty in her bad behaviour than her family, which has employed all kinds of mean intrigues, ostensibly for her benefit, but actually the reverse. Besides, I have sometimes wondered whether the mother may not have been backed by a priest, for more has been done on their part to influence the woman than I can explain, particularly because I have not heard anything from her, though I told her before I left that I would send my address to the carpenter next door as soon as I should know it myself. I did send it to him, begging him to pass it on to her, yet I have not heard anything, except from that same carpenter, that she had come to take away all her things (after all, more than she brought with her). Now you can understand that I am anxious about her fate, though I believe if she were simply in need, she would have written; but now there must be something basically wrong. You will understand how I feel about it. I am rather afraid that her family is telling her, He will certainly write, and then - he will be under our thumb, in short, they are gambling on my weakness, and I will *not* walk into that trap.

So today I wrote, not to her, but to the carpenter, that he must see to it that she gets my address, but that I will *not* write her first, and *if* she writes, I shall see how things really are.

I would definitely try to help her if the family disowned her altogether. But since she is in fact backed by her family, it is clear enough to me that she is in agreement with them, and has been for a long time, so that I may not and cannot have any more to do with it; or if, as I thought, there is a Catholic priest behind it all, she will get help, but only on condition that she have no dealings with me; this then being the reason for their silence.

This much I can tell you, however - I am not yet so far that I can resign myself to the idea of separation; at present I am very, very worried about her fate, just because she has left me in the dark about it. And besides, these last few days I have been overwhelmed by forebodings about the future, and also about the miserable state of my stock of painting materials, the possibility of doing the most necessary, useful things the way they ought to be done. Because from the very first I have found so much beauty here that, if I could afford it, I would send for my things in The Hague, and I would fit this very same garret up as a studio (by making a little more light) or I would hunt up some other room. And then I should like to replenish and renew all my materials.

I wish I could do that thoroughly for once, and if somebody would help me to do that, my greatest cares would be relieved. But now, either everything falls on your shoulders or I find nobody who trusts me; this is the circle which my thoughts describe, and I see no way out. A painter who has no means of his own cannot do without a rather large credit, a credit which not only the painter's profession demands, but which I think the shoemaker's, the carpenter's and the blacksmith's profession would demand equally if they wanted to establish themselves or had to move to a new place.

It is especially this rainy weather, which we may expect to continue for months, which handicaps me so much.

And then, what shall I say? - sometimes my thoughts go this way: I have worked and economized, and yet I have not been able to avoid getting into debt; I have been faithful to the woman, and yet I had to leave her; I have hated intrigues, and yet I have neither credit nor any money. I do not think lightly of your faithful help, on the contrary, but I cannot help asking myself if I must not tell you, “Leave me to my fate, there is no help for it; it is too much for one person, and there is no chance of getting help from any other side. Isn't that proof enough that we must give it up?”

Oh, boy, I am so melancholy - I am in a splendid country, I want to work, I absolutely need it - at the same time, I am absolutely at a loss as to how to overcome the difficulties, when I think that all my things are in a most miserable condition, and that I am here without a studio or anything, and shall be handicapped on all sides until I can mend matters.

The models refuse to pose when there are other people around, and that is the main reason why a studio is necessary.

I now have the very same feeling I had when I started a studio in The Hague: “If I don't do it now, I shall never be able to manage.” And as for The Hague, I am not sorry I acted then as I did; I only wish that I had come here a year and a half sooner, and had started a studio here instead of back there.

Father wrote to ask if he could help me, but I have kept my cares to myself, and I hope that you too will not mention it to Father. Father has his own cares, and if he knew that I was not getting on well, it would worry him even more. So I wrote Father only that I like it here exceedingly, which is absolutely true as far as the scenery goes. As long as the weather was fine I did not mind the troubles because I saw so many beautiful things; but now that it has been pouring incessantly these last days, I see more clearly how I have got stuck here, and how handicapped I am. What can I do? Will it get better or worse in time? I do not know, but I cannot shake off a feeling of deep melancholy.

In every life some rain *must* fall
And days be dark and dreary.

It is true and it cannot be otherwise, but the question is, isn't the number of dark and dreary days sometimes too great?

All the same, I had models again in the barn, but with very unfavorable light. Well, I do not refuse to do anything that can be done, *but can I do what is necessary under the circumstances*? And this letter is a cry for more breath, and if this winter is the way it has been these last days, I should be badly off. It is beautiful, yes, very beautiful with the rain, but how can one work, how can one, when so many things are lacking?

Goodbye, boy, I wish everything would come out all right, but we need to find more sympathy from others, otherwise I am afraid it won't. I hope to hear from you soon. *Did you receive the studies*? With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 27 September 1883

Dear Theo,

This morning the weather was better again, so I went out to paint. But it was impossible, I was missing four or five colours, and I came home so miserable. I am sorry to have risked myself so far without a sufficient supply. I know from experience how it ends when one undertakes such an expedition, without knowing whether one will get an answer to, or whether people will listen to, reasonable, rational demands.

You remember, perhaps, how it was with me in the Borinage. Well, I am rather afraid it would be the same thing here all over again, and I must have some security before I risk myself further, otherwise I shall go back (Oh, you know, that's what I say, but I really want to stay). I did not see any good at the time, nor do I now, in reaching such a point of destitution, in literally having no roof over my head, in having to wander and wander forever like a tramp, without finding either rest or food or covering anywhere - besides, without any possibility of working.

See for yourself how far it is from Mons to Courrières on the map. I went that way on foot, from Valenciennes to Mons and back, with not quite two francs in my pocket - three days and three nights in the beginning of March, in wind and rain, without a roof over my head.

It is just these antecedents, brother, which I have not yet come to, of course - but should come to if I risked myself too far without security, if I did not put my affairs in reasonable order. I repeat, if I risked myself far into the country without anybody to back me up.

Before I begin - I do not distrust or suspect you, but it is just a measure of common sense - I repeat, before I begin (and I ask it because not very long ago you wrote me about being distressed yourself, and being afraid of troubles and calamities in the future) can you assure me that the usual remittance will not be lacking? And at the same time - though that may be sufficient, and I should not need more under certain circumstances - I tell you, the condition on which the usual money loan will be sufficient is that one is well equipped to begin with, and starts with a supply of certain things. I, who like to have the initiative because sometimes a proof of sincerity is needed, a fact proving that one does not deal in words but in actions - though I went as far as Drenthe, I shrink, not from taking the first step, but from taking the next one without being sure of my footing.

Experience forces me to demand a definite fixed arrangement. If you had gone through what I suffered during that expedition in the Borinage, you would have learned to do exactly what I do in my case - what I see so distinctly and clearly now - recognizing as old acquaintances all the circumstances and things with which I have had to deal.

The expeditions I should want to make are impossible and foolish if undertaken without supplies. They are very precarious without a surplus of ready money for unforeseen circumstances.

In short, one must not undertake them without the thorough conviction that one will be hampered everywhere and always by people who stand staring, but are unwilling to lend a helping hand. One must expect to be distrusted at every inn - like any poor peddler (for that is what they take one for). Often one has to pay the money for board and lodging in advance - as I have to do here - to get them to take one in for pity's sake. And so everything is *prose,* everything is *calculation* in regard to a plan for an excursion, which, after all, has poetry for its end. I never told you this as plainly as I do now, and if I do so now, I assure you it is not in the least because I distrust you, but because since I planned this journey, I have not spoken to you as seriously as I do now about the obstacles connected with the money you might have available or might be able to find for it. I must mention it now because, though in one of my last letters I told you that everything here was better than I expected - which is really the case - nevertheless in this inn I find drawbacks as to light, space, opportunity to work with a model, and therefore - though I can put up with it if need be, and will do so if it *must* be - I am thinking of pushing on farther into the country, notwithstanding the bad season, not doubting that wherever I go, I shall find at least just as good an opportunity to work as here, and I hope even more space, *etc.* I have been here about two weeks now, and I speak from experience when I tell you that in many, in almost all, respects my materials and outfit and supplies prove to be insufficient.

Hoogeveen itself is classed as a town on the map, where it is marked with a red dot, but in reality it isn't a (it doesn't even have a tower). So I cannot get anything in the way of drawing materials. If I go deeper into the country, I shall be even more handicapped - and I must be prepared for anything, or, I repeat, it would be sheer madness. I should not be in such a hurry if this season's advance did not spur me to the greatest speed. Remember that time is passing, and perhaps two weeks will have gone by again before I can get an answer from you.

Before the real winter comes (and it will be there at all too soon!! I really do not see how to manage), I should like to try to get some better quarters - even farther out on the heath. And also my state of mind, which is too gloomy - so that I feel an urgent need to go on working steadily, this being the very best remedy and distraction - forces me to insist on better equipment. And that would remain exactly the same, even if I stayed here.

I am bargaining for two lots of old tubes, which are just damaged a little on the outside, one from Leurs, the other from Furnée, who is that land surveyor's father; and in addition, I should need brushes, canvas, watercolours and Whatman paper.

If I told you it could wait, I should be lying, for it is absolutely necessary to have it at once.

If it cannot be, it cannot - but then I must stop working.

And I should not have grown so melancholy even now if my bad equipment had not handicapped me so much.

If I could find a measure of encouragement and what's strictly necessary, I think I could manage all right here. The country is very beautiful - today I saw a funeral in a barge, it was very fascinating - six women wrapped in coats in the boat, which the men pulled along the canal through the heath, the clergyman in a three-cornered hat and breeches, exactly like the figure by Meissonier, following on the other side. There are all kinds of curious things here.

You must not be angry with me for writing the way I do. I came here in too much of a hurry, and only now I feel what I lack, and that I acted rather rashly - but what else could I do? I feel inexpressibly melancholy without my work to distract me, as you will understand, and I must work and work hard, I must forget myself in my work, otherwise it will crush me. I repeat, I do not distrust you in the slightest, but my experience forbids me to undertake an excursion without knowing what I can count on. So speak absolutely openly, for my decision depends on it, and, at all events, I will suit my actions to the circumstances. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

If I had known beforehand that I should have to separate from the woman after all, I should probably have separated six months ago - but even though I still have to smart for it, I am glad I was faithful to her too long rather than too short a time, and I did not want to act on my own responsibility before I had spoken to you personally. When you think of last year, do not forget that the reason for the expenses being too high was less our personal needs than the enormous prices in The Hague. If I had known everything - I could have economized 200 guilders on rent, even if I had taken this whole inn with garden and all, and lo! The whole deficit would have been made up out of one single item. Indeed, the woman is quite innocent of my deficit, and so am I, since it was impossible to act differently in The Hague - but if I had known it, I would have moved here much sooner. I reproach myself with this blunder, or rather this ignorance.

But last year was not entirely fruitless or useless - it was a year of hard work, and I look back on it calmly after all. As to my not having my hands as free as I should wish at present - in no case shall I have them free, even if assistance came; for by then a great part of the autumn will already have passed - and before winter I shall have finished only a portion of those studies which I had hoped to get done. As to the present difficulties, only patience will clear them up here - all the same, I should like to undertake another trip between now and Christmas. Let's make the most of our time, for loss of time is most expensive. In The Hague I have more than 70 painted studies - if I had made them here, they would have been more use to me.

I must tell you frankly that lately I have been sorry, and am still, that I paid off my debt with the money you sent. It is true I was in debt, but none of those I had recently paid were exactly pressing me for money then - though they did some time ago - and I might have put it off a little longer. I do not know whether one may not think of oneself first in order to keep one's plans and one's energy free, for I repeat, I shall not be able to paint the necessary studies before winter comes, and who will thank me for it?

I shall reproach myself with it, and be miserable about it. It's true that since your visit I have paid Leurs over 30 guilders. I might get credit if it were ordinary colours, but I am bargaining for old tubes, which I can get at 33 1/3% discount, but payment in cash. It is the same thing with Furnée, who is that land surveyor's father. I have his assurance that he trusts me, but the fact is that I generally used to pay him cash - and I see no reason to change it, as I should then seem to change my line of conduct, and it might influence our friendship; and what I wanted to buy from him is also a part of that same lot, about half of it, so it is again a question of cash. Then brushes, another paint box, a portfolio for studies, and other things - if I pay cash for them, I get more favorable conditions, and shall have no further worries about it; and if I have no further worries, I can begin to settle with Rappard.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 3 October 1883

Dear Theo,

This time I am writing to you from the remotest corner of Drenthe, where I have arrived after an endless passage by barge through the heathland.

I don't think I shall be able to do justice to the countryside because words fail me, but imagine the banks of the canal as miles and miles of, say, Michels or Th. Rousseaus, Van Goyens or Ph. de Konincks.

Level planes or strips, varied in colour, that grow narrower and narrower as they approach the horizon. Accentuated here and there by a turf hut or small farmhouse or a few stunted beeches, poplars, oaks - peat stacked up everywhere and barges constantly passing by with peat or bulrushes from the marshes. Here and there skinny cows, subtle in colour, quite often sheep and pigs.

In general the figures that now and then put in an appearance on the flats are full of character; and sometimes they have an exquisite charm. I drew, amongst others, a little woman on the barge, wearing crape round her casque brooches because she was in mourning, and then a mother with a baby - the latter had a purple shawl over its head. [The headdress is a kind of golden casque worn by Frisian women. It consists of two oval plates with ornamental spirals at the temples. Over these plates is worn a cap of stiff lace with wide frills. Often this (costly) headgear is very becoming.] There are lots of Ostade types among them, physiognomies that put one in mind of pigs or crows, but now and then a little figure who is like a lily among the thorns.

In short, I am very pleased with this trip, for I am full of what I have seen.

This evening the heath was inexpressibly lovely. There is a Daubigny in one of the Boetzel Albums which conveys the effect precisely. The sky was of an inexpressibly delicate lilac-white - the clouds not fleecy, for they were joined together more, but in tufts covering the whole sky in tones of more or less lilac-grey-white, with a single small break through which the blue gleamed. Then, at the horizon, a glorious red streak, the surprisingly dark stretch of brown heath underneath and a host of little low-roofed huts against the brilliant red streak.

In the evening this heath often has the kind of effect the English call “weird” and “quaint.”

The fantastic silhouettes of Don Quixote-like mills or curious monsters of drawbridges are profiled against the vibrant evening sky. Such villages look wonderfully cosy in the evening sometimes, with the reflections of little lighted windows in the water, or in the mud and puddles.

Before I started out from Hoogeveen, I painted a few studies there, among others a large moss-roofed farm. For I had had paint sent from Furnée, as I thought on the subject like you wrote in your letter, that by absorbing myself in my work, and quite losing myself in it, my mood would change, and it has already greatly improved.

But at times - like those moments when you think of going to America - I think of enlisting for the East Indies; but those are miserable, gloomy moments, when one is overwhelmed by things, and I could wish you might see those silent moors, which I see here from the window, for such a thing calms one down, and inspires one to more faith, resignation, steady work. In the barge I drew several studies, but I stayed a while here to paint some. I am quite near Zweeloo, where, among others, Liebermann has been; and besides, there is a part here where you still find large, very old turf huts, that have not even a partition between the stable and the living room. I intend first of all to visit that part one of these days.

But what tranquillity, what expanse, what calmness in this landscape; one feels it only when there are miles and miles of Michels between oneself and the ordinary world. I cannot give you a permanent address as yet, as I do not exactly know where I shall be for the next few days, but by 12th October *I shall be at Hoogeveen*, and if you send your letter at the usual time *to the same address*, I shall find it there, on the 12th, at Hoogeveen.

The place where I am now is Nieuw Amsterdam.

Father sent me a postal order for ten guilders, which, together with the money from you, makes me able to paint a little now.

I intend to settle for a long time at the inn where I am now, if I can easily reach from there that district with the large old turf huts, as I should have better light and more space there. As to that picture you mention, by that Englishman, with the lean cat and the small coffin, though he got his first inspiration in that dark room, he would hardly have been able to paint it in that same spot, for if one works in too dark a room, the work usually becomes too light, so that when one brings it out to the light, all the shadows are too weak. I just had that experience when I painted from the barn an open door and a glimpse into the little garden.

Well, what I wanted to say is that there will be a chance to remove that obstacle too, for here I can get a room with good light, which can be heated in winter. Well, lad, if you do not think any more about America, nor I of Harderwijk [The place where Volunteers for the East Indian army enlisted] I hope things will work themselves out, I admit your explanation of C. M.'s silence may be right, but sometimes one can be careless purposely. On the back of the page you will find a few scratches. I write in haste, it is already late.

How I wish we could walk here together, and paint together. I think the country would charm and convince you. Adieu, I hope you are well and are having some luck. During this excursion I have thought of you continually. With a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 6-7 October 1883

Dear Theo,

After having nosed around this place for some days, I am writing to you again. Here it is so absolutely and entirely what I think beautiful, that means there is peace here.

There are other things I think beautiful - for instance, the drama - but that is everywhere, and there are not *only* Van Goyenesque effects here.

Yesterday I drew some decayed oak roots, so-called bog trunks (that is, oak trees which have perhaps been buried for a century under the bog, from which new peat had been formed; when digging the peat up, these bog trunks come to light).

These roots were lying in a pool, in black mud.

Some black ones were lying in the water, in which they were reflected, some bleached ones were lying on the black earth. A little white path ran past it all, behind that more peat, pitch-black. And a stormy sky over it all. That pool in the mud with those rotten roots was completely melancholy and dramatic, just like Ruysdael, just like Jules Dupré.

This is a scratch of the peat fields.

There are very often curious contrasts of black and white here, for instance, a canal with white sandy banks, across a pitch-black plain. In the above sketch you can see it too, black figures against a white sky, and in the foreground again a variation of black and white in the sand.

I saw an effect exactly like Ruysdael's bleaching fields at Overveen; in the foreground a high road overshadowed by clouds, then a low barren meadow, on which the light fell, and down below two houses (one with a slated roof, the other with red tiles). Behind it a canal and mounds of peat, varying in size according to the plane on which they stand; far away a silhouette of a small row of huts, and a little church spire, little black figures spreading linen out to bleach, a single mast of a barge sticking up between the mounds of peat. A grey stormy sky over all. I often think of Van Goyen on these misty mornings, the cottages are just like this, they have that same peaceful and naïve aspect.

I think I have found my little kingdom, you know.

“Coming events cast their shadows before,” is an English proverb.

I must repeat once more that I hope you feel perfectly sure, in hours of melancholy, that you are not without a friend. For I think I can assure you that you can trust me. Why do I repeat this? - because I have been thinking over what you wrote about America. And I cannot approve of that “plan quand même,” even if you had the finest connections there, for instance, with Knoedler or whomever you like. Though the thought may have crossed your mind only in a melancholy moment, though it is not exactly a plan - I do not believe it is - still it proves that you have your gloomy moments. And I can understand perfectly well - though I know nothing of the circumstances, but quite in general - that it is not very pleasant at Goupil's. Wisselingh told me the story of the firm in London, and I can only say that there is certainly an enormous difference between the house of Goupil & Co. as it *was* (for instance, when Uncle Vincent was still a partner, and not even during *his* last years) and as it is *now*.

This must be very unpleasant for persons like you, everything so much more disagreeable than in former years.

Personal activity, personal energy, Tersteeg has it, you have it, and at the same time you have a position; but in case of a *change*, it might not be of any use to you, and you would hurt yourself everywhere against “triomphe de la médiocrité, de la nullité, de l'absurdité.”

For instance, take Wisselingh who is strong-minded; very well, he keeps on his feet, but in no respect has he the active life Uncle Vincent has - why not? - because now other things are more important; and, for instance, if he were young *now*, Uncle Vincent would not be able to do *now* what he could do *then*, any more than *you* could *now* if *the present* were the *past*. Therefore I say, what's the fun of it? - at present one is bored - as , for instance, Wisselingh, as far as I can see, is enormously bored, because he cannot act.

If you have personal energy, do not let it wear out, do not let it rust; if things get rotten and one cannot rely on anything, then try something simpler. But I am so out of everything, I know so little about it directly - I think the few words I heard from Wisselingh about London are the only things I have heard about business in a year and a half, so I may be quite mistaken.

But some things seem so queer to me that in general I suppose business to be out of joint, though I do not know exactly where and how.

Now you will perhaps say, Yes, but your painter's business is even more wretched, unsafe, and there, too, it may happen that personal energy or activity cannot do everything, for instance provide one with food for some time. All right, admitting this to be true, but if it is a case of providing for the simplest needs, trying a spot where life is cheaper instead of the very expensive city life won't make things worse. If I had just a little luck; if I found a few friends for my work - then, yes, then I would speak quite differently still.

For the very reason that I owe my having been able to work on till now to you, I want to tell you that I do not doubt for a moment that you would consider it a delightful thing to have a handicraft; and though at first it might bring you into the most impossible and queer relations with your real position as far as life in general is concerned, the glimpse of the future would give you a “qu'est-ce que ça me fait” - a future which, though it does not entirely depend on personal activity, nevertheless has a more direct connection with it than trade, which is no handicraft.

In the beginning you would not have to be alone, and I assure you that this *shortens* the initial ineptitude enormously. It is a fatal thing that sometimes one has to plod for a whole year on a thing that might have been explained in two weeks by someone more advanced. It does depend on personal effort, but the road is easier or more difficult according to one's being alone or not. And the worst is when *one absolutely has to know* a thing, and on seeking information, has the other one turn his back on you. That is a terrible thing, but it does happen, and perhaps people call that “distinguished manners.” One is absolutely beaten then, and it is so painful to know in advance that one is sure to make a number of mistakes before finding out for oneself; all such losses of time and misery are expenditures which might have been avoided.

The result is that one never asks again, and will only depend on oneself; but it ought not to be so. Well, there are many things that ought “not to be so.” Enough of it; I only say, *If ever* you change (though there may be no question of it as yet), then become a painter. And then spend your early days together with me, though I do not know as much as many others and I am still ignorant on many points.

I shall be able to speak much, much more definitely about it if I succeed in getting some more stability in my affairs this year. When C. M. comes, talk it over with him. I do wish that things would become a little easier, especially for you, through relations with him.

A thing that would help you a good deal is that you would be coming fresh from the world of art, from which I had been excluded a long time when I began.

For it is necessary to thoroughly feel the link between nature and pictures in general. I have had to renew that in myself. I hope to make something of the women on the moor on the enclosed little sketch, and I am going to the same field again.

Adieu, boy, but you must not think about going to America any more.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

And you must not think “I am not an artist,” for as far as universal feelings of energy and intellect are necessary, rest assured that you possess them.

As I told you, I shall be at Hoogeveen on October 12, but after that I shall come back here.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 29-15 Oct-Nov 1883

Dear Theo,

After having written about it, I have thought it over out on the heath. The same thing I had thought over so often already. Among the old masters as well as among the modern ones, one often meets with the same instance of two brothers being painters, in whose work there is more resemblance than difference. They are quite different, yet they complement each other perfectly. Take, for instance, the Ostades, Adriaan and Isaac. Well, you know yourself many other cases. The Van Eycks too.

And in our time, Jules and Émile Breton, to name only a few. And already I have so often thought how delightful it must be to work together, and how productive the two can be together, just because one encourages the other, and saves the other so many periods of melancholy.

I cannot repeat to you often enough, boy, that when one is thirty, one is just *beginning*. Look at the biographies of artists, even many who had painted from their earliest years changed only then, found their own personality only then. I only ask you to take those things into consideration. I know one is faced with the problem “bread.”

The argument, I must eat, I must live somewhere, is not wrong; on the contrary, I think it absolutely correct.

Very well, but to everybody who says, “I haven't the means,” I put one question; that question is: “Friend, what are your claims, how high is your standard? Is your character such that you think, for instance, like Corot, who didn't mind buying a loaf at the baker's and eating it in the fields when he couldn't pay for a dinner? In short, can you be contented with little and not care in the least for the conventions of life?”

You are exactly that way basically, and would put up with many things. And though the “bread” problem may not be quite settled then, it will be cleared up a great deal. When I think of the possibility of your coming here sooner or later, and I begin to calculate, I arrived at the conclusion that together we shall need little more or no more than I alone.

And besides, I firmly believe that your presence would be a stimulus to me in so many things, that it would be such a help to me to talk and discuss things and exchange views with you that I should be able to work better.

Now hardly a day passes that I do not make something. As practice makes perfect, I cannot but make progress; each drawing one makes, each study one paints, is a step forward. It's true, it is the same as on a road, one sees the church spire in the distance, but as the ground undulates, when one thinks one has arrived, there is another bit one had not seen at first, and which must still be covered. But one gets nearer and nearer. After a longer or shorter time, I do not know how long, I shall arrive at the point of beginning to sell.

All right, once I am so far, it won't be by halves, for I don't work by halves. And I try my hand at different things simultaneously, therefore I shall have more than one string to my bow, more than one arrow; that is what I, for my part, can throw into the Gulf called “bread.” Things may change for me, and though I do not sell now, notwithstanding all my drudging - I repeat: things may change.

We should need, let us say, at least 150 francs a month as a minimum, preferably 200 francs, we should have to find credit for that, not without a guarantee, but our work would be that guarantee. Now, let us suppose we should have to work for two years before we begin to earn well, more than we spend, so that we can pay off our debts.

200 francs a month in two years is 2400 francs. Well, let's put it at 1500 guilders.

This may serve as a guarantee - I am now thinking of you and me working together, that we ourselves have invested a great deal already, and have laid a certain foundation. My skill is my own, some things of drawing, even some things of painting, are firmly rooted and were not acquired by pure chance, but by honest work. I call this another guarantee that we do not build castles in the air.

Look here, Theo, I shouldn't be able to talk with you if you didn't possess a certain self-confidence, a certain self-knowledge. I have told you before that I think you are an artist at heart, and I am more and more strengthened in that opinion. You will say, I cannot make anything - no, of course not *now*, but after a year's work, when the first difficulties have somewhat cleared up, you will feel with the greatest serenity that, yes, perhaps not everybody can become a painter by sheer drudging when he lacks a certain predisposition to it - but in yourself you would perceive that disposition to mediate, to think and analyze, to *feel* the beauty in nature, and discover that you can be an artist for the very reason that you possess both diligence and energy, which now, however, are working in another direction, so that nothing is left for art. But if that same diligence became the motive power of your sense of beauty, the result would be a true painter.

I must come back for a moment to that question of “bread.” A great many things which are said to be impossible are possible after all.

Permit me to suppose for a moment that you had arrived at a point where you had to make a change - the time hasn't come yet, I'm only supposing it for the moment - then you will get a situation in some other concern; all right, but what ought to be bright is not the near future, but the deeper background, the horizon. And to me this background seems to be mighty dark. Now if you become a painter, look at the more distant future, the deeper background - there is no darkness in it - it is only in front of you, in the immediate foreground.

Your personal energy may turn you into a painter, and others will not be able to prevent it, but it might well be that this “personal energy” in the art-dealing business would not be exactly the commodity which certain employers, new ones included, would desire, particularly at moments when they are in a scrape.

For all of your personal energy, you might find yourself in the same straits as Wisselingh did, who most certainly is energetic, and who was with Goupil too.

I said, many things which are said to be impossible are possible after all. If circumstances made it unavoidable, why shouldn't we go and live with Father? I do not say for nothing, but in case we should not earn enough to stick it out here in Drenthe. We might get credit. But never mind that, and take the first possibility. It would be hard work, but by the pleasure of being together, by living together in that unutterably beautiful scenery, and especially the consciousness of being two craftsman, boy, how delightful it would be. So delightful that I hardly dare to think of it, yet cannot help doing so, though that happiness seems too great, for you as well as for myself, because we are not used to getting pleasure out of life, and feel that is rather more for others than for us.

We should need credit to the amount of 1500 guilders. I do not know where and how to get it. I will work out for you how we should use the money. We should make an arrangement for two years with my landlord here, perhaps pay a part in advance. I think that for 1000 guilders he would give us both board and lodging during those years, would let us have this room where I am living now - in short, we should be free from all domestic cares during those two years, and should be able to work steadily and quietly.

Two years are a pretty long time, are all that you would need under the circumstances to reach a certain height.

Then we shall have some money left to lay up a big stock of colours, to supply ourselves well.

Then there will be few things which can upset us or make us change our plans. We will be in for it then, and must go on. We will have insured our lives as to board and lodging, and will not be able to go back, but must, must, must go forward and win.

As to you, I think you must act differently than I did. That's past now. Up to the present I have acted as I thought best, but as for you, I wish you would start painting at once, *I know exactly what you would like to make here*.

I should like you to try your hand at landscape at once, in the spirit of *Michel*, which I see here all the time. It is absolutely Michel, *that's* what it is here. I feel sure that I can show you the way in this, because just now I tried things of the same kind; I do not pretend they are as good as Michel, but I daresay that when you are as far advanced as that, you will be able to find your own way.

As for me, *especially if you were here*, I should concentrate more and more on the figure.

I will just make a scratch of the landscapes which I have on the easel.

These are the kinds of studies which I should like you to try it once: to learn to look at the landscape in a big way, and seek its simple lines and contrasts of light and brown. The little sketch at the top is what I saw today, it was absolutely Michel. In reality that earth was superb. I don't think my study ripe enough yet, but I was struck by the effect, and as to light and shade, it was indeed as I draw it for you here.

The one at the bottom is a tender green little cornfield in the foreground, and withering grasses; behind the cottage, two piles of peat, again a glimpse of the heath, and a very light sky.

Look here, what I want to say is this: that's the kind of thing you ought to start with, and from the very beginning I believe you will do well not to draw exclusively. I mean everything I write you here in full, full earnest. I have thought it over so long.

If all had remained well at Goupil's, I should not have spoken about it, but under the circumstances it is only because of my own wretched financial position that I do not say much more positively: come here at once. If it were otherwise, I should not use more words than that.

The country is splendid, splendid, everything calls to you: paint! it is so full of character and so varied. Look here, boy, isn't it true that however things go, there are always financial obstacles, and where or how on earth can a time of struggle lead to a more definite peace? - to a great peace which nothing on earth can disturb. I for my part can say no better than that I give all my own studies as a pledge and guarantee for our giving back the money we shall absolutely need during the first two years. I think we must be able to find it. I have put down the minimum, because both you and I would live as economically as possible.

As for me, I have a lot of plans, but I do wish I had some 100 guilders to spend to replenish my painting materials. And I wish I knew for sure that I could stay here for two years, for instance. I now have so little security for the future, and I wish I knew for sure that I shall not have to leave again after some time. The plan which I have laid down here is open to changes.

But I think its basis remains, we must arrange things so that we can work in peace for two years.

After those two years I shall be so far that I can earn regularly, and hope to have regular work on such conditions that both you and I can go on in the same way.

The plan it is simple enough; people would gossip about you, too, but there would be six hours' walking distance of landscape à la Michel between their wretched little town of Hoogeveen and yourself, so it would not trouble you in the least, would it? You would be rid of everything, and in about your 30th year; even the house Goupil would seem like a dream to you, and you would hardly understand that once you were the head of the Gallery on the Boulevard, and were treated politely, always politely, by Monsieur the Director.

As to my coming to Paris, well, I think it's a long detour, though if you think it better, all right; but it depends so entirely on the change you are going to make, and if you change *in a way other* than by becoming a painter, I should be afraid that in the end it would have to happen after all, and that meanwhile I would again become more difficult. I cannot write differently than I do.

You are a man of business; for this very reason I do not think you will be so prejudiced as to reject all this. There are always, everywhere, financial obstacles and worries; one cannot avoid them anywhere, and after all this is something solid, as it will make you a handicrafts one. Is that taking a step backward? - no it is not! I think it is the right way. It would be a manly action, and action which demands foi de charbonnier. So I repeat: you must have that foi de charbonnier. Well, boy, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Do write again soon.

Think of Barbizon, that story is sublime. When those who originally started working there came there, by no means all of them were externally what they were basically. The country formed them, they only knew, It is no good in a city, I must go to the country. I suppose they thought, I must learn to work, become quite different, yes, the opposite of what I am now. They said, I am no good now, I'm going to renew myself in nature.

As for me, I reason in the same way, and though I should go to Paris if I absolutely had to, and to find something to do there - I think my future here infinitely, infinitely better.

Theo, your case is curious, hugely interesting. To have the courage to risk it -

look, for this you must have foi de charbonnier, quand même, in spite of everything. But now think with all coolness of your highly curious position. Now I cannot beat about the bush, my dear fellow - and take this in a friendly spirit - I shall have to say it the way things appear to me. You see your way in the art dealing business, which, as it appears to me, makes you something like Wisselingh, to mention a good one. I feel great respect for Wisselingh, I like him and all that, but *even now* I should like to tell him, Old fellow, go and be a painter, you are much too honest for today's art-dealing business, much too clever, *etc*. Now is not the right time for it. But on the contrary, if you will now persevere *more* vigorously, try to find *more* “personal energy” and “*your own handicraft*,” then say, I will not hesitate, I will take the risk, I will push off to the open sea. And you will immediately get a certain somber earnestness - something mighty serious will rise up within you - one looks at the quiet coast, all right, it is pretty enough - but the Secret of the depth, the intimate, serious charm of the ocean of an artist's life - with Something on High over it - will take hold of you. All right, you are no longer a Wisselingh - you are something quite different. Personally you say that however small a little ship may be in a marine by Jules Dupré, you are even smaller - but you are greater - you are an artist and you can do nothing - certainly, your act of surrender has already changed you - in this respect your own power or lack of power is of no importance. No, the renewal of life changes your whole character, changes your thoughts and opinions, changes them to such a degree that you prefer to be silent about it and to work. Your work is unbeautiful - all right, let it be unbeautiful - it will grieve you, but it will not discourage you - after a while you will see a hasty little sketch with a je ne sais quoi in it - fine, it this is the harbinger.

It varies - now you think, I can manage it - then again you think it will never succeed - but more and more you learn to have foi de charbonnier, and this grows more solid, even if the moments of bitter melancholy remain. Very soon art matters become so serious that what people say about it becomes something like the croaking of ravens. The heath speaks to you; you listen to this still voice of nature, and at times nature will seem a little bit less hostile, until at last you are her friend. Then your work too will be beautiful and calm.

But nature demands a certain devotion, and she demands a period of struggling with her.

I can't help it, if I want to speak with thorough frankness, I am forced to say, Theo, be a painter, try to disentangle yourself and come to Drenthe. People will raise a clamour, but you won't hear much of it. A six-hour walk full of landscapes by Michel lies between you and the ordinary world.

You would wake up in the morning, and getting up you would find yourself near an open farmyard with a cradle in it. There you would think better, and feel what Corregio meant by his *anch'io* - I too am a painter; they would say, you are not - you would answer, Well, well.

Well, *if* you were here, I should have a comrade, and this would mean that the work would make better headway. For all that, you would not be without friends. Very soon you would be on much more jovial terms with Rappard than you were in the past. Wisselingh would also remain faithful to you - although he would probably advise you against it. If you were here, I should become prolific sooner. I say the same - for me alone it is almost too big, I always lacked the courage to go on alone. I need a person to talk things over with - who knows what a picture is.

The greatest attraction for me in Paris, the thing which would most help me to make progress, is being with you, and the exchange of ideas with somebody who knows what a picture is, and who understands the reasonableness of my quest. I approve of Paris because you are in Paris, and as I should be less alone there, I should make better progress even there.

Enough of this for a moment. I do not say it would be possible if we couldn't pay for our bread and our workshop. But with the sum I mentioned as a minimum, I should most decidedly think it possible.

For myself I have a simple method, I go out into the open air and paint what strikes me, breathe the fragrant air of the heath deeply, and believe that after a while I shall become fresher, newer, better.

So, boy, do come and paint with me on the heath, in the potato field, come and walk with me behind the plough and the shepherd - come and sit with me, looking into the fire - let the storm that blows across the heath blow through you.

Break loose from your bonds. I do not know the future, in what way it might be different if everything should go smoothly with us, but I cannot speak differently: Don't seek it in Paris, don't seek it in America; it is always the same, forever and ever exactly the same. Make a thorough change indeed, try the heath.

Goodbye, write soon. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 12 October 1883

Dear Theo,
I just received your letter. I read it over and over again with the greatest interest, and one thing is becoming clear to me, which I have often thought about without getting very far.

That is to say, you have in common with me a time of secretly drawing the most impossible castles in the air, etc., which drawings stand in a curious relation to the throng of thoughts and aspirations - useless because nobody who might lend a helping hand takes any notice of them (only painters could show the right way then, but they have their thoughts elsewhere). That is a great inner struggle, which ends in discouragement, or in giving up the ideas as impracticable, and just about the age of twenty-one is very eager to do so.

What I may have said then, which was bound to contribute to that casting things overboard, at that moment my thoughts were perhaps the same as yours, that is to say, I regarded it as impossible. But as to that despairing struggle without getting any light anywhere, I know how awful it is too - with all one's energy one cannot do anything, and thinks oneself crazy, or Heaven knows what. In London how often I stood drawing on the Thames Embankment, on my way home from Southampton Street in the evening, and it came to nothing. If there had been someone then to tell me what perspective was, how much misery I should have been spared, how much further I should have been now! Well, let bygones be bygones. It has not been so. I spoke once or twice to Thijs Maris. I dared not speak to Boughton because his presence overawed me; but I did not find it there either, that help with the very *first* things, the A B C.

Let me repeat now that I believe in you as an artist, and that you may become so still, yes, that in a very short time you would think over in all calmness whether you are an artist or not, whether you succeed in producing something or not, if you learned to spell the above-mentioned A B C and if at the same time you wandered through the cornfields and the moors, to renew what you yourself express as “I used to feel myself part of nature; now I do not feel that way any longer.”

Let me tell you, brother, that I myself experienced so deeply, so very deeply what you say there. That I have been through a period of nervous, arid overstraining - there were days when I could not see anything in the most beautiful landscape just because I did not feel myself part of it. It is the street and the office and the care and the nerves that make it so.

Do not be angry with me when I say that at this moment your soul is sick - it is true, you know; it is not right for you not to feel yourself part of nature, and I think the most important thing is to restore that. I must look into my own past to find why I lived in that stony, arid mood for years, and why it became worse instead of better, though I tried to remedy it.

Not only did I feel hardened instead of sensitive toward nature, but, much worse still, I felt exactly the same toward people.

They said I was out of my mind, but I knew myself that it was not true, for the very reason that I felt my own disease deep within me, and tried to remedy it. I exhausted myself with hopeless, unsuccessful efforts, it is true, but because of that fixed idea of reaching a normal point of view again, I never mistook my own desperate doings, worryings and drudgings for my real innermost self. At least I always felt, “Just let me do something, be somewhere, and it *must* redress itself. I will rise above it, let me keep hold of patience to redress things.”

I do not believe somebody like — — — (?) for instance - who proved really to be insane - thought that way, and therefore I repeat, I have often thought those years of grubbing over, but I do not see how in those circumstances I could have been different from what I was.

This was the ground which gave way under my feet; think how miserable anyone would be if such a ground gave way. I had been with Goupil for six years. I was rooted there, and thought that if I left them, I could look back on six years of clean work, and that if I presented myself elsewhere, I might refer to my past with full assurance.

It was by no means so; things are done so hurriedly that there is but little time for reflection, for questions or arguments. People act according to very arbitrary, very superficial impressions, and once one has left G. & Co., nobody remembers who G. & Co. is. It is a name like X & Co., without any meaning, so one is simply “someone out of work.” At once, suddenly, inevitably, that is how it is everywhere. Of course, just because one possesses a certain proper pride, one does not say, I am Mr. So-and-so, I am this or that. One applies for a new position in full earnest, without many words, fully intending to put one's hand to the plough. All right, but by and by a person out of work, “L'homme de quelque part,” becomes a suspicious character.

Now imagine your new boss to be a man whose business is rather mysterious, imagine him to have but one goal, “money.” Can you, with all your energy, at once, on the spot, help him to a big amount? Not very likely, don't you think? But he wants money, money “quand même”; you want to know a little more about the business, and what you see or hear is rather disgusting.

"A person out of work" - "I do not want you any longer" soon is the answer.

Well, look here, you are becoming more and more "a person without work." You may go to England, you may go to America - it does not matter, you will be like an uprooted tree everywhere G. & Co., where you had been rooted since your earliest years, G. & Co., though indirectly they brought you to grief, because as a boy you thought them the finest, the best, the biggest in the world; G. & Co. - *if* you came back to them (I have not done so, I *could* not do it, my heart was too full, much too full) - G. & Co. would give you the cold shoulder, with a "nous n'avons plus à nous en occuper." [We need no longer bother about it.] For all that, one is uprooted, and the world reverses the facts and says that you have uprooted yourself. The fact is - your place no longer knows you.

I felt too melancholy to try to redress things, and I do not remember ever having been in a mood to speak about it to anybody the way I do to you now. Because, to my surprise, in your letter I read the words, "The gentlemen made things almost impossible when I spoke to them this week," and I never for a moment had supposed they would dare treat you as they did me. My dear boy, you know how things are with me, but if you are feeling miserable about one thing and another, don't feel *alone*. It is *too much* to bear *alone*, and in part, at least, I can sympathize with you.

Now, stick to your point, and don't let your grief let you lose your head; if the gentlemen behave like that, then stand on your honour, and do not accept your dismissal except on conditions which guarantee your getting a new situation.

Don't fly into a rage, they are not worth that, *though they incite you to it*. I flew into a rage and walked out.

Now again, my position was different from yours. I was one of the least, you, one of the foremost, yet I am afraid you would feel what I say about being uprooted too if you were out of it, so face this fact coolly, don't give in, and don't let yourself be turned out without being somewhat prepared for the difficult situation of having to start anew.

And in that extreme case: do *not* go to America, for it is just the same there as in Paris. No, beware of the moment when one says, I shall make myself scarce; I went through that moment myself, I hope you will not know it. And *if* it comes your way, I repeat, Beware of it, resist it quite collectedly, and say, This proves that I am striking a stone wall. Such a wall is for bulls to beat against; it is true that I am a bull myself, but an intelligent one, I am a bull in the matter of becoming an artist. In short, don't let yourself be induced to crush your own skull, that's all. I do not say things will turn out that way; I only hope there will be no question whatever of striking a stone wall.

And know this well, in case of being uprooted, in case of a failure when starting anew, do not despair. Suppose there were a whirlpool somewhere, with sharp-edged, rocky promontories; well, then I should just think one might sail around them, mightn't one? You will perhaps admit that rock to be there, as you yourself pulled me out of that whirlpool when I myself no longer had any hope of getting out, and was hopelessly unable to struggle against it any longer.

I mean, sail around that whirlpool at a great distance - it has already begun to suck you in to the extent of your being estranged from nature. Do you think me foolish if I dare to say, Change your course enough *now* so that you try to restore the harmony between yourself and nature? The longer you remain in this mood, the more you foster nervousness, your constant enemy and mine. I have had more experience than you with what tricks it *might* play on you.

You are now entering upon a situation that may disturb you in so far as the relation with nature is disrupted. Take this quite calmly as a sign of aberration. Say, “Oh, no, not that way, please.” Look for a new aim, an interest in something, for instance, think that basically perspective must be the simplest of all things after all, and chiaroscuro, a simple, not a complicated thing. It must be something that speaks for itself, otherwise I do not care much for it. Try to get back to nature this way.

Well, simply believe this, boy, that while writing this, I have got back something of the same feeling of years ago. That I again take pleasure in castles in the air, for instance, that especially here in Drenthe I am feeling pretty much the way I did at the time when first I began to see the beauty of art. You will agree with me when I call this normal, won't you? I mean to admire the things of nature, to be calm enough to draw them, to paint them.

But suppose *you* are faced by a stone wall, would you think a person in my frame of mind tranquil enough to be tempted to take a little walk with you to divert your thoughts at the moment when, because of nervous tension, these thoughts are beginning to contain an element of despair? At the core you are yourself, and have not changed, but your nerves are getting upset from overstrain. Well, take care of your nerves, and do not think lightly of them, for they may tempt you to quick-tempered manoeuvers; anyway, you know something about that yourself.

Theo, understand clearly what I mean at this moment: Father, Mother, Wil, Marie and particularly I myself are all assisted by you; you think you will have to stick it out for all our sakes, and believe me, I quite enter into your feelings about this, at least I can sympathize with them to a great extent. But think it over. What is the purpose - your own purpose and Father's, Mother's, Wil's, Marie's and mine? What do we all want? We want to pull through, acting righteously; we all want to arrive at a clear position, not a false position, don't we? This is what we want unanimously and earnestly, however much or little we may differ. What is it that we all want to set against fate? All, all of us without exception, want to work steadily, want quiet. Am I wrong in looking at the situation this way? All right, what is facing us now? A calamity is facing us which, hitting you, will hit us all. All right. A thunderstorm is threatening us; we see it threaten, we may be struck by lightning. All right, what are we going to do now? Are we frightened out of our wits? I do not think this would be our state of mind - although we all have certain nerves in our bodies, although certain fibres of the heart even more delicate than nerves might be shocked or suffer pain. “We are today what we were yesterday,” even if the lightning strikes, even if the thunder rolls. Are we or aren't we the sort who can face things collectedly? - that's the simple question, and I do not see any reason why we should not be.

What I further see is this:

That at this moment our mutual position is straight; to keep it so, a closer solidarity between us is desirable, and in my opinion, there are in ourselves a few things which we must settle between us.

In the first place I should think it a very good thing if your relations with Marie were put on a firmer basis, if possible a formal engagement. In the second place I should wish that we both understood that circumstances urgently demand that Brabant no longer be closed to me. I myself think it best *not* to go there if it can be avoided, but in case of a calamity, as Father has a house there rent-free, I might save the rent I am obliged to pay here.

I have reached the point where my work will probably yield *some* profit soon. And now if we could reduce the expenses to a minimum, even below the present rate, I could perhaps earn a little instead of spending, become positive instead of negative.

If this is urgent that we *must* earn money, I see a chance of it in that way, if they have patience at home, if they realize what is necessary, and especially if the whole family helps in the question of posing for me.

As to their being my models, they should decidedly have to do what I want, they should have to trust in my having reasons for it. If I say to them, You must pose, they ought to do so. Of course I would not ask anything unreasonable.

You remember the basic cause of my leaving home, a misunderstanding of each other in almost *everything*.

Can one live together in such a case? *Yes, for a time,* if it *must* be, and if both sides feel that everything must be subordinated to what the *force majeur* of circumstances demands. I wish that had been understood *at the time*; besides, I did not take the initiative in going away; but when I was told to go, I went.

Well, I just mention this, because I see that circumstances may demand that you *must have* your hands free, and if my living at home for a time might further that, I think Father and I must agree to it at once. Though, if it is not absolutely necessary - “tant mieux” - but I do not say that I absolutely *must* be in Drenthe, it doesn't matter in the least where I am.

So rest assured on that score, I would do anything you thought advisable.

And today I shall simply write Father this: In case Theo considers it advisable that my expenses be reduced to a minimum and I should have to live at home for a while, I hope, for myself as much as for you, that we shall possess the wisdom *not* to make a mess of things by discord, and that, ignoring the past, we shall resign ourselves to what the new circumstances may bring. Nothing further about you or about business matters, and in case I should have to live at home, I should not speak about you otherwise than in general terms. And certainly *not* mention Marie for the present.

Theo, when, perhaps a year ago, you said you would certainly not become a painter, but would definitely stay in your present profession, I could not but acquiesce; now I no longer acquiesce to the same extent: throughout the history of art one repeatedly finds the phenomenon of two brothers being painters. I know that the future is unpredictable, at least for myself I declare that I do not know how things will turn out. But it is a fact that I believe in you as a painter, in which belief I am strengthened by your last letter.

But mind, there is one thing I tell you is urgently necessary. Beware of your nerves - avail yourself of all means to keep your mind at ease. If it is possible, go and consult a doctor every day, not particularly because a doctor could do something for you that would prove effective, but because the measure of going to see a doctor, etc., would force you to bear in mind, *this* is nervousness, *this* is what I am. It is a question of self-knowledge, of serenity notwithstanding all the tricks nerves *must* play. As I see it, the whole idea of the *possibility* of making yourself scarce is caused by nerves. Assume this to be the case, and you will do wisely and well.

I hope you will *not* pull off a coup; I hope you will *not* make a financial invention; I hope you will become a painter. If your cool, self-possessed exterior shows that you do not give a damn about the crisis the gentlemen have purposely conjured up, it will be like water off a duck's back with you; tell them, “I'm not leaving like that, certainly not at present, *never* that way” - if you say, I have plans, but they are not even of a commercial nature, and as soon as they are ripe for execution, I shall withdraw in all quietness; until such time, as long as you can find no fault with my activities and behaviour, leave things as they are; but bear in mind that you would be gravely mistaken in my personality if you thought that I should run away because you make the situation unbearable for me, or that I should part with you in an unreasonable way. Do you want to get rid of me? All right, I for my part want to be rid of you, but amicably and in an orderly way - that, however, you are not the slightest bit bent on staying, but that you will not get out before you see a favourable moment. I think this is the way in which you will be able to frustrate what they are now trying to do to make it impossible for you to stay on. Perhaps they suspect you of entering into negotiations with others, and in such a case their making things impossible might be venomous indeed. If they should turn venomous, nothing can be done, so forestall it - perhaps mentioning in a quiet way on what terms you should be willing to retire would be the best thing to do.

In the meantime, if I should have to go home for a time in order to give you a free hand, please give me warning. And again - Father, Mother, Wil, Marie and I, in a word all of us, think more of you than of your money. This making yourself scarce is purely nerves.

But redress - try to redress if you cannot do it at once - the relation between yourself and nature and people. And if it cannot be done in any other way than by your becoming a painter, well then, do so, notwithstanding all objections and obstacles. Say, do write soon, be sure you do so, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I am sending you the enclosed sketches to give you an idea of the many extremely different things this apparently monotonous country presents. You see, I am just sampling at random - I catch hold of one thing and another; later things will arrange themselves and settle into shape of their own accord. But here I will not begin with a prearranged plan; on the contrary, I want my plan to result from my studies. As yet I do not know the real character of the country; now I draw everything that presents itself, but later on, after some experience, I shall try to reproduce it in its real character.

One thing depends so much on another that one must catch hold of everything; however much one should like to concentrate on a single subject, not one thing can be left out.

So there is work enough. I now have a pretty large room (where a stove has been put), which happens to have a small balcony, from which I can see the heath with the huts. In the distance I see a very curious drawbridge.

Downstairs there is the inn, and a farmer's kitchen with a peat fire on the hearth, very cosy in the evening. Such a fireplace with a cradle beside it is an excellent place for meditation. When I am feeling melancholy or worried about something, I just run downstairs for a while.

I can tell you that in a roundabout way I have heard something about the woman. I could not imagine why she did not write me.

So I wrote the carpenter next door, if the woman had not been to ask my address. And the scoundrel answered: “Oh yes, sir, but I thought you wouldn't like her to know your address, so I pretended not to know it.” The damned wretch.

So I wrote her at once, though it was not as good as the express arrangement I had made with him and with her; but I do not want to hide myself *now* or *ever*, and I would rather write her at her family's address than conceal myself in any way. That's my opinion about it. And I also sent her some money; if this should have bad consequences, I am not responsible for it. I *will not* act falsely. I found that scoundrel's letter at Hoogeveen on my last visit there.

Friend Rappard has written to me again from Terschelling, and now today from Utrecht - he is home again. He has brought studies from there, especially of the almshouse. I don't understand it exactly, he told me the doctor had prescribed sea air for him during the winter; besides, he longed to spend a winter in the country, but it seems to have turned out differently in the end.

You wrote to me about Liebermann: his palette consists of slate-grey tones, principally running from brown to yellowish-grey. I have never seen anything of his, but now that I have seen the landscape here, I can understand perfectly how logically he is led to it.

Often the colour of things reminds me of Michel; you know, he also has a grey sky (slate-coloured sometimes), a brown soil with yellowish-greys. It is absolutely true, and according to nature.

There are Jules Dupré effects, to be sure, but in this autumn season it is exactly that - and you describe Leibermann's palette. And if I may find what I seek - and why shouldn't I find it? - I shall certainly often do it in the same way, in that same chromatic gamut.

Mind you, to see it like that, one must not look at the local colour by itself, but in conjunction with the colour of the sky!

That sky is grey -but so iridescent that even our pure white would be unable to render *this* light and shimmer. Now, if one begins by painting this sky grey, thus remaining far below the intensity of nature, how much more necessary it is to tone down the browns and yellowish-greys of the soil to a lower key, in order to be consistent. I think if once one analyses it thus, it is so logical, one can hardly understand not having always seen it so.

But it is the local colour of a green field, or a ruddy brown heath, which, considered apart, easily leads one astray.

Write again soon, for your last letter was remarkably brief, too brief, but it was obviously written in the office.

What about that Triennial Exhibition? There will be many beautiful things. I long to hear about it, because these certainly are the characteristic things of the present, and not of past years. So if you have a moment, tell me about it.

There was a rumour that Liebermann is somewhere here in the neighbourhood. I should like to meet him.

I must say I am very glad to have found a better place to work in, so that I needn't sit idle at home now that there is so much rain and bad weather is expected. I wish you could see the country here. In the evening it is inexpressibly beautiful.

And I think, with snow, it will also be splendid.

I read a very beautiful little book of Carlyle's, Heroes and Hero Worship, nice sayings, as, for instance: we have the *duty* to be *brave*, though in general this is wrongly considered to be an exception. In life it is the same, goodness rises so high above everything that of course we cannot reach such a height. The most reasonable thing, and the thing that makes life less impossible, is to put our gamut in a lower key, and not to try to be luminous, and not to subside into dullness.

One finds here the most wonderful types of Nonconformist clergymen, with pigs' faces and three-cornered hats. Also adorable Jews, who look uncommonly ugly amidst Millet-like types or on this naive, desolate moor. But they are very characteristic. I travelled with a party of Jews who held theological discussions with some farmers. How is it possible for such absurdities to exist in a country like this? Why couldn't they look out of the windows or smoke their pipes, or at least behave as reasonably as, for instance, their pigs, which make no disturbance whatever, though they are pigs, and are in place in these surroundings and in harmony with them. But before the clergymen of the type I saw here reach the -cultural and rational level of ordinary pigs, they must improve considerably, and probably it will take ages before they arrive at this point. Now any pig is better, as far as I can see.

Well, I am off again for a walk, write me if you can spare a moment, and look out for something of Liebermann's at the exhibition.

Good-by, my address is here for the present. Best wishes, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 13 October 1883

Dear brother,

My thoughts are always with you, no wonder that I write rather often.

Besides, my impressions have become more fixed, my thoughts are more collected, things adjust themselves, become more tangible. So I can write you about it in all calmness. In the first place, I don't see much probability of your remaining on good terms with Goupil's. It is such an enormous business that it certainly will take a long time before one cannot put up with things any longer, before the corruption has penetrated *everywhere*. But, look here - in my opinion there has already been a very long period of corruption, so I should not be at all astonished if it were far advanced.

Wisselingh *waited* - before he went. And it was in vain - *his* heart was entirely in his work - I believe he would much rather have stayed on - but it was impossible. I do not count Arnold and Trip; they were quite a different sort, with less inner life. But I am disposed to include Obach - he waited so long and went through so much strain that for a time he lost his reason.

But after all, it is not exactly about the condition of the business - about the negative side of things - that I want to speak; leaving all that aside, it is about one single positive matter that I have something to say.

A few things have happened to you which I don't think unimportant. You have read Zola's books in a different and better way than most people do - I consider them among the very best of the present time.

You once said to me, “I am like that man in Pot-Bouille”; I said, “No. If you were like *that*, you would do well to enter a new business; but you are deeper than he, and I do not know whether you are really a man of business; actually I see the artist in you at heart, the true artist.”

You have undergone unsought, harrowing mental sufferings; now things are running their course. Why? Whither? To the renewed beginning of a similar career? My decided opinion is - no - there is something deeper than that. Change you must - but it must be a general renewal, not a repetition of the same thing. You wee not wrong in the past, no, in the past you had to be as you were; that past was right. But does it follow that it was *not* simply a preparation, a basis, nothing but a schooling, and not a definite thing yet? Why shouldn't that follow? In my opinion it is exactly that.

I think things speak so much for themselves that it would be impossible for me to tell you anything that is not already quite evident, even to yourself. Besides, it strikes me as rather curious that there is a change in me of late.

That just *now* I find myself in surroundings which so entirely engross me, which so order, fix, regulate, renew, enlarge my thoughts, that I am quite wrapped up in them. And that I can write you, full of what those silent, desolate moors tell me. Just at this moment, I feel within me the beginning of a change for the better. It isn't there yet, but I see things in my work - which I didn't have a little while ago. Painting comes more easily to me. I am eager to try all kinds of things which I have left undone till now. I know that circumstances happen to be so unstable that it is far from certain I shall be able to remain here. Perhaps just because of your circumstances it might turn out differently. But I should be sorry for it, though I would take it quite calmly.

But I cannot help imagining the future, when I should no longer be alone, but you and I, painters, working together as comrades here in this moorland.

That idea presents itself to me in all its attractiveness, the thing ought to happen without the slightest fuss, without much disturbance like “une révolution qui est, puisqu'il faut qu'elle soit.” [A revolution that is, because it must be.] That's all - so I only say that I should not be in the least astonished if, after some time, we were *here* together. I feel that it *may* happen, without making any more disturbance than a piece of peat rolling from one place to another. One moment, and it lies perfectly still again, and nobody takes the least notice of it.

But a human being has his roots, transplanting him is a painful thing, though the soil may be better in the place where he is transplanted.

But is that soil better??? What the Puritans were of old, such are the painters in the present society.

It is no foolish, artificial piety or bigotry; it is something simple and solid. I am speaking now more particularly of the Barbizon people, and that tendency to paint rural life. I see in you as a man something that is incompatible with Paris. I do not know how may years of Paris have passed over it - yes, part of your heart is rooted there - I admit it, but a something - a “je ne sais quoi” - is still untouched.

That's the artistic element. It seems to be weak now - but that new shoot will sprout and it will sprout quickly.

I am afraid the old trunk is split up too much, and I say, sprout in an entirely new direction, otherwise I am afraid the trunk will prove to lack the necessary vitality. So it seems to me - do you think differently?

The more so because, *if* you became a painter, you would unintentionally have laid the foundation for it yourself, and for the first time you would have company, friendship, a certain footing. I also think it would cause an immediate change in my own work, for what I lack is companionship and encouragement in my work, a certain interchange of opinions with somebody who knows what a picture is. I have been quite without it so long that I think I need that stimulus.

I have so many plans that I hardly dare to undertake them alone - you would make out what they are, what they mean, soon enough. Though I wish it were not so, I am extremely sensitive about what is said of my work, about what impression I make personally. When I meet with distrust, when I am alone, I feel a certain void which cripples my initiative. Now you would be just the person to understand it - I don't want any flattery, or that people should say “I like it” if they do not; no, what I want is an intelligent sincerity, which is not vexed by failures. Which, if a thing has failed six times, would say just when I begin to lose courage, Now you must try again a seventh time. You see, that's the encouragement I need, and cannot do without. And I think you would understand it, and you would be an enormous help to me.

And it is something you would be able to do, especially if you were obliged to do the same yourself. We should help each other, for I, on my part, would be the same to you, and that is of some importance. Two persons must believe in each other, and feel that it *can* and *must* be done - that way they are enormously strong. They must keep each other's courage up. Well, I think you and I would understand each other.

I am not sure you could do it if you weren't a painter. The only obstacle is the doubt which people generally try to raise: Tersteeg, for instance, who is sceptical by nature, who doesn't know what it is to believe.

Millet, however, is the archetype of a *believer*. He often used the expression “foi de charbonnier,” and that expression was already a very old one. One must not be a City man, but a Country man, however civilized one may be. I cannot express it exactly. There must be a “je ne sais quoi” in a man which keeps his mouth shut and makes him active - a certain aloofness even when he speaks - I repeat, an inner silence which leads to action. In that way one achieves great things - why? Because one has a certain feeling of let come what may. One works - what next? I do not know -

I am not hurrying you, I only want to say, Don't thwart nature. What I wish is not foolish, but I have a faint hope that one might begin it in a reasonable way, not absolutely without, but with only a very little money, just what is necessary for board and lodging. And I say now - not with the intention of causing an absolute calamity, but in case there is the slightest possibility: “Follow that little point, that very slight possibility, there lies the road - follow it - drop everything else. I do not mean drop all external relations - you must keep them if you can -

but stick to your conviction in saying, *I will become a painter*; so that what Tom, Dick and Harry say is like water on a duck's back.”

I don't think you would feel like a fish out of water then, but that it would be like a coming home to your fatherland, that you would feel a great serenity at once - that you would feel surer about becoming a painter than about a new situation, surer of yourself even than at Goupil's.

And, boy, there is something else - you are provided with a nervous system like other people's - from my own experience I must now warn you against something. Take care that your nerves do not play a dirty trick on you. You have gone through a period of terrible mental strain: in fact, you are right in the midst of it. You are not the man to break down - if such were the case, there would be no danger. If you should have to go through the shock of leaving Goupil & co., then calm down before you attempt anything new, boy, for if you don't, you will probably live to spoil your own constitution and energy, and your affairs too.

For a month now I have been breathing the air of the heath; I needed it absolutely - I have sat down by a peasant's fire with a cradle beside it. Now I speak calmly - I think calmly - It is excellent that you have written about it to me - go on confiding in me - go on trusting me a little bit more, or rather not me, but put your trust in the same thing I put my trust in, namely that one ought to risk leaving the world in order to look for “It” in a more quiet life with a handicraft. You should do this, not because I tell you to, but because you believe in it yourself. Well, in that case I need not tell you that you may trust me, seeing that you will understand that my endeavour is honest.

I cannot tell how things would go for me if you did *not* decide to become a painter. If there were a place for me in Paris, I should have to take it of course, and otherwise I should have to compromise with Father so that I could live at home and work in Brabant for a time. But oh, I can tell you that I do not think much about it now for the moment. I think only of my work, and about that plan for you. You are a man with a will, and a good, intelligent, clear head, with an honest heart. I think you may safely become a painter if you can hold out for a while. And I repeat, it would decidedly be a stimulus for my work.

Today I have been walking behind the ploughers who were ploughing a potato field, with women trudging to pick up a few potatoes that were left.

This is quite a different field from the one I scratched for you yesterday, but it is curious here - always exactly the same, and yet with just enough variation, the same subjects, like the pictures of artists who work in the same genre and yet are different. Oh, it is so curious here, and *so* quiet, *so* peaceful. I can find no other word for it but peace. Say much about it, say little about it, it is all the same, it does not matter at all. It is a question of wanting an entirely new thing, of undertaking a kind of renovation of yourself, in all simplicity, with the fixed idea: ça ira.

I don't mean to say that you will have no cares - things don't run so smoothly - but you must feel, “I am doing what seems simplest to me - I am finished with all that is not simple; I don't want the city any longer, I want the country; I don't want an office, I want to paint.” That's it. But it must be treated as a business matter, though it is deeper, aye, infinitely deeper; but every thought must be entirely concentrated on it.

In the future you must consider yourself and me painters. There may be worries, there may be obstacles, but *always consider us so - see your own work before you*. Look at a bit of nature and think, *I* will paint *that*. Give yourself up to the fixed idea: to become a painter.

All at once, people, even your best friends, become more or less like strangers. You are preoccupied with other things, exactly. All at once you feel, damn it, am I dreaming? I am on the wrong road - where is my studio, where is my brush? Thoughts like these are very deep; of course one says little or nothing about it, it would be a mistake to ask for advice about it, it wouldn't give you any light.

It means deciding not to go against it; on the contrary, one has the will and the courage to go through with it. I do not say one should expect the “quelque chose en Haut” to be precisely this, no, but after all the “Something on High” is there, at least Millet believed in it, and of course you have enough confidence in him not to think he was woolgathering when he knew it was there. You may well think of this - what I say is, life is serious; an honest decision may not remove the difficulties attached to its execution, but life is serious after all, and therefore one should take it seriously, and try to raise one's life to the height of something sound; and so in case there is the inevitable necessity of a change, then what is right should be of greater weight than what people say.

What was said about it in the past will not be noticed later on; it will be of no importance.

Now art dealers have certain prejudices, which I think you may not have shaken off yet, particularly the idea that painting is inborn - all right, inborn, but not the way it is supposed; one must put out one's hands and *grasp* it - that grasping is a difficult thing - one must not wait till it reveals itself. There is something, but not at all what people pretend. Practice makes perfect: one becomes a painter by painting. If one wants to become a painter, if one delights in it, if one feels what you feel, one can do it; but it is accompanied by troubles, cares, disappointments, times of melancholy, of helplessness and all that, that's what I think of it. I think it all such a nuisance that I just had to make a little scratch to forget it. Forgive me, I won't say anything more about it, it is not worth while.

But what I wanted to point out again is that in may respects this is the right moment, provided bread can be procured, nature being so extraordinarily interesting that you would set to work *eagerly* - there would be no bungling, but a direct attack on things, as direct and refreshing a struggle as can be.

We should have to show the world so much courage, so much energy, so much serenity, not taking things too ponderously, you know; in spite of serious cares, we should have to be gay, like those Swedes whom you mentioned, like the masters of Barbizon. We should have to take things literally, energetically, thoroughly - not doubting, dreaming or hesitating. That is a plan I should like, I could not care so much for any other plan. Therefore I do not doubt for a moment that you would be of the same opinion, and that if it should come to that, it should be undertaken with all possible coolness. And the reason why I write about it is that I want to show you that I am of the same opinion. Personally, I believe in you as a painter, as an artist, and I respect you as such.

I know than in the beginning, at least, I was as little capable of making a thing, but now I no longer doubt that practice will improve my work; I may be a good comrade if you should get bogged down in the beginning just because I have seen this *absolute* clumsiness in myself.

I should not be at all surprised at this, and I should be able to help you in those things which took me a long time to master because then I was alone.

Of course I don't know exactly how things are, but that does not matter in the least; it would be something so new that the attendant circumstances would be of relatively little importance.

What I say is this, In all probability you will be obliged to make a change, therefore I think it would be excellent if you were to make a thorough change of it - taking the bull by the horns. The bull called fatality, which would make us all miserable and melancholy if he were to get the upper hand; from which we shall not be delivered without a struggle. Whatever you want - peace - order - a handicraft - art - all right - get out of this art-dealing gamble - become a painter. This might be foolhardy if Goupil & Co. were now what Goupil & Co. was in the past. Now it is too much of a gamble - I am not at all curious to know how this will turn out and where it will end, no more than you are actually, I think.

And now another thing - yes, if it *must be*, if it should be utterly impossible to ensure us a period of quiet working here…If you should be *forced* to attack the other thing, have it your own way; then I shall submit and resign myself to whatever circumstances result from it for me, either by going to Paris or perhaps by going home for a time, until things look up a bit. If it must be, I hope I shall be able to accept one or the other reasonably.

I only said a few things about a project in which I feel at home; I do not feel at home with the things I say about the other possibility.

It's a great risk, but neither you nor I are afraid to venture something. Just think it over, and at all events, write soon. Goodbye, boy, with a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

What you ought to do?

Mais toi tu te tairas,
Tel que l'on voit se taire un coq sur la bruyère.

[But you will be silent,
Just as one sees a cock being silent on the heather.]

You cannot act more coolly than that.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 22 October 1883

Dear brother,

This morning I received your letter; in many respects the contents do not surprise me. It does surprise me a little that you should credit me with the slightest insight into business, as I am considered a dreamer in that respect, as you know, and I could not suppose that you thought differently about it. I think your idea of changing your situation is a very rational one. In the first place, one is not obliged to wait for the moment when the employers will arrive at a better insight; and in the second place, if one considered oneself obliged to do so, one might go on waiting forever and ever, and a young employee might doubt whether, when that moment came, he would not be too tired to redress things; how much more would this be the case with the old “pochards pleins” themselves. The latter will have lost their wits entirely by then; and decadence being decadence, a deserved ruin of a business will follow, the fatal consequence of certain mistakes. I don't mean to say it is if it happens through thoughtlessness, but if it happens through that odious, wanton, capricious, reckless way of outliving one's fame, and through supposing that everything is only a question of money, and that anything is allowed; it may succeed many a time, but the end is a breakdown, and such a managing director is the only man who gets off safely for the moment.

Well - it's the old, old story - but of course all those departments, officious as well as official, all that bookkeeping, it's all nonsense, and *that's* not the way to do business. Doing business is surely also *action*, a measure of personal insight and energy. That does not count now - that is handicapped - thence your complaint, There are not enough pictures.

Suffit, in my opinion the house of G. & Co. is going in for gambling now, and who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind. I - who was with them for six years - though I was one of the lowest employees - even now after at least ten years, I still feel that part of my heart is in it. I think it very, very sad. In Uncle Vincent's time they started with a few employees who were not treated nearly so arrogantly and as if they were machines. Then there was real cooperation, then one *could* be in it with all one's heart. Since then the number of employees has increased, but has consisted less and less of persons who really put their hearts into the business and whose knowledge is sound.

I myself witnessed some curious instances of this. In the meantime the gentlemen became more and more haughty, and I am of the opinion that now they are absolutely blind to reality. And if I may express my thoughts frankly, I believe that the best thing that could happen to them would be that their business go to the dogs. In their disenchantment, although they would be too old to redress things, it might be possible for them to be redressed themselves as human beings.

I note with pleasure that you don't mention the gentlemen personally; that is right - indeed, I didn't expect anything else from you. But for the rest, for you yourself it is indeed curiously difficult. Your heart is in it, and you are more faithful to them than any of the others. I think you would rather stay on if possible, even in case another situation were more advantageous, because the house is what it is. All that is counted for nothing, at least it seems so; though for instance old Mr. Goupil felt a certain affection for you, he would probably say nothing about it, because they themselves keep silent, and let things accumulate quietly.

Now from your letter I see that the situation in which you are placed at the moment is pretty well untenable. Perhaps it would be a good thing if, for instance, you went to see old Mr. Goupil privately, and told him that you had kept silent as long as you could, but that now you cannot wait any longer, so that you feel obliged to ask what the gentlemen really want, because if it goes on like this, you will no longer be a party to it. Something like this - for which you will hardly find an opportunity - there will hardly be a question of that - I realize that - but something to the effect that you might accept an equally good situation, not nearly so well-paid at first and still to be created, instead of your present one - which, as I see it, might act as an eye opener. I do not think that anything of the sort would lead to results or to an amelioration of things, but, whatever might happen, old Mr. Goupil would trust you, and there is the possibility that in any case you might still be of service to him.

But I must not lose myself in situations which I can only estimate quite in general, and now speak about what you say further about a project of your own. Under the circumstances - always taking the necessity of a change for granted - excellent - a modern business, in which energy might achieve something - where one is not hampered by so much routine and so complicated an administration that everything, absolutely everything is paralyzed by it. You tell me there is capital: there is (and this means more than capital) a good apparatus for reproductions - and if in addition the directors of this concern are people who mean well, and who intend to sell good things, quand même to seek their success in honesty, then, as I said, it is excellent. But Wisselingh at Collier's collided too violently with his employer's character (although *he* never told me or anybody else so, but I have drawn this conclusion independently, which tallies with Wisselingh's saying, “I wasted my time at Collier's”). And I am disposed to think that the latter's character is the kind that will *talk* grandly rather than *act* grandly, so I say: Are *those* people at the head of the other concern *willing?*

The *being able* is rather more the result of these two items than people are ready to admit in most cases. After all, one should know one's own mind.

Now I come to what you write about myself.

Of course I should very much like to spend some time in Paris, because I think I should find there that intercourse with artists which I shall need someday or other.

Is that possible? It would be if it did not get you into too much trouble. I should like it well enough.

I should love to talk with you about what you wrote, but what would be the use? It is better to lend a helping hand when there is a chance. “N'importe comment.”

For I think that it would greatly help me in my work if I had an opportunity to see more of printing, for instance. I have had some years' practice in painting now, so I stick to that. But if I could get some work in a printer's office or something, that would be a help rather than a hindrance - but I should have to learn all that. I think, however, I should be able to draw reproductions myself, for instance. And I am willing to try my hand at *anything* of that kind, especially if a living may be earned in that way over there. Indeed, I believe that the time will come when I will not have to earn a living in any other way than by painting; but be sure that I shall not have the slightest objection to going to Paris, whenever you think it would be useful or necessary for some reason or other.

My advising *you* in business matters would hardly be the thing. I have been out of it too long, but if I came into it again, we would be of the same opinion in a great many things. And I do know I have seen what I have seen, and in matters of reproduction or publication I daresay I know what is good. And I am willing to lend a helping hand as to carrying things out, no matter in what way.

But I need not tell you that here on this beautiful moor I haven't the slightest longing for Paris, and I wouldn't think about it at all if it hadn't been for your letter. And I simply say this, If it must be, all right, I shall go to Paris; if it must be, all right, I shall stay on the moors.

I shall find things to paint everywhere. It is splendid here, and I think I learn to paint somewhat better while painting. And my *heart is in it*, I need not tell you that.

Besides, I believe that knowing a handicraft is the most solid profession after all, one reason more for me to stick to it.

But if it might happen for some reason or other - on account of its being more convenient to you, or because of urgent necessity - that we should be together in Paris - I dare predict that I shall tell you, start drawing, and I would give you a few hints in the beginning.

I know how much I still have to learn myself, yet I begin to see light, and in some way or other, by practice or by learning from others what can be of use to me, I will stick to my painting with all my heart. And if it might be that you came to a point where you saw *light*, well, so much the better.

You say your heart is in the art business, all right, but even more in art itself, I believe.

Well, boy, write soon again - if you kept silent about it now, I should imagine all kinds of worries. So if something is the matter, write that; if nothing is the matter, write that; but don't keep it all to yourself, for that's not worth while.

Oh, I have had a letter from the poor woman; she was glad that I wrote her, but she is worried about the children, and she goes out working as a charwoman. She is obliged to live with her mother. Poor things.

But we must keep courage notwithstanding everything.

I enclose a few scratches from here. The country is so beautiful that I cannot describe it. *As soon as* I can paint a little better - then! You can arrange things for me exactly as you think best, I shall learn here, and I should learn out there, too, I think

However things may go, I don't suppose it will make you more unhappy, and perhaps you have already put up with things too long. The best thing would be, if it turned out so, that you were more appreciated by your directors, and that they left you more liberty to do business as you think best. But I should be surprised if things took this turn seeing that Uncle Vincent himself was not treated very fairly when he left.

But leaving that out of it, it seems to me that the whole art business is rotten - to tell you the truth, I doubt if the present enormous prices, even for masterpieces, will last. A “je ne sais quoi” has passed over it which has chilled everything - and enthusiasm has been put to flight. Is this of great influence on the artists? Not at all, for generally the greatest of them personally profited but little from those enormous prices, except in their last period, when they were already famous, and they - Millet and others, particularly Corot - would not have painted less, or less beautifully, without that enormous rise. And whatever may be said of art business, for the present it will remain so that he who can make a thing worth seeing will always find certain persons interested in it, who will make it possible for him to earn a living.

I would rather have 150 francs a month as a painter than 1500 francs a month in another position, even as an art dealer.

I think one feels more a man among other men as a painter, than in a life which is founded on speculation, and in which one has to heed conventions. I wonder how it will all turn out, but it is all the same to me, one way or another.

And as to you, I don't consider it would be such bad luck if the consequences were that you became a painter in your thirtieth year. I should consider it great good fortune. One's real life begins at thirty, in fact, that is to say, its most active part.

Friends and family may consider you old, or I don't know what, but you can feel a renewal of energy for all that.

But then it is necessary to reflect well, and to have a will, and to be wide-awake. But in that period, a change is really necessary; one must wipe out the whole thing and start anew. *Just as one does when a boy* - but more maturely. Tom, Dick and Harry, who drowse away in the same old way, think this foolish, and say they don't see any good in it; all right, leave Tom, Dick and Harry alone, as long as they don't attack you; they are as little awake as a somnambulist. For oneself one must not doubt that it is the way of nature, and that one works against nature only by *not* changing. There is an old saying, They have ears but they hear not, they have eyes but they see not, they have a heart but feel not; their heart is hardened, and they have closed their ears and eyes because they *do not want to hear and do not want to see*. I think that in any case you and I are honest enough so that we need not be afraid to open our eyes and look at things as they are and as they occur. That little old saying means so much, expresses it all so exactly, that I cannot help thinking of it again and again.

This is people gathering peat eating together behind a mound of peat, with a little fire in the foreground.

This painting was of peat loaders, but I fear the scratches are absolutely indecipherable.

Here are a couple of evening effects; I am still working on that weed burner, which is better than before in a painted study, so that it renders more strongly the immensity of the plain and the gathering twilight, the fire with a bit of smoke being the only spot of light. I went again and again to look at it in the evening, and I found this cottage on a muddy evening after the rain; seen on the spot, it is splendid.

I repeat, I think that there are things for me to learn in Paris as well as here on the moor; in the city, I should have an opportunity to learn from other people and to see what they are doing, and that is worth something; but working here, I think I can make progress even without seeing other painters. And for my own pleasure I would much rather stay here. But if a change in your position made it desirable for me to go to you, perhaps to earn something in the same business, it is all right, and I haven't the slightest objection.

Be sure to write me about all these things, which of course I shall not mention to anybody else. If my affairs might change somewhat for the better, if I could count on C. M.'s buying my studies for instance, then the best thing for me would be to stay here, as it is cheaper here; and after I had made some more progress, and if you decided to become a painter, it would be an excellent place for study here - excellent.

Has C. M. been to see you already? Once more, keep good courage, I will try to do the same; and if you ever decide to become a painter, do so with inner cheerfulness and all possible optimism. Then, taking a broad view of things, you would have to consider the time between now and your thirtieth year as a rather hard experimental time; but at the end of it you would find all things renewed, and a rich future before you. Think of what you told me when those Swedish painters were in Paris; one must have pluck, the more so because one sees how shaky and tottering everything is. “Efforts de perdu, que soit” [efforts of lost souls, so be it] - but they are our duty in the times which we live in, and very often one has to choose between that and dreaming one's life away.

Well, boy, good luck, write again soon, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

The Hague, 22-29 October 1883

Amice Rappard,
I just received your letter, and it is exactly what I meant. Now I am somewhat informed about things, and as the opportunity occurs I can try to find something to complete your collection.

In the first place, That Beautiful Wretch - I do *not* have it; it is certainly very beautiful, and I am most eager to have it, if possible. I shall send you the Holiday No.82, in which there are also very fine illustrations by Caton Woodville, Knowles, etc., today or tomorrow, and the following sheets besides:

Lecolle “At the Riverside” Knaus “Schweinchen” [Little Pigs]

Small “In the Park,” “Spectators at a Cricket Match” Frank Hol “Home Again”

Robinson “The Rescue” Rochussen “In the Dunes,”

Robertson “Christmas on the Wave” Edelfelt “Chez l'artiste” [Artist's Home]

“A Merry Christmas”

Renouf “Un Coup de Main” [A Helping Hand]

“Portrait of Washington.” Excellent. Emslie “Nearing Home”

Overend “Hopes and Fears.” Vierge “Exhibition of Electricity”

Morris “The Mowers” Kaufmann “Maison d'ecole de Wissenbourg” [Schoolhouse at Wissenburg]

Koch “Verbrecherspelunke” [Criminals' Den] “Ruderregatta” [Rowing Match] Heywood Hardy “The Village Doctor” “Christmas Hymn”

Meyerheim “Affenakademi” [Monkeys' Academy] Overend “Dans la Serre” [In the Green-house]

You happen to have two or three Frank Hols that I don't have, but how beautiful the one of the two fellows in the wagon is, and so is that other one, and “Bereaved” too. I know them very well.

I think the one I am sending you completes the series “Summoned for Active Service,” as it is called “Home Again.” I haven't got those sheets by Hopkins that you have, but I have others (“Fancy Ball” and “Charity”).

I am particularly interested in Buckmann's “Vor dem Asylhause” [In Front of the Night Shelter] - is this one from a current magazine? Please let me know; then I shall order it. I don't know what this one is like, but I know his work and think it splendid - I presume his conception of this subject will be unusually beautiful. I don't know Herkomer's “Schwierigkeiten” [Difficulties], nor do I know Overend's “Gottesdienst” [Divine Service] and “North Pole,” nor the things by Main, Régamey and Boulanger on the last list you sent me. If the “Boat Race” whose artist you don't know has a part of a boat with a lady in black, a lady in white and a dog in the foreground, then it is by no less a man than *Paul Renouard*.

I also have a magnificent thing by Dagnan for you, “Un Charmeur au Jardin des Tuileries,” and one by Montbard, “Arab Beggars.” These two had some tears which I have repaired, after which I mounted them; they are both very large, so I will not send them now, for the package would get too big if I sent them flat, and they can no longer be folded. You can take them with you whenever you come here, the way you did last summer.

But maybe you have them already, since they are French; in that case I shall keep them. They are undamaged now and especially beautiful. Let me know if you don't have them; then I shall set them apart for you. I have been thinking over your scruples about accepting the ones I sent you; and, although I respect your feelings, I believe you must not consider it a kindness on my part but look upon it as something natural - for the following reason.

I hope you do not object to my considering you my friend, and I suppose that you on your part think of me in the same way. I feel sure you will agree with me when I say that I think friendship must be primarily *action* and not just *feeling*. Consequently it was only natural for me to save duplicates for you of things you didn't have yet. You yourself did me a similar favour in Brussels, for instance, by letting me use your studio when I didn't have one of my own yet, and so on.

You write that you have seven “Months” by Montbard; if I knew which ones they were, I might be able to complete them. I see that I have two more beautiful Standards, which I shall add to the lot, as well as a Dollmann.

I should have to see the monogram FD, or whatever it is before I could decipher it, which I would do by studying the manner in which it is done. I should not be surprised if it were F. Dadd. I have also not been able to decipher the monogram under “The Arrival of the Coach”; I have found another sketch from Scotland, however, on which it occurs too - “Salmon Fishers.”

Caton Woodville is enormously clever - I see it more and more clearly. I have a number of large things by him from Ireland; except for “Nightly Visit,” which you have too, they form a series together with other sheets by O'Kelly, Gregory and Dadd.

Well, today I went to visit the place where the dustmen dump the garbage, *etc*. Lord, how beautiful that is - for Buckmann, for instance. Tomorrow I shall get some interesting objects from this Refuse Dump - including some broken street lamps - rusted and twisted - on view - or to pose for me, if you like the expression better. The dustman will bring them around. That collection of discarded buckets, baskets, kettles, soldiers' mess kettles, oil cans, iron wire, street lamps, stovepipes was something out of a fairy tale by Andersen.

I shall probably dream of it tonight, but you may be sure I shall work on it this winter. Whenever you come to The Hague, I shall be greatly pleased if you will allow me to take you to this and some other spots, which, though they are commonplace in the extreme, are really an artist's paradise.

And now a drawing has been waiting for me for quite a while; I must now return to it without delay. So you will receive some more sheets one of these days. And if you should have duplicates, you know I should very much like to have them.

Adieu - may your work prosper - don't you think the weather glorious these days - a real “chill October”? How beautiful the mud is, and the withering grass!

With a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

You would find a great many things changed in my studio since this summer - it is more spacious and convenient, and I hope my work will not be any the worse for it.

Three guilders fifty is perhaps not exorbitant for a volume of the London News, provided it is an interesting old one, with a lot of things in it, but it all depends on the contents, of course.

Do you remember the établissements de bouillon [soup kitchens] in Brussels? One of Roger's was opened that winter near the Hôtel de ville [city hall]; and I saw “bouillon” being given away gratis to poor people the morning of the opening. I suddenly remembered it the other day, and this is the drawing I am working on at present. I have had models here from the Geest, a street which I think greatly resembles the Rue Haute or the Rue Blaes in the Walloon Quarter of Brussels, for instance. And what I am seeking is most certainly the right types, but above all the sentiment of the whole. Such a bouillon-gratuit establishment may be in Brussels or London or The Hague; its character is sure to be something like that of Buckmann's “Vor dem Asylhause.” The figure I made a little scratch of in my previous letter is one of the models for it.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to His Parents

Drenthe, c. 27 October 1883

Dear parents,

I received your letter, many thanks.

The death of cousin A. touched me too. How suddenly things can happen.

I often thought she was not very happy, or rather, for my part, I do not doubt it for a single moment. I think one can hardly be happy as the wife of a banker, least of all nowadays. You will say, That's not true - but my thoughts are pretty much fixed about those things.

There is a certain sphere which one had better avoid, in my opinion.

To change the subject, the people of the Heike were always cheating each other, and I cannot say for sure that it never happens here. But I think that generally the people of the Heike proved to be very united basically, though they cheated each other under certain circumstances and though this was considered quite natural. I always found the Heike a remarkable example of energy, those little huts, each with a patch of ground, that poor little group of people struggling together against the barrenness of the heath - I do not deny their faults, but those are not the things which strike me first. So here I had not yet thought about whether people cheated each other. Now that I think of it, I suppose they do - probably it happens now and then - but in general what strikes me is the same thing I saw on a small scale in the Heike. Here things are generally on a larger scale and more interesting, and they have more character. It is something just as beautiful and well ordered as an ant's nest or a beehive. That's how things are, generally speaking - for me they are admirable as they are - but now what might they be basically? They might be better, I don't deny it - but I repeat, I see so much positive good here that I abstain from finding fault, especially as I am not at all able to distinguish coincidences from faults of character as yet. I must see more of it before I can decide that.

Now, when I compare the population of a city with the people here, I do not for a moment hesitate to say that the population of the heath, the peat workers here, seem to me to be better. Yes, then the differences seem enormous, though they may cheat each other here, no less than at the Heike, but I do not say they do, I do not know it yet. Recently I had a conversation on the same subject with the man whom I board with, who is a farmer himself. It was by chance, because he asked me how things were in London, he had heard so much about it. I told him that in my opinion a simple farmer *who works, and works intelligently*, is the civilized man, that it has always been so and always will be, that in the country one finds an example of it here and there, and in the city one finds a few men who are almost as noble, though in quite a different way, among the very, very rare excellent people. But that in my opinion it goes no further, and that in general there is more chance of finding a reasonable human being in the country than in the city. And that in my opinion the nearer one gets to the large cities, the further one gets into the darkness of degeneration and stupidity and wickedness. He said, in fact, that he was of the same opinion.

There *is* a difference, and in the country it is more quiet, more peaceful, a little better, too - though they may cheat each other, it is not so bad as in the city. Here beautiful, clear autumn days alternate with stormy ones. I really like the latter best, though it is difficult to walk out-of-doors then, and sometimes even quite impossible. But going out anyway and taking a study one has made on a fine day, and correcting it according to what one sees out-of-doors in the rain, is possible, after all, and satisfying to me.

Don't worry about my health, I take care of myself, and I am feeling even better here these first days than during those last months in The Hague, when I suffered much from my nerves. And that is quite calmed down now. I think there is no better place for meditation than by a rustic hearth and an old cradle with a baby in it, with the window overlooking a delicate green cornfield and the waving of the alder bushes.

At present I am studying the ploughers all the time, so I must be off again. Goodbye, dear parents; my overcoat is all right, the woolen undervest is very comfortable, believe me,

Your loving Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 28 October 1883

Dear brother,
It is Sunday today and you are not out of my thoughts for a moment. I should think it is quite appropriate to apply to business the words “plus tu y resteras plus ça t'embêtera” [the more you stay in it the more it will bore you], and to painting, “plus ça t'amusera,” using “amusera” in the more serious sense of energy, cheerfulness, vitality.

Oh, I said I should give Tom, Dick and Harry their due - by all means - let's do; but having done justice to those things, aren't they absurd, those formalities and conventions - in fact, aren't they really *bad*?

In order to maintain a certain rank, one is obliged to commit certain villainies, falsehoods - willingly and knowingly, premeditatedly. That's what I call the fatal side, even of the rayon noir, let alone when there is no rayon at all.

Now take, for instance, the painters of Barbizon: not only do I understand them as men, but in my opinion *everything* - the smallest, the most intimate details - sparkles with humour and life. The “painter's family life,” with its great and small miseries, with its calamities, its sorrows and griefs, has the advantage of having a certain good will, a certain sincerity, a certain real human feeling. Just because of that *not* maintaining a certain standing, not even thinking about it.

If you take “amusera” in the highly serious sense of “thinking it interesting,” then I say, it will amuse you.

And as to the safe position, there is “embêtera,” “abrutira” [(will) stupefy].

Do I say this because I despise culture? On the contrary, I say it because I look upon the real human feelings, life in harmony with, not against, nature, as the true civilization, which I respect as such. I ask, what will make me more completely human?

Zola says, “Moi artiste, je veux vivre tout haut - *veux vivre”* [I, as an artist, want to live as vigorously as possible - (I) *want to live*], without mental reservation - naive as a child, no, not as a child, as an artist - with good will, however life presents itself, I shall find something in it, I will try my best on it. Now look at all those studied little mannerisms, all that convention, how exceedingly conceited it really is, how absurd, a man thinking he knows everything and that things go according to his idea, as if there were not in all things of life a “je ne sais quoi” of great goodness, and also an element of evil, which we feel to be infinitely above us, infinitely greater, infinitely mightier than we are.

How fundamentally wrong is the man who doesn't feel himself small, who doesn't realize he is but an atom.

Is it a loss to drop some notions, impressed on us in childhood, that maintaining a certain rank or certain conventions is the most important thing? I myself do not even think about whether I lose by it or not. I know only by experience that those conventions and ideas do not hold true, and often are hopelessly, fatally wrong. I come to the conclusion that I do not know anything, but at the same time that this life is such a mystery that the system of “conventionality” is certainly too narrow. So that it has lost its credit with me.

What shall I do now? The common phrase is, “What is your aim, what are your aspirations?” Oh, I shall do as I think best - how? I can't say that beforehand - you who ask me that pretentious question, do you know what *your* aim is, what *your* intentions are?

Now they tell me, “You are unprincipled when you have no aim, no aspirations.”

My answer is, I didn't tell you I had *no* aim, no aspirations, I said it is the height of conceit to try to force one to define what is indefinable. These are my thoughts about certain vital questions. All that arguing about it is one of the things of which I say “embêtera.”

Live - do something - that is more amusing, that is more positive. In short - one must of course give Society its due, but at the same time feel absolutely free, believing not in one's own judgment, but in “reason” (my judgment is human, reason is divine, but there is a link between the one and the other), and that my own conscience is the compass which shows me the way, although I know that it does not work quite accurately.

I should like to refer to the fact that, whenever I recall the past generation of painters, I remember an expression of yours, “they were *surprisingly* gay.” What I want to say is that, if you become a painter, you should do it with this same *surprising* gaiety. You will need this to offset the gloomy circumstances. It will be a greater help to you than anything else. What you want is a spark of genius; I know no other word for it, but what I mean is the exact opposite of “being ponderous,” as people call it. Please don't tell me that neither you nor I could have this. I say this because I am of the opinion that we must do our best to become like that; I do not claim that either I myself or you have sufficiently captured it - but what I say is, Let's do our best to get it. And I say this to show you - writing these things down, although I think you will be able to understand what is in my mind anyway - that you are not mistaken in my ideas. I believe the whole plan would be enhanced immeasurably if your remaining with the woman you are with now were combined with it.

And if it is in your nature as well as hers to feel even a certain pleasure - a surprising gaiety - in the face of circumstances - a je ne sais quoi of surprising *youthfulness* - and I do not count this among the impossibilities, for you said she is intelligent - well then, you will be able to do more together than alone. And in this case, if persons of the same sentiment, persons who have the same pretty serious misery, combine to see things through, what I say is, the more the merrier.

And what I say is - if this had come about or should come about, this combining to carve your own way in the world means infinitely more than any standing on form, and rises above all gossip, all qu'en dira-t-on.

I know all these things have a perilous money side, but what I say is, let's weaken this perilous money side as much as possible, in the first place by not being under its sway too long, and then by feeling that if one will only set about things with love, with a certain understanding of each other and cooperation and mutual helpfulness, many things which would otherwise be insupportable would be softened - yes, even totally changed.

As for me, if I could find some people whom I could talk to about art, who felt for it and wanted to feel for it - I should gain an enormous advantage in my work - I should feel more myself, *be* more myself. If there is enough money to keep us going in the very first period, by the time it is gone I shall be earning money. The more I think it over, the more it appears to me in the way I felt it in the beginning.

Your heart is partly with the firm of Goupil & Co., but in their presumption G. & Co. demand unreasonable things. In the first place, they are doing you a great wrong, which causes you much grief. This is not only a question of money, your heart is in it, for you it means heartache. You would start on a new career with the same heartache, and possibly with a similar result. Look, is this possible?

What I say is, I doubt it.

It seems to me that you, who are very young, do not act recklessly when you argue, I have had enough of the art-dealing business but not of art; I'll drop the business, and aim at the very heart of the profession.

That is what I ought to have done at the time. My making a mistake was perhaps a natural error of judgment, because then I did not know anything about teaching or about the Church - did not know anything about it, and cherished ideals about it.

You will say, Doesn't one sometimes have ideals about art that are incompatible with existing conditions?

Well, answer that question for yourself. I also answer it for myself by asking, Is Barbizon, is the Dutch school of painters a fact or not?

Whatever may be said of the art world, it is not rotten. On the contrary, it has improved and improved, and perhaps the summit has already been reached; but at all events we are still quite near it, and as long as you and I live, though we might reach the age of a hundred, there will be a certain real vitality. So he who wants to paint - must put his shoulder to the wheel. If the woman came, of course she would have to paint too.

Everybody would have to paint here - the wife of one of the Van Eycks also had to do it. And I tell you that the people don't seem disagreeable or intriguing. There is a kind of benevolence in this place, and I think you can do exactly what you think best. There is a surprisingly youthful atmosphere in existence here.

One should begin by saying with all possible courage, gaiety, enthusiasm, I know none of us can do a thing, but for all that, we are painters. Our *wanting* in itself means *action*. This is what I believe should be the main idea. We are alive - if we do not work “comme plusieurs nègres,” we shall die of want, and we shall cut a most ridiculous figure. However, we happen to abhor this mightily - because of that same thing which I call surprising youthfulness - and in addition, a seriousness that is damned serious.

That...y mettre sa peau.

Well, if this were mere speculation, I should not want to think of it - but in this case it means a fight to free ourselves from the world of conventions and speculation. It is something good, something peaceful, an honest enterprise. Most certainly it will be our intention to try to earn our bread, but only in the literal sense of the word. Money, as far as it is not used for the absolute necessaries of life, leaves us cold. We shall do nothing we need be ashamed of; with what Carlyle calls “quite a royal feeling,” we shall be able to roam about in nature freely, and to work - we shall be able to work, because we are honest. We shall say, when we were children we made a mistake, or rather, We had to obey, and do certain things to earn our bread. Later such and such things happened, and then we thought it advisable to turn handicraftsmen. Because certain things were too puffed up. If you should talk this over with other people, they would advise against it unanimously, I think, except perhaps the woman you are with.

If you have come to a decision for yourself, avoid other people, because they can only weaken your energy. Just at the very moment when one has not yet lost one's outer clumsiness, when one is still green, a “ni fait ni a faire” [neither done nor to be done] is enough to cause discouragement for half a year, after which one at last sees that one ought not to have let oneself be led astray.

I know the soul's struggle of two people: Am I a painter or not? Of Rappard and of myself - a struggle, hard sometimes, a struggle which accurately marks the difference between us and certain other people who take things less seriously; as for us, we feel wretched at times; but each bit of melancholy brings a little light, a little progress; certain other people have less trouble, work more easily perhaps, but then their personal character develops less. You, too, would have that struggle, and I tell you, don't forget that you are in danger of being upset by people who undoubtedly have the very best intentions.

If you hear a voice within you saying, “You are not a painter,” *then by all means paint*, boy, and that voice will be silenced, but only by working. He who goes to trends and tells his troubles when he feels like that loses part of his manliness, part of the best that's in him; your friends can only be those who themselves struggle against it, who raise your activity by their own example of action. One must undertake it with confidence, with a certain assurance that one is doing a reasonable thing, like the farmer drives his plough, or like our friend in the scratch below, who is harrowing, and even drags the harrow himself. If one hasn't a horse, one is one's own horse - many people do so here.

There is a saying of Gustave Dore's which I have always admired, “J'ai la patience d'un bœuf,” I find a certain goodness in it, a certain resolute honesty - in short, that saying has a deep meaning, it is the word of a real artist. When one thinks of the man from whose heart such a saying sprang, all those oft-repeated art dealer's arguments about “natural gifts” seem to become an abominably discordant raven's croaking. “J'ai la patience” - how quiet it sounds, how dignified; they wouldn't even say it except for that very raven's croaking. I am not an artist - how coarse it sounds - even to think so of oneself - oughtn't one to have patience, oughtn't one to learn patience from nature, learn patience from seeing the corn slowly ripen, seeing things grow - should one think oneself so absolutely dead as to imagine that one would not grow any more? Should one thwart one's own development on purpose? I say this to explain why I think it so foolish to speak about natural gifts and no natural gifts.

But in order to grow, one must be rooted in the earth. So I tell you, take root in the soil of Drenthe - you will germinate there - don't wither on the sidewalk. You will say there are plants that grow in the city - that may be, but you are corn, and your place is in the cornfield.

Well, I too suppose that for financial reasons now may not be the right moment, but at the same time I suppose that circumstances may just make it possible. If there were only half a possibility, I believe you would do well to risk the venture. I do not think you would ever regret it. You would be able to develop the best that is in you, and have a more peaceful life altogether. Neither of us would be alone, our work would merge. In the beginning we should have to live through anxious moments, we should have to prepare ourselves for them, and take measures to overcome them; we should not be able to go back, we should not look back nor be able to look back; on the contrary, we should force ourselves to look ahead. But it's in this period that we shall be far removed from all our friends and acquaintances, we shall fight this fight without anybody seeing us, and this will be the best thing that can happen, for then nobody will hinder us. We shall look forward to victory - we feel it in our very bones. We shall be so busy working that we shall be absolutely unable to think of anything else but our work.

I don't suppose I'm telling you anything at all new, I only ask, Don't thwart your own best thoughts. Think that idea over with a certain good-humored optimism instead of looking at things gloomily and pessimistically. I see that even Millet, just because he was so serious, couldn't help keeping good courage. This is something peculiar, not to all styles of painting, but to Millet, Israëls, Breton, Boughton, Herkomer and others.

Those who seek real simplicity are themselves so simple, and their view of life is so full of willingness and courage, even in hard times.

Think these things over, write me about them. It must be “une revolution qui est, puisqu'il faut qu'elle soit.” [A revolution that is, because it must be.] With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 29-2 Oct-Nov 1883

Dear Theo,

What life I think best, oh, without the least shadow of a doubt it is a life consisting of long years of intercourse with nature in the country - and Something on High - inconceivable, “awfully unnamable” - for it is impossible to find a name for that which is higher than nature. Be a peasant - be, if it could be considered possible nowadays, a village clergyman or a schoolmaster - be - and in my opinion this ought to be thought of first, the present times being what they are - be a painter, and as a human being, after a number of years of living in the country and of having a handicraft, as a human being you will in the course of these years gradually become something better and deeper in the end.

This is my firm belief. Whether one is *more* or *less* clever at the start, whether one has the advantage of favorable circumstances to a greater or to a lesser extent, is, to my way of thinking, far from being the main thing. One should start with the conviction that one is in need of intercourse with nature, with the conviction that one cannot lose one's way by taking this road, and that one's course will be straight. And ... there is that other important thing: if one should have an easy time of it, like a man living on his private means, it would be of very little help; the very fact that there is many a hard day and many an “effort of lost souls” will make one a better man.

And I believe not being absolutely alone does a lot of good, as one is apt to become absorbed in one's work; but this should not lead to losing one's way, and by taking each other's advice the right way can be followed steadily.

If you talked it over with other people, they would say, What are you thinking of? - how wild a venture to give up this, that and the other! In short, they would think it madness - a blunder. As for myself, I find wildness in a conception of life other than the one I am talking about - *i.e.* being a painter - *I* think it wildly reckless to tie oneself down irrevocably to the city and the affairs of the city.

They will tell you that you are a fanatic, but most certainly you - after having undergone so many mental trials - will know that it is impossible for you to be fanatical, for you are in a period of disenchantment. Don't let them try to turn things upside down, that won't do for me!

I feel my own incurable melancholy, caused by certain developments in the past, and then they want to tell me that my mood is “the rash fanaticism of youth”! Far, very far from it. In your mood one is “in damned earnest,” as the English say. You do not expect to find something soft or sweet, no, you know that you are in for a fight against something like a rock, no, you know that it is impossible to conquer nature and to make her more amenable without a terrible struggle and without more than ordinary patience.

And when speaking of your being a painter, they would describe your state of mind as that of a dreamer, imagining himself on a bed of roses. I ask you, what do those who represent things that way know? But people being what they are, this is only one of their enormities and not even the worst by a long shot. This hopeless absurdity of public opinion makes it only natural for one to want to avoid the world.

One feels things to be wretched and much too distorted, and however peaceful and cheerful and full of serenity one's natural disposition may be, one feels that this cannot be otherwise - but then I ask, what is more practical than telling yourself: If I don't do anything about it, I shall lose my energy and strength of mind; I am going to refresh, to rejuvenate myself in nature; I am going to attack things in a new way, and I will arrange my life in such a way that, let's say, in a few years I shall have quite new and sure ground under my feet.

I have no patience with “so-called” common sense (a spurious article, unutterably different from the genuine one) one is told to use, and which they say one does not use as soon as one deviates from the ordinary course and takes a risk. I repeat, I have no patience with it. I have no patience with it for the very reason that my own natural common sense, if I reflect, leads me to wholly different results than the conclusion of narrow-minded worldly wisdom and prudent, halfhearted righteousness.

Oh, that dawdling, oh, those hesitations, oh, that not believing that good is good, that black is black, that white is white.

Dear brother - *I cannot speak*; at the *present* moment I am glad I can express myself stumblingly, incoherently, roughly. I am glad I cannot write you like Tersteeg or Father - for the moment - anyway.

I am so deeply convinced of your artistic talent that to me you will be an artist as soon as you take up a brush or a piece of crayon and, adroitly or maladroitly, make something.

Before you are able to express yourself, that is, your plain-thinking virile soul - peaceful, good - before you can express this in your work, quite a lot of things must happen; but it *will* come, for as you *are*, so you *paint* - not in the beginning, assuredly, if one is good.

It is clear to me that there is a je ne sais quoi - I already see it in your words, pictures of some little corners in Paris, etc., even now I should see it in your first sketches and studies. When I think of Father, it seems to me that the good in him is due to his intercourse with nature, and in my opinion his error is that he attaches more value to other things than they are really worth.

In my eyes Father is a man who, when he ought to have had it, did not possess any knowledge of the intimate life of some great men. What I mean to say is that in my opinion Father never knew, and does not know now, and never will know what the soul of modern civilization is. What is it? The eternal quality in the *greatest of the great*: simplicity and truth. Dupré, Daubigny, Corot, Millet, Israëls, Herkomer - as well as Michelet, Hugo, Zola, Balzac, and many another master of older and newer times. Father is too much circumvented by his prejudices to understand this; all through life he applies them with a punctiliousness worthy of a better cause. For me he is the rayon noir. Why isn't he a rayon blanc? - this is the only fault I find in Father. True, it is a great fault - I cannot help it. And listen to what I say: Try to find the rayon blanc, but blanc, do you hear?

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I do not say - far, very far be it from me to say - that I myself have the rayon blanc, but I am not ashamed to say that it exists, this White Light - and that I seek it, and only this do I consider simplicity.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 29-2 Oct-Nov 1883

Dear brother,

I cannot count the grains in a sack of corn just by smelling it - I cannot look through the planks of the barn door - but sometimes I can see by the lumps whether it is a sack of potatoes or of corn, or, though the barn door be closed, I can tell when the pig is killed from the squealing.

Only in this way can I and will I judge the circumstances in which you find yourself just now, from the indications I have, however vague they may be, and it is not a prophecy I am making.

But now to the point! Just consider coolly whether you are not faced by what they call fatality on the battlefield. Just consider the faces of your friends, your sham friends and your enemies, just consider the je ne sais quois - just consider whether a certain void is not developing around you, so that you are losing your hold on things, or at any rate so that it is less easy for you to put through business deals. In short, consider whether this fatality is in your favour or decidedly against you.

Tell me this one thing, am I mistaken when I conclude from some symptoms that there is a question of one of those malignant crises which at times arise in large businesses in the big cities? Do things have a desperate aspect? Do you feel this cannot be redressed? Or do you feel redress is possible, and that therefore this crisis is no reason to change your position?

Unless you write me, “No, it is not so bad as that,” I personally think matters have a rather desperate aspect.

Think it over cool-headedly - I know you have your composure, your presence of mind, I know you try to analyze things, and for this reason I should like to know if you yourself see something which I fear is there.

You know, boy - as long as the position was tolerable - as long as business was possible, I have never dared to advise you openly, Give it up, especially out of respect for your position, which you kept, not for your own pleasure, but for the welfare of us all.

But your former duties, which, moreover, you have taken on yourself of your own free will, cease to be duties when business conditions become such that to continue would not only be a hopeless struggle, but at the same time would inevitably bring about your own ruin.

In short, there are limits, and my intuition tells me you have almost reached that point.

Look here - as regards now or never - making oneself scarce or disappearing, neither you nor I should *ever* do that, no more than commit suicide.

I too have my moments of deep melancholy, but I say again, both you and I ought to regard the idea of disappearing or making oneself scarce as becoming neither you nor me.

And notwithstanding all, one should take the risk of going on, even when one feels that it is *impossible*, of going on with the desperate feeling that it will end in disappearance - but on the other hand, in our consciences there is that *"beware!!!"*

Should I be mistaken - should my presentiment be at variance with the facts, about which I ask you the question, Have they a decidedly desperate aspect or not? - very well, then I am willing to believe your simple assurance, I expect things to come out right, or some such words, *as soon as you write me that*.

In the event of your being faced with a fait accompli in one of those venomous crises such as Paris and London produce - if this is so definitely to be expected that you feel it is a power that would crush you if they should try to force the worst to happen by resorting to a maneuver of opposition - well, under these circumstances leave the sinking ship, and concentrate your mind and energy, not on clinging to your present position, but on creating something wholly new. For a long time your *duty* has seemed too complicated to me; your duty ought to be something simple, and your present duty would grow more and more involved and doubtful, leaving the question of whether I think it is really and truly your duty out of it. By starting to paint, you will find a very clear duty and a very simple, straight path for your feet.

My idea is that going on in your present situation would prove to be not only more and more unbearable, but also less and less profitable. I do not say this only as far as Goupil & Co. is concerned, but also in general with regard to you as a *dealer*. I do not say that you and I will get rich together, but in any case we shall be able to preserve our aplomb and our balance, although - I cannot deny this - we shall have a very hard time of it during the first few years.

But I see not *the unfavourable* but *the favourable* fatality hovering over our painting enterprise, but you would crush not only yourself but me too, I am afraid, by carrying through something which in my opinion goes utterly against the grain. In the first place we shall not be able to assist each other, and we shall be too much cast upon ourselves, and in the second place we shall make each other waver by working in diametrically opposite directions, so that notwithstanding our friendship, at times we shall have to turn our backs on each other

Well, my dear fellow, to me painting is too logical, too reasonable, too straightforward to allow me personally ever to change my course. Besides, you yourself helped me realize the idea of a handicraft, and I know that basically it is your idea too, so I think we ought to cooperate from now on.

My reason, my conscience, compel me to tell you what is partially your own view too; there is nothing to fall back on but a *radical* renewal.

I know that my words will be in strange contrast to those of others you might consult, who want to pass the matter off with, "It will come out all right," "The desired changes will occur." I do not wish to flatter you, all right, I do not flatter. As to rousing your courage, yes, I dare to, I dare rouse the very highest courage and serenity in you, but only as regards painting; and about Paris, I can only say this, Look well, and see if *fate* is not against you on that battlefield.

As far as I can see, going on in Paris, even if you were able to stick it out for many years, will not grant you peace, and there would not be so much opportunity for being as useful to others as if you were a painter.

I see that Paris will put you into what I would call a crooked position in regard to *your own duty*. Leaving your being useful to others out of it for the moment, seeing that I do not know if *in the long run* I myself should remain truly firm, because you are directing the simpler minds of others toward Paris, a thought which will disturb exactly *these* people because they *might* be intoxicated by it.

Understand clearly what I say: Until now everything has had its reason, but now the signs of the times suggest a change of direction, as I see it, in a way quite different from and far more decisive than anything in the past.

There is no question of slackening or giving in here; on the contrary, in this there is an attacking the calamity at the core: the same energetic principle as that of sowing superior plants in better soil.

The calamity leaves us our old courage and our old earnest energy. Let the world say venomously what it cannot refrain from saying; it will leave you and me cold. On the contrary, we are counting on the possibility of a hard life which will have a purpose other than earning as much money as possible.

Our purpose is in the first place self-reform by means of a handicraft and of intercourse with nature, believing as we do that this is our first duty in order to be honest with others and to be consistent - our aim is walking with God - the opposite of living in the midst of the doings of the big cities.

We shall not harm anybody by this.

Though some people may think it hypocritical to say so, our belief is that God will help those who help themselves, as long as they turn their energy and attention in this direction, and set to work *to this end*.

I see that Millet believed more and more firmly in “Something on High.” He spoke of it in a way quite different than, for instance, Father does. He left it more vague, but for all that, I see more in Millet's vagueness than in what Father says. And I find that same quality of Millet's in Rembrandt, in Corot - in short, in the work of many, though I must not and cannot expatiate on this. The end of things need not be the power to explain them, but basing oneself effectively upon them.

In short, Theo, I have a vague but firm feeling that it is our first duty to fix the heart on high, and this feeling forces me to recommend to you, brother to brother, friend to friend, preparing yourself for a life based on simpler principles. Principles which I am unable to define for others, but which I feel; one can hardly imagine *duty* commanding one to *do business in Paris*; rather, it will induce one to retire from it.

Can you share these feelings to a certain extent? Think it over, deliberate on it; if you want time, search your heart, and take your time. All hesitation based on the objection “I am not an artist” seems reasonable to me only as long as you do *not* prevent yourself from *becoming one.* To what degree we *are* or are *not* artists, neither we ourselves nor others can definitely ascertain. However, the How-to-do-it system entails saying, I *shall do my best to do it*, without asking any such questions; on the other hand, it seems to me that it is the How-NOT-to-do-it system which says, “I know in advance I shall not be able to do it.”

One is not sure of things all at once, one cannot foresee things except very vaguely, but there is something called conscience after all, a kind of compass by which one can distinguish between this direction and that - between North and South - between right and left - at least broadly speaking. Which means - notwithstanding fortuitous currents and certain deceptively inviting coasts - being able to say, This is not the right course for me after all. And look, earning money in Paris, even for others' sakes, would, considering your recent experiences, seem to me such a deceptive fata morgana: a coast that recedes more and more when you approach to make a landing *there,* at the same time causing you to be driven farther and farther off your course. I respect all hesitations and doubts, I respect your weighing all the pros and cons, I will not try to force an immediate decision upon you. But I only point out very, very seriously that in my opinion it is an incontrovertible fact that you are standing at a crossroads, and that you will have to look before you leap to the decision simply to continue in Paris. The signs of the times, not I, say: Wait a bit! What do you want? Do you choose Paris? All right, if you *have made up your mind* that it is to be so, then I should not want to interfere; but it will not be as easy as all that, and I am afraid you will be in for fatality. I am damned doubtful whether you will remain at peace with your lot.

I see *everything except* fatality against painting; *for* Paris I see everything *except* fatality!

Fatality, in which with an unutterable feeling I see God, Who is the White Ray of Light, and Who has the last word; what is not good through and through is not good at all, and will not last - He, in Whose eyes even the Black Ray will have no plausible meaning.

What is before you is something terrible, something “awful” - those things are so inexpressible that I can find no words for them; and if I were not your brother and your friend, who considers being silent ungrateful as well as inhuman, I should say nothing. But seeing that you say, First, inspire me with courage, and second, do not flatter me, I say now, Look, I see all these things here on the silent moor, where I feel God high above you and me. With a warm handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 2 November 1883

Dear brother,
I must just tell you about a trip to Zweeloo, the village where Liebermann stayed for a long time and did studies for his painting at the last Salon, the one with the washerwomen. Where Ter Meulen and Jules Bakhuyzen spent some time also.

Imagine a trip across the heath at 3 o'clock in the morning in a small open cart (I went with the man with whom I'm lodging, who had to go to Assen market), along a road, or “diek” as they call it here, which had been banked up with mud instead of sand. It was even better than the barge.

When it was just starting to get light, and the cocks were starting to crow everywhere round the huts scattered over the heath, everything, the few cottages we passed - surrounded by wispy poplars whose yellow leaves one could hear falling - a stumpy old tower in a little churchyard with an earth bank and a beech hedge, the flat scenery of heath or cornfields, everything was exactly like the most beautiful Corots. A stillness, a mystery, a peace as only he has painted it. When we arrived at Zweeloo at 6 o'clock in the morning it was still quite dark - I had seen the real Corots even earlier in the morning.

The ride into the village was so beautiful. Enormous mossy roofs of houses, stables, covered sheepfolds, barns. The very broad-fronted houses here are set among oak trees of a superb bronze. Tones in the moss of gold-green, in the ground of reddish or bluish or yellowish dark lilac-greys, tones of inexpressible purity in the green of the little cornfields, tones of black in the wet tree trunks, standing out against the golden rain of swirling, teeming autumn leaves, which hang in loose clumps - as if they had been blown there, loose and with the light filtering through them - from the poplars, the birches, the limes and the apple trees.

The sky smooth and bright, shining, not white but a barely detectable lilac, white vibrant with red, blue and yellow, reflecting everything and felt everywhere above one, hazy and merging with the thin mist below, fusing everything in a gamut of delicate greys.

I could not find a single painter in Zweeloo, however, and people said they *never* turn up in the *winter*. Whereas I, *on the contrary*, hope to be there this winter. Since there were no painters, I decided not to wait for my landlord's return, but to walk back instead and do some drawings on the way. So I began to make a sketch of the little apple orchard where Liebermann did his large painting. And then back along the road we had driven down early in the morning. Right now the whole area round Zweeloo is nothing but young corn, sometimes as far as the eye can see, the greenest of greens I know. With a sky above of a delicate lilac-white producing an effect I think cannot be painted, but which, as I see it, is the keynote one must understand in order to find the key to other effects.

A black stretch of earth, flat, unending, a clear sky of delicate lilac-white. The earth sprouts that young corn as if growing a mould of it. That's what the good, fertile lands of Drenthe really are - and all in a misty atmosphere. Think of *Brion's* Le dernier jour de l*a création* - well, yesterday it felt as if I understood the meaning of that painting. The poor soil of Drenthe is the same, except that the black earth is even blacker - like soot - not lilac-black like the furrows, and overgrown in a melancholy way with perpetually rotting heather and peat.

I notice it everywhere - chance effects on that infinite background: in the peat moors, the turf huts; in the fertile areas, those most primitive hulks of farmhouses and sheepfolds with low, very low little walls and enormous mossy roofs. Oak trees all round them. Journeying through these parts for hour after hour, one feels that there really is nothing but that infinite earth, that mould of corn or heather, that infinite sky. Horses and men seem as small as fleas. One is unaware of anything else, however large it may be in itself; one knows only that there is earth and sky.

However, in one's capacity of a little speck watching other little specks - leaving the infinite aside - one discovers that every little speck is a Millet. I passed a little old church, exactly, but exactly like The Church at Gréville in Millet's little painting in the Luxembourg. Here, instead of the small peasant with his spade, though, there was here a shepherd with a flock of sheep walking along the hedge. In the background was a vista, not of the sea, but of a sea of young corn, a sea of furrows instead of waves. The effect produced was the same. Then I saw ploughmen, hard at work, a sand cart, shepherds, road menders, dung carts. In a small roadside inn, I drew a little old woman at her spinning wheel, a small dark silhouette out of a fairy tale - a small dark silhouette against a bright window through which one saw the bright sky and a little path through the delicate green, and a few geese pecking at the grass.

And then, when dusk fell, imagine the silence, the peace!

Imagine *then* a short avenue of tall poplars with autumn leaves, imagine a wide muddy road, all black mud, with heath stretching to infinity on the right, heath stretching to infinity on the left, a couple of black triangular silhouettes of sod-built huts, the red glow from small fires shining through the small windows, with a few pools of dirty, yellowish water reflecting the sky, in which fallen trees lie rotting into peat. Imagine that sea of mud at dusk with a whitish sky overhead, thus everything black against white. And in that sea of mud a shaggy figure - the shepherd - and a mass of oval shapes, half wool, half mud, jostling one another, pushing one another out of the way - the flock. You see them coming, you stand in their midst, you turn around and follow them. Laboriously and reluctantly they work their way up the muddy road. The farm beckons in the distance, a few mossy roofs and piles of straw and peat among the poplars. The sheepfold is again like the silhouette of a triangle, the entrance dark. The door stands wide open like a dark cave. The light of the sky glimmers once more through the chinks of the boards behind it. The whole caravan, masses of wool and mud, disappears into that cave - the shepherd and a little woman with a lantern shut the doors behind them.

That return of the flock in the dusk was the finale of the symphony I heard yesterday. The day passed like a dream, I had been so immersed in that heart-rending music all day that I had literally forgotten to eat and drink - I had had a slice of black bread and a cup of coffee in the little inn where I had drawn the spinning wheel. The day was over and from dawn till dusk, or rather from one night till the next, I had lost myself in that symphony. I came home and as I sat by the fire it occurred to me that I felt hungry, no, I realized I was ravenous.

But now you can see what it is like here. One feels just as if one were at, say, an exhibition des cent chef-d'œvres. What does one bring back from such a day? Merely a number of rough sketches. Yet there is something else one brings back - a quiet delight in one's work.

Be sure to write soon. It is Friday today, but your letter has not yet arrived, I'm waiting for it eagerly. It takes time to get it [the money] changed, too, because it has to go back again to Hoogeveen and then here again. We're not sure how it's going to work out, otherwise I should tell you now: perhaps the simplest thing would be to send the money once a month. In any case, write again soon. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 3 November 1883

Theo, of late I have been unable to refrain from turning my thoughts to a few things. “Coming events cast their shadows before,” and “We know not what a day may bring forth,” as the English say. Enough, I myself have a presentiment that it will come to pass that you will leave Goupil & Co. because G. & Co. is unsupportably arrogant, and will do mean things, and in a word, they will do their utmost to make staying on impossible for you.

At least this is the story of the honest fellow's leaving - those who could not stay with Goupil & co., however much they were attached to the firm. Just wait and see how things turn out, but do not flatter yourself with the belief in reconciliation. Theo, as for me it is true that I have never been able to abandon the belief in reconciliation in the thousand occurrences of life, but my experience tells me - even if there is every reason to make it up, and if there is much harm in failing to make it up - yet my experience tells me that *in most cases* it does not occur.

So, my dear fellow, it may well happen that one bright morning in the near future you will find yourself uprooted after a gale which suddenly assumes a huge violence, and that you will feel deeply shaken; my dear fellow, a thing like this is horrible, and may lead to your doubting whether your heart is in your commercial job.

Then be wise, you, then be sensible, and listen to what I tell you about the thorny little path of painting, which at first leads to all sorts of humiliation, etc., but which for all that will eventually lead to a more lasting victory and a more definite peace than commerce can ever give.

You and I are brothers, and what is more, friends, and if misfortune should happen to tighten these ties and knit us closer together, I should see so many favourable sides to this that the whole thing would appear to me anything but a misfortune.

Theo, at times I think that for an artist the utmost poverty would be bearable (and productive too) if only he were not alone. I assure you that this presentiment that you will not stay on at Goupil's has remained with me all the time, since I wrote you for the first time: “Coming events cast their shadows before,” notwithstanding the fact that I forced myself to think, It will not happen; he will stay on. And at the same time it has become an idée fixe of mine that you will feel *so* uprooted, *so* disoriented, *so defeated* that as for standing behind another counter you will simply say, “I can't do it,” “It would certainly be a failure,” “I am no longer fit to be a dealer,” “It was possible at Goupil's, as I had been there from my youth onward, but *now I'll have done with it*.” There, my presentiment tells me that this is approximately how you feel at heart.

In this case I see nothing reckless, nothing unpractical, nothing foolish in our wanting to feel our energy, to feel *ourselves*. Let our love of art inspire us with a foi de charbonnier, inspire us to say what others have said before us, and will say after us, namely, Though circumstances may be ominous, and though we may be very poor, and so on, *yet we have one thing to cling to tenaciously - painting, of course*.

Certainly I feel a great deal of what you say. Namely that in the interest of so many things you feel in your heart the inclination to throw yourself into business again, not primarily for your own pleasure but for the welfare of others.

Dear brother, it is not at all necessary to give up your endeavours to keep all who belong to our home on their feet. On the contrary - although until now I did not think I had the right to put in a word - the present state of affairs induces me to make the proposal to divide things we are engaged in among all the people at home, among Father, Mother, Wil and Marie. And we ourselves should understand one thing thoroughly: that it is our duty to co-operate, and that because of the calamity at Goupil & Co. we are faced with a number of years in which we must “stoop to conquer.”

During these years we must aim at you and me in the end earning as much money together as you now do all alone. And although the interval may be something of a “bad passage” for all of us, we must try to make up for it by a little cordiality and love between us.

I do not see any good coming of your forcing yourself to undertake new work against your inclination; on the contrary, I foresee it would end in all-round failure.

But you must have *Foi de charbonnier* - and start out boldly with the idea: *Painter*.

I am afraid, my dear fellow, that if you engage in new things, in the first place you will waste your time; in the second place, it will turn out a failure, because the shock of being uprooted will prove too strong for you, and in the third place you will lose more than you gain. Should you insist on taking this road, and once more engage in business affairs in Paris, America or elsewhere, I should quietly let you have your own way, but on the back of this page I have uttered my presentiments clearly enough so that you can decide for yourself whether I take a wrong view of things; to me it is pretty clear that these consequences are highly probable.

Well, dear fellow, what I advise you is something quite new. Foi de charbonnier in art, instead of saying (and to me it is twaddle), I can't do anything, I am not an artist, do not attribute qualities to me that I do not possess, and all that rubbish. I tell you this is a delusion, and now, my dear fellow, things are so serious, and your future and mine are so terribly dependent on them that you must not take it amiss if I tell you a little baldly that the right thing to do under the circumstances is to undertake painting with the foi de charbonnier.

And at home they must understand one thing - namely that whatever we do, you and I will always bear today's purpose in mind, which is to see things through not only for ourselves but for all of us. But that the old way is barred to us, and that we shall have to create a new one, and that what we need is their silence about it and their not disturbing us - on the contrary, their coming to our aid if there should be need for it. Our project ought to be respected at home, and not frustrated. Look here, old fellow, I cannot speak otherwise. I have not a moment's rest, because I must not inspire false hope by saying that the other things will come right.

Perhaps, or rather, assuredly, we were mistaken in not starting on it sooner, but this mistake is understandable on account of our education and the influences we were submitted to; but this is all the more reason to get to work now with a steadiness and a resolution which I doubt we should have had at our disposal in our younger days. So it appears to me that we must concentrate our whole energy on painting with the utmost singleness of purpose - it being the raft that will take us safely to shore after the shipwreck - undertaking it in all cheerfulness.

Adieu, old fellow, with a cordial handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, c. 17 November 1883

Dear brother,

Thanks for your letter, though you yourself admit it to be rather short. I know that at present many people call everything that is only an interchange of views, everything outside their *business* or *facts*, quite superfluous and even nonsensical in a letter, and so they arrive at a certain very concise form, which, however, is at the same time a rather unsatisfactory, disappointing way of corresponding.

Well, brother, I wish you had written about it less curtly, but it may have been that you were too busy. As to your idea of letting some time pass, and then looking at the question again from all points of view, I think it wise, and not at all wrong in itself. But you add something to that proposal which I will answer quite plainly. You say, “Think over whether there isn't also much to be said for my staying at Goupil's.” Well, brother, that subject has been in my thoughts from a long time ago until now, much more than I told you of in my letters, and as you ask me now to consider its advantages, I will, in all sincerity, tell you how it seems to me.

I tell you that more and more I doubt whether the advantage of being with Goupil is really to our good, I mean to your good, to the good of those at home and to my own good - I'm not just thinking of the financial advantage alone, but of other doubtful advantages too, such as direct or indirect relations with influential persons. In short, taking everything into account, I put a question mark after *advantage*.

You must understand me well - perhaps - no, certainly - there was a crisis at home as well as in my own life when, as I sincerely believe, all of our lives were literally *saved* by you. We have been saved from ruin by the protection and support we received from you; the situation was critical, especially for me. If I have now reached such a point that, when I stand before an object or figure, I feel within me clearly, distinctly, unhesitatingly, the power to draw it - to render it - not perfectly, but true in its general structure and proportion - well, that point has been reached, absolutely, absolutely, and if I have reached it, it has been primarily because your help was a kind of fence or shield between a hostile world and myself, and because I could in all calmness think almost exclusively of my drawing, and my thoughts were not crushed by fatally overwhelming material cares. And though I don't know the details of the matter - I believe that those at home are under great obligations to you, too. And indirectly also to Goupil & Co., so I fully acknowledge the advantage *up till now*; but *in the future* there comes the question mark after *advantage*. If your help was indispensable until now, I believe that in the future I myself at least must try to manage my affairs differently.

The germinating seed must not be exposed to a frosty wind - that was the case with me in the beginning. I'm afraid that if it hadn't been for you, Uncle Vincent's words, “ni fait, ni à faire,” Tersteeg's words, and the accompanying cold shoulder from both at a critical moment would have been fatal to me, like a too cold wind to the germinating corn. But once the winter corn is rooted in the earth, it becomes a little stronger, and it struggles through the winter as best it can, at least it *must* get through. And now, brother, I would think it mean in myself if I said, The money from you *must* continue, in that way inducing you to stay with Goupil & Co. If you arrive at that decision I am so decidedly against it, I warn you, so decidedly - the art-dealing business will betray you in the end - that I will take no part in forcing you to such a decision by needing help myself.

And though I hope we shall remain as true friends as ever, and shall always feel our brotherhood tie, I repeat, it is my intention to refuse your financial help as soon as you bind yourself to Goupil & Co. *for good*, because I am sure you would regret such a decision in the end, and it would put you in a position of which you might say, I wish I had never accepted it; and at the same time you would think, Then why did my brother and my parents drive me into it? I will not be guilty of bringing you to that decision, so now you know what I really think in all frankness about the “advantages(?) of Goupil's.”

How should I manage then? Well, for instance, I could try to get a job as an illustrator for a magazine, or, in short, do anything “n'importe quoi,” for which perhaps you yourself would know an opportunity, or in which you could advise me - for instance, about the Moniteur Universel, though I do not consider this the most desirable connection.

But if I were left entirely to myself, I might take a chance in Paris, or London, or The Hague - in short, in some city in a printer's or a magazine's office - of course trying at the same time to make and sell drawings and paintings; and after that, manage to get back to Drenthe.

Then I should want, however, to submit myself to the utmost stress in order to *force* myself to be productive, and I would beg to stop the present assistance of my own accord.

But, brother, this is in case of your staying with Goupil & Co., and in the other possibility, your deciding to become a painter, we should of course feel the pressure of an enormous compulsion behind us, and would have to encourage each other in those circumstances by faithful comradeship; but though I shall always be, and remain, grateful beyond all words and expressions for your help, my intention for the future is fixed: if you stay with Goupil, this will push me straightway to the decision mentioned above, though our friendship will of course remain, unless you should object to having anything to do with me.

If it might be - and I don't think it absolutely impossible - that not the circumstances but *your own soul* lead you to painting, well, then it is quite natural for us to join hands for one and the same aim and ideal.

But as to trying to put up with the thought of approving (?) of your staying with Goupil, of considering the *advantages* (?) of it --you see how I look upon these things. I have had my own experiences with Goupil in the past; a look thereon, a look at the present time, and a look into the future lead me to a Beware! And, for myself, I think Paris enervating, and I see no good in living there permanently, neither for myself nor for you.

As for me, perhaps I shall have to be there for a time in order to make some contacts (made impossible for me at The Hague), but I will stay in the country as much as I can, and the only thing which counts with me is painting or drawing. Goodbye, boy, for the rest, let some time pass, and receive in thought a warm handshake from,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

You know, brother, I had promised Wisselingh to show him some studies from Drenthe before the winter. Now I am sending you today six studies; be so kind as to show them to him someday, as a small sign of life, though of course I do not suppose they will be considered saleable.

The painting out-of-doors is over, it is already too cold of late. But what a relief it would be if I could settle in these parts for good.

The house rent is very low; if only one had company, how delightful it would be to rent a peasant's cottage and fix up everything more solidly and less precariously than at an inn.

Well, I repeat, let us possess our souls in patience, let things decide themselves.

Taking a house alone is so very melancholy and chilly. There must be some life in the camp to keep things going and to prevent stagnation.

But, Theo, how inexpressibly beautiful it is here!

You cannot see it at all from my studies yet; I still have much to learn before I can express how it really is here, and it is also a question of time.

One thing I declare, that this country had an influence of calm, of faith, of courage on me, and I believe you need that influence too - it would be the very,

very best thing for you; it would make you discover yourself again, your soul, but in a more genuine and complete way than at the time of drawing mills. But I am afraid you consider what I say as the product of my imagination, my words as idle and without foundation.

And I admit it is very difficult to know what one has to do. Money plays a brutal part in society, and I partially share your feelings in that respect. But then, I feel such a vivid hope that painting will set our real energy free, and yet keep us afloat, though the first years may be very difficult. If I have to perish, then I shall perish, is the only thing one can say. As to my saying, If you stay with Goupil for good, I shall be obliged to refuse your help, do not suppose I think too highly of my present work.

No, I am well aware it had no market value, but my idea is that I want to work without any more protection than others have, and I shall throw myself into it headlong, not because I think I have arrived, but because I believe: “je grandirai dans la tempête” [I shall grow in the tempest].

You may ask, what is my intention in saying “stay with Goupil for good”? Look here - now winter is at the door and I am sitting here lost on the heath, what else can I do for the purpose but work?

But suppose toward spring, for instance the month of March, you are still on good terms with Goupil, without any prospect of leaving. That is what I should call “staying for good,” and then I should try to take another direction, or rather, I should force myself to it, by an enormous compulsion.

Fortune favours the bold, says the proverb, and though something may perhaps be said against it, I decidedly believe its basis to be a fact, in the same way as the opposite: that moral weakness or want of courage brings a kind of fatal doom in the end.

So my plan is always to risk too much rather than too little; if one is defeated by too much, well, so be it. In short, I don't want my needs to be a reason for your staying; if you want to stay, do so, but not for my sake, as I think it decidedly not the right road for you.

Once more a warm handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Please don't take what I tell you amiss, as if I should have a personal grudge against you if you stayed on, for even then I approve of you as you are.

It is absolutely nothing but the fact that I don't want it said that I should ever consent to your being in a profession against your will, with my knowledge, more or less for my sake.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 19 November 1883

Theo,
Some time ago you wrote me about a certain difference in our respective physiognomies. All right. And your conclusion was that I was more of a thinker. What can I say to that? I do feel in myself a faculty for thinking, but that faculty is not what I feel specially organized in me. I think myself to be something other than specially a thinker. When I think of you, I see very characteristic action that is well and good, but also most decidedly not isolated but on the contrary accompanied by so much sentiment, and real *thought too*, that for me the conclusion is that there is more resemblance than difference between you and me. I do not say there is no difference - but having learned to know you better of late, the difference seems smaller to me than I used to think sometimes in former years.

When I consider our temperament and type of physiognomy, I find similarity, and a very pronounced resemblance between, for instance, the Puritans and ourselves besides. I mean the people in Cromwell's time or thereabouts, the little group of men and women who sailed from the Old World to America in the *Mayflower,* and settled there, firmly resolved to live simple lives.

Times are different - they cut down forests - we would turn to painting. I know that the initiative taken by a small group, called in history The Pilgrim Fathers, however small in itself, had great consequences; and as to ourselves, I think that in the first place we should philosophize but little about great consequences, and only try to find a path for ourselves to travel through life as straightforwardly as possible. To meditate on consequences is not our way, *neither yours nor mine.*

If I mention The Pilgrim Fathers, it is because of the physiognomy, to show you that certain reddish-haired people with square foreheads are neither only thinkers nor only men of action, but usually combine both elements. In one of Boughton's pictures I know a little figure of one of those Puritans, for which I should think *you* had posed if I didn't know better. It is exactly, exactly the same physiognomy - a small silhouette on a rock against a background of sea and fog; I can show you myself also, that is to say, that *variation* of the same physiognomy, but my profile is less characteristic.

Father used to ponder over the story of Jacob and Esau with regard to you and me - not quite wrongly - but fortunately there is less discord, to mention only *one* point of difference, and in the Bible itself there are plenty of examples of better relations between brothers than existed between the venerable patriarchs mentioned above.

I myself have sometimes thought about that being a thinker, but more and more it becomes clear to me that it was not my vocation, and because of the unfortunate prejudice that a man who feels the need to think things over is *not* practical, and belongs only among the dreamers, because this prejudice is greatly respected in Society, I often met with rebuffs because I didn't keep things to myself enough.

But since then that very history of the Puritans, and the history of Cromwell, as for instance Carlyle gives it, made me see that thinking and acting do not exclude each other, and that the sharp dividing lines which are drawn nowadays between thinking and acting - as if the one excluded the other - do not really exist. As to doubting whether one is an artist or not - that question is too much of an abstraction.

I confess, however, that I don't object to thinking it over, provided I can draw and paint at the same time.

And *my* aim in *my* life is to make pictures and drawings, as many and as well as I can; then, at the end of my life, I hope to pass away, looking back with love and tender regret, and thinking, “Oh, the pictures I might have made!” But this does not exclude making what is possible, mind you. Do you object to this, either for me or for yourself?

I wish painting would become such a fixed idea in your mind that the problem of “Am I an artist or am I not?” would be placed in the category of abstractions, and the more practical questions of how to put together a figure or a landscape) being more amusing, would come to the fore.

Theo, I declare I prefer to think how arms, legs, head are attached to the trunk, rather than whether I myself am more or less an artist or not.

I suppose that you prefer thinking of a sky with grey clouds, and their silver lining above a muddy field, to being engrossed in the question of your own personality. Oh, for all that, I know sometimes the mind is full of it, which is only natural. But look here, brother, even if our mind is now and then full of the problem, “*Is there a God* or *is there not*?” it is no reason for us to commit an ungodly act intentionally.

In the same way, in the matter of art, the problem, “Am I an artist or am I not?” must not induce us *not* to draw or *not* to paint. Many things defy definition, and I consider it wrong to fritter one's time away on them. Certainly when one's work does not go smoothly and one is checked by difficulties, one gets bogged in the morass of such thoughts and insoluble problems. And because one feels sorely troubled by it, the best thing to do is to conquer the cause of the distraction by acquiring a new insight into the practical part of the work.

Now I, for my part, seeing both in you and in myself something of the Puritan character, which so unites thinking and acting and is so far removed from wanting to be only a thinker or only a machine, which needs principles of simplicity as *well as* of sensible work, I do *not* admit a difference or divergence, much less a contrast between you and me.

In my view, it would be an erreur de point de vue [error of judgment] were you to continue in business in Paris. The conclusion then: two brother painters. Would that suit your nature? You may be involved in a difficult and fruitless struggle *against* it, a struggle that would impede your own liberation, just because you doubt whether you can do it. I know all this, alas, from my own experience.

Après tout, no matter how much we may be our own enemies, I am beginning to realize more and more: “L'homme s'agite, Dieu le mène [Man proposes and God disposes].” An infinitely powerful force prevails over our doing right and wrong. The same is true of your circumstances - act sensibly in them - perhaps even sensibly enough, in the end, to become a painter. Ultimately I should feel so reassured were you to take up a brush that I should consider the momentary calamity and shipwreck of lesser importance than the certain knowledge that your future is moving in a direction you will never regret.

But I wish that at the same time you may find rest for your heart in the matter of women. If this were possible, you would be *even stronger*, as being loved gives one certain wings, a certain surprising courage and energy. Then one is more of a *complete* man than otherwise. And the more one is this, the better.

At all events, I count it among the possibilities that you yourself may become conscious that painting is your vocation, and then, dear brother, Puritan “sans le savoir” [without knowing it], it might be that your days in Paris were numbered, that an old world closed itself to you, in a rather ungenerous way - but that at the same time a new world opened itself to you.

Well, think it over, a long or a short time. But it would be of little use if you said, Vincent, keep silent about it; for to that my answer is: Theo, it will not keep silent *within yourself*.

On le contient plus malaisément
Que la source des grands fleuves.
[It is more difficult to repress
Than the source of great rivers.]

Theo, I have heard from the poor woman a few times; she seems to be doing her best, working, washing for people, going out as a charwoman. Her writing is almost indecipherable and incoherent, she seems to regret some things in the past. The children are well and happy.

My pity and affection for her are certainly not dead, and I hope that a bond of affection may remain between us, though I do not see the possibility or the good of living together again - pity may not be love, but for all that it can be rooted deeply enough.

Well, brother, to change the subject, it is snowing here today, in the form of enormous hailstones. I call it snow because of the effect.

I don't speak about the beauty of the scenery here because I should have to say *too much* about it to you. As to the work, I am almost too preoccupied with the idea that you should take it up too, which quite absorbs me. I wish it were settled, then we could make definite plans for working together. Drenthe is so beautiful, it absorbs and satisfies me so absolutely that if I could not be here forever, I should wish I had never seen it. It is inexpressibly beautiful.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 26 November 1883

Dear Theo,
May I draw your attention to the fact that the post of Monday, November 26, has just gone by, without having brought your letter. As it still has to go to Hoogeveen and back, we have now arrived at a point where it almost amounts to my having failed to receive one remittance, for suppose the next mail brings your letter, I cannot get the money before November 28, late in the evening, or November 29 in the morning.

So it is, properly speaking, a deficit, for your next letter, which I should otherwise have expected about December 1st, probably won't arrive then. For since I have been here at Nieuw Amsterdam, the letters have been arriving later and later. If I had received a word of warning according to our arrangement, it would not rouse in me that feeling which I cannot help gradually getting now. That is to say that a certain insincerity is creeping into our relationship, which began by being sincere, by mutually understanding and respecting each other.

That this is a disappointment to me, and worries me considerably, even apart from the thoughts I cannot keep from rising within me, is not what weighs most heavily on my mind today.

Rather it is a vague uneasiness about you, though - perhaps just *because* - only yesterday I heard from home that they had had a good letter from you. So I should conclude from it that the crisis in question is suppressed, averted, stopped - well, whatever you like to call it. And so this would be a confirmation of your words to me: “I believe that for the present things will remain as they are.”

About which, however, I hinted that it only half pleased me, or rather that it alarmed me more than it reassured me about your future.

I only hope now that you will understand and not *mis*understand me.

At this moment to I do not suspect you of insincerity - please keep this in mind as my starting point.

So because I believe in you as an honest man, I consider you relatively safe at present in spite of difficulties, even in case of a catastrophe.

But now I approach the point where I am afraid you are in danger - are vulnerable. Suppose all impending dangers were averted, suppose everything were quieted down, then I want to remind you of the English saying: “Fear the storm but dread the *calm treacherous enchanted ground*.” Suppose you are carried along, gently and imperceptibly, by a current deviating from the straight course. Suppose what I will call - excuse the expression - the poison of the Parisian atmosphere - the Jesuitism of its vapours - slowly but surely penetrates your pores - imperceptibly to yourself - yet the result would be that after some years you would become aware of it yourself - I am driven from the right course, I have turned *too* insincere, I am too little *myself*. I have indulged *too much* in pursuing prosperity.

Brother! when you told me the other day, “I think in the matter of finance I am on the trail of a new conception” - what I thought of it was, in short, That's bad enough. I should not have thought so if you had written: In the matter of printing I am on the trail of something, or - I have discovered a number of energetic new artists, with whom I shall probably be able to do business, or something of the sort - in short, if you had discovered something in the field of work or art, **I** should have thought it excellent, but - the field of finance - pardon my saying it - it is too much in the air for my taste.

Well, boy, do you take offense at my not being quite easy in my mind on your account? And in the second place do you think I am confusing your concerns with my own, the latter being to a certain extent dependent on those of yours? Granted that my concerns are dependent on yours, yet it is not about this that my mind is uneasy at present - my uneasiness is about you and you alone - about you as a human being - as a man - as an upright, honest man. And my question remains: Won't you suffer a loss and decline - as a human being? And if I am forced to put this question, it is because Paris is Paris.

I do not say I am sure that I myself always have this mental energy, so I do not speak for myself but of another person out of the remote past. It is said that when he felt he was on enchanted ground and in an enchanted atmosphere, when he perceived that he was being unnerved, he resolutely left the island on a timber beam or a raft, and ventured on the high seas, thinking, the sea is less dangerous than *this*. And in my opinion this man was almighty wise.

This…you must excuse me from defining it, and just allow me to say that there are things which, as one ought to know, can gradually cast a spell of a man and make him change his course in a direction diametrically opposed to the course he took as long as he was honest.

My words may sound gloomy, very well. For myself, there are moments when my own prospects seem very dark to me - but as I already wrote you, I do not believe that my fate depends on what seems against it. All kinds of things may be against me, but there *may* be one thing more powerful than what I see threatening me. I used the word fatality for lack of a better word - no one falls before his time - so as for me, I resign myself to fate, and act as if nothing were the matter.

As for you, I repeat, as long as I believe in your sincerity (and I do not believe the contrary yet), I also believe that you are safe in spite of happiness or unhappiness, were it solely in that conscious reality - which hovers over the appearance of things. But I couldn't help smiling at what they wrote from home about a “good” letter, with one single vague word, that's all I know about it, and that it seemed that matters had taken a more favourable turn again. I thought, Very well - if you people say that you are satisfied, then be satisfied - I did not think more of it, however, than that.

If that one sentence in that letter about you ended thus: “But next year we expect important occurrences to take place, and we hope that he (that means *you*) will not suffer a loss in consequence of them,” it would seem to me that the occurrences in question will not influence you as a man, but that the problem will be far more, “What shall [*sic*] he do with it?” as the English say - what are the qualities of his character, his soul - in short a problem which, in my opinion, has not yet been solved, seeing that to a very large extent it will depend on your own thoughts and your own will.

But know this one thing, brother - that whatever choice you might make, or whatever decision you might or might not take, that whether you become better in my eyes, or worse, and also whether or not there will be more or less direct relations between us with respect to money or business, this will *not* be regarded by *me* as a reason for estrangement. Difference of opinion, difference in view of life, difference of principles, suppose they might show themselves later on - they haven't so far - are for *me no* reason to overlook the fact that we are brothers, and that we agree on many points. I just emphasize this to our mutual reassurance I hope. You are free, I am free, to act as it seems most reasonable to us, aren't we? And if one always takes this for granted, that one must not blame the other or become hostile, or spiteful, or throw obstacles in each other's way because of a possible difference of opinion - then, though there may come a time of greater coolness, things will, thank God, remain free from fanaticism or intrigue.

Which, alas, is not always the case with everyone. It is the same with the money, which I wrote about at the beginning of my letter. What I mean *primarily* is, never let that become a point of discord between us, and bear in mind that of course I don't blame you in the least for not having it, even when it sometimes causes me terrible difficulties.

As to the capital already invested in it by you and by me - for after all, I put my work into it, throw myself headlong into it - as to all these things - after all, I still cherish the hope that in the future it will redress itself - though, though - perhaps not only I, but you too on your part, have been mistaken in a few things, which, however, are not yet fatal or past remedy, and which I will not even mention now. Do not find in this letter nor in the preceding ones a distrust, a suspicion, or an insult; take it only as a warning concerning some Parisian things, which I want you to consider, not as if I were infallible, not as if I should insist on your agreeing with me - but because I believe I see certain symptoms which seem to me of an enigmatic and ominous nature.

And, yes - now it *must* be said - I do not even ask for a reply - I even beg you not to consider this a question but simply a statement, in order to make quite clear to you that *within* my *general* uneasiness there is *another* uneasiness. In short, the core of many matters is - this woman of yours, is she good? Is she honest? Is she modest, does she stand on common ground, or are there some little weeds of a somewhat dangerous craving for what I will call “greatness” among her wheat? I was thinking of Lady Macbeth.

Macbeth was an honest man but…but he was enchanted, and when he and she awoke from the bewitchment, they were facing more and worse wickedness than they had intended. And Macbeth fell - he had a *big* fall.

If it is possible, reassure me - as for the calamities, I am not particularly afraid of *them* - in general one should be afraid of nothing except of deteriorating as a man. Now you know the most important thing I sometimes fear when I think of you.

Here you are, I am speaking harshly now, because I wanted to tell you unreservedly that I should be very grateful if I could be reassured about this.

I repeat, it is not in the least my intention to ask for particulars. But the fact remains that there are men who fall in this way. And there are also men who withdraw in time. If a woman is simply good, it is a blessing; but there is the danger that, if a woman should want to be glamorous in the eyes of the world, she might debase a man. Mentioning this disease is something different from saying that this is the case with you, isn't it? On the contrary, I ask you, say just one word and my mind will be perfectly easy, and I shall ask no more questions.

The woman I was with - a whore, already pock-marked, already withered and prematurely old, already a mother of two children - she is not a *good* woman, que soit, but here misfortune has reached the height of her being *no longer capable* of being a Lady Macbeth; and as to temptation, if in the past there were a really ugly wickedness in her, her very misfortune has much curtailed this power to do harm (supposing it had been present in her), and I very much doubt whether the temptation, even if it had been there before, could be effective *now*. So I am not saying what I say because I want to compare notes; the very fact that there is such a difference obviates the chance of there being anything Lady Macbeth-like in my relations with this woman. But you are confronted with a personality who has the power to charm, and this charm may be used fatally in the direction of worldly ambition.

As far as I am concerned, because the woman I was with is a thoroughly unhappy person, and so heavily burdened with a tainted past, two children, poverty, etc., etc., that, even if I found no good in her, I should not want to sever all ties, and I should not stop seeing her to please anybody, nor speaking to her nor writing to her, nor sending her a little money when I happen to have it. Let people think and say what they like about it, all right, I have long ceased to take it ill of them.

But look here, in your case there *might* exist the influence of a charm that has the power to benumb certain strings of the heart, the sense of right and wrong. Once more I repeat, I do not say this is the case, I repeat, I am not even asking if it is so; I only mean it as a hint, and having given this hint that there might be a possible danger, I leave it at that, and I will not pursue it even in thought. And also I think this solicitude on my part may be excused by you and not taken amiss if it should be unfounded, which I hope will be the case.

Did you receive my studies? Since then I have made a large painted one, and a large sketch of a drawbridge [Lost], and even a second painted one of it with another effect.

As soon as there is snow, I hope to use them to get the snow effect more accurately, that is to say, keeping the same lines and structure which I have found now. Well, I hope to hear from you soon.

What influence this or that occurrence, which is not even visible on the horizon yet, may have on you is a thing I think about extremely little, for, as you see, what I think about is yourself as a human being - about the “what shall he do with it?” - about your activity and energy too.

With a handshake, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Yesterday I heard that Furnée had passed his final exam, and now he again has his hands free to go on with his painting.

Though it may not be my first preoccupation, yet I am far from indifferent to the reason for *almost ten days'* difference in the receipt of the money.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Drenthe, 1 December 1883

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. Your letter explains the reason for your silence to me. You thought that "*feeling well off for the moment,*" I offered you an "*ultimatum*," like, for instance, the Nihilists might send the Czar.

Fortunately, for you and for me, there is no question of such a thing here.

However, I understand your idea *now that I know it*, but it is indeed the last straw. In the first place, I meant something quite different - I simply meant, "I wouldn't want to thrive if you were the loser by it" - I would not want to develop the artist in me if you had to suppress your artistic talent for my sake. I would never approve of your repressing the artist in yourself, no matter whose sake it were for, for the sake of either father, mother, sister, brother or wife. That was my meaning - perhaps nervously expressed, and in wrong terms - but I most decidedly meant no more, or nothing else.

You understand it now, don't you?

With reference to what I wrote in my last letter, it was occasioned by your silence, which was an absolute mystery to me, was inexplicable until I knew what was the matter. With regard to Marie, I had an answer before I received your letter, simply because I remembered what you wrote in the past about your meeting her, and I thought, This *cannot but be all right*, there can be nothing wrong with it. So my letter on the subject ought to be taken to mean, Brother, without any warning you seem to have left me out of things; *if* you did this *on purpose* I should think it a betrayal, but I *cannot* believe it, so "explain it to me" - that is, approximately; there was no other motive. And as for Lady Macbeth, you have rightly interpreted my meaning, it being no more than a general hint, and *not even a question*, but only meant to let you feel *either* it must be like this, or it is a *misunderstanding*.

But know this, brother, that I am absolutely cut off from the outer world - except from you - so that it *made me crazy* when your letter did not come at the moment when, far from "being well off," I was very hard pressed, *though I did not mention it*, because I feel I am rather above the cares that gnaw at my heart, which torture I can perhaps explain, but do *not* consider *merited*. Regarding "*I should not want to thrive if another were the loser by it*," I hope *this*, the real meaning of what you took for an ultimatum, will always remain my conviction, either in prosperity or in “agony.” Your conclusion of my “being well off” was rather fatuous, or rash I think, though the fault must have lain in my way of expressing it, but certainly not in my *mood*.

I will tell you once more that, since I have been here, I have had to put my material in good order, I have had to get a supply of colours, I have had to make some trips, I have had to pay my board and lodging, to send something to the woman, to pay off some debts. All these things put together kept me *very hard up*, to use a mild expression. Add to this that particular torture, loneliness, and really you will no longer *be able* to imagine me “well off,” either in the present or the past.

I say loneliness, and not solitude, but that loneliness - which a painter has to bear, whom everybody in such isolated areas regards as a lunatic, a murderer, a tramp, *etc. etc.*

Indeed, this may be a small misery, but it is a sorrow after all: A feeling of being an outcast - particularly strange and unpleasant - though the country may be ever so stimulating and beautiful.

But for the rest I only look upon it as a bad time, which must be got through, and which one can change but little oneself, that is to say, in the relations with people whom one would love to have as models, but cannot get.

Looking back, I see clearly enough now how it came to a misunderstanding between you and me. There was a moment when you were very melancholy and wrote me as follows: “My employers make the situation almost impossible for me, and I even believe they *would rather dismiss me than let me resign*” (the latter exactly my case at the time). And you said some things about the idea of painting at least not being uncongenial to you.

Well - then I told you frankly all my thoughts about the possibility of your becoming a painter; I said, “*You can do it* if only you want to, and *I* believe in you *as an artist, from the moment you take up the brush*,” though nobody else might.

What I told you about this I said to you in order to make it clear that whatever misfortune - calamity - may overtake you in the future, to me the real misfortune is the one which prevents you from deciding on “a complete renewal” now. I am of the opinion that, if you, a human being, were overtaken by a catastrophe, you would be the greater man for it - with - with - with - a scar that always hurts.

In your case I assume it would *lift you up* and *not pull you down*, that hurt which only calamity can cause.

But your later letters are so different in tone and contents that now I say, “If your rigged ship is all trim, just stay on it.”

However, I shall stick to what I said through thick and thin if a calamity forced you to enter into new relations with society. If this should happen, what I have to say is, Let it be the signal for a total change of profession, sooner than starting the same thing all over again.

But as long as you have your rigged ship, I do not advise you to put out to sea in a fishing boat. Although, speaking for myself, I should certainly not want that rigged vessel of Goupil & Co.'s back. At the time what I thought was, Calamity, burst out for Heaven's sake! And so on.

At first I did not know how to interpret the change in the tone of your letters. On looking back - remembering your somewhat melancholy but to me so touching letter, written at a moment when G. & Co. *was treating you horribly unfairly* (a moment I passed through *in something of the same way*) - on looking back, I say that I believe you took a different view of the moment at which I myself said to Messrs. Goupil & Co.: "*If you are bent on inducing me to go, I shall not refuse to go.*" And that things have really *calmed down*, for good and all perhaps - and with your assent - que soit - I do not protest against it. Now I do *not* think it wicked of you - because I think in such a case conditions *may* be offered which really are *acceptable*, and I am convinced that you would *not* have accepted them if there had been anything dishonest in the acceptance.

But my saying something about "If you stay, then I shall refuse your financial support" referred to your saying, Let me stay where I am, for I must provide for those at home and myself (though you did not mention me) - a delicacy on your part not to mention *me*, which I had to return with delicacy on my part. I do not want *that*, namely such a sacrifice of yourself that you should stay there against your inclination for other's sakes; that is what you took as an ultimatum from me.

If you stay because you "take renewed pleasure in it," all right then, and I congratulate you on your newly rigged ship, though I for my part do not want to go back to it.

What you wrote me about Serret greatly interests me. Such a man, who finally produces something poignant as the blossom of a hard, difficult life, is a wonder, like a black hawthorn, or better still, the gnarled old apple tree which at a certain moment bears blossoms which are among the most delicate and most virginal things under the sun.

When a rough man bears blossoms like a flowering plant, yes, that is beautiful to see; but before that time *he* has had to stand a great deal of winter cold, more than those who later sympathize with him know.

The *artist's life*, and *what an artist is*, it is all very curious - how deep it is - how infinitely deep.

Because of your unaccountable silence, and because I connected it with possible new difficulties on the director's part, and because of the suspicion of the people at the inn, I wrote a note to Father saying that as I had not heard from you, I did not know what to think of it, and begging Father to lend me some money. I added that I was anxious both about you and about myself, especially when thinking of the future, and that I wished that you and I, as boys, had become painters then, and that I didn't see why we two brothers could not be painters yet.

So if Father should write you about it, you know how it is, but I myself (up to now, I have had no answer from Father), I shall write Father that your last letter has made it clear to me that for the moment G. & Co. has an influence on our family, a curious mixture of good and evil, but *at all events,* as it prevents much stagnation, the evil is for the moment not prevalent. That my heart knoweth its own bitterness is a thing which I think you understand, and in consequence will pardon.

“Ultimatum” - it is *you* who speak of it, *not* I (at least my meaning was something quite different) - if *you* want to take it that way, it is all right with *me*, but *I* shall *not* be the *first* to say it - nor was I. For the moment your *interpretation* anticipated my *intention* by a *long stretch*. I should possibly contradict you as little as I did Goupil & Co. in the past if you *really wanted* to carry it into effect. *Then* I should say *you, not I,* talked first of an ultimatum. If you want to interpret it this way, I shall not *protest* against this interpretation.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Brother, all my worst, vague anxieties have been quieted since your last letter; I mean that I have perfect confidence in you as a man.

I simply think you will get into certain financial difficulties *in consequence of the trend of trade*. Therefore I advise you, if you can economize, then by all means economize; if you *can* save up, then *save up*. At the moment I have nothing myself - but I shall try to rouse some interest in certain plans of mine - and in case nobody should be willing to return to Drenthe with me later on, I may try to find some credit for the purpose of settling there. I am not affluent; I have nothing. For a long time I have seen you tottering financially - you have taken too much on your shoulders - now you think the future will redress it - what I think is that you will find the future hostile in Paris. Once again, if I am wrong, you can laugh at me, all of you - and I myself shall join in this laughter. *If* it is only my nerves that are deluding me, well then, it is my nerves - but I am afraid fatality is too effectively against you.

I shall be able to write you more calmly from home [Apparently he intended to go to his parent's house in Nuenen for a short time; but he did not go back to

Drenthe, and stayed in Nuenen for two years].

There is certainly a field of action for me in Drenthe, but from the very beginning I must be able to undertake it somewhat differently, and have more financial security. I must calculate on a small scale; for now, for instance (I admit, of course, it's the first time you skipped a whole term entirely), the difference of 25 guilders is for me a thing that may well handicap me for another six weeks. I readily believe that you can't imagine this - you *cannot* know how again and again a number of difficulties, each very small in itself, makes a thing possible or impossible. For instance, last week I got a note from my former landlord, who more or less insinuates that he might appropriate the things I left behind (among which are all my studies, prints, books, which I could hardly do without) if I did not send him the 10 guilders I had promised him as payment for the use of a garret for my things and a debt of the woman's, which he had a doubtful right to claim, but I yielded on condition of an arrangement to store my things. Against New Year's I have still other things to pay. I still have to pay Rappard, and I saved all I could. In short, it is just the opposite of being “in clover.”

It cannot go on the way it is now. I must try and find a way out.

Of course, I do not say it is your fault, but even last year I was not able to save more than I did. And the harder I work, the harder I am pressed. We have now arrived at a point when I say, For the moment I cannot go on.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 5 December 1883

Dear Brother,

Perhaps you were rather astonished when I told you briefly that I intended to go home for a while, and that I should write you from here. But first I have to thank you for your letter of December 1, which I just now received here at Nuenen.

For the last three weeks already I have not felt quite well - all kinds of little troubles arising from having caught a cold, and also from nervousness.

One must try to conquer such a thing, and I felt it would get worse if I did not get a change.

So for several reasons I made up my mind to go home for a while. A thing which, however, I was very loath to do.

My journey began with a good six-hour walk across the heath - to Hoogeveen. On a stormy afternoon in rain and snow.

That walk cheered me greatly, or rather my feelings were so in sympathy with nature that it calmed me more than anything. I thought that perhaps my going back home might give me a clearer insight into questions of how to act.

Drenthe is splendid, but one's being able to stay there depends on many things, depends on whether one is able to stand the loneliness. I believe Father would consider that question settled by a conclusion drawn from an ordinary conversation, but for my part I am in no hurry to decide it, and, for instance, I want to see what I think of it after having been here about a week or so. But for the present I am quite in the dark as to how to act in that respect.

One by no means arrives at a satisfactory conclusion by thinking or speaking about the question, that's what I see more and more. At one moment it seems more possible than at another.

And I for my part do not drop problems suddenly, but keep turning them over in my mind, sometimes long after other people consider them settled. But, boy, it is so difficult for me, it becomes so much a matter of conscience that I should be too great a burden to you, that I should perhaps abuse your friendship when I accept money for an enterprise which perhaps will not pay.

You write again about Moniteur Universel.

Do you think my opinion too pessimistic when I declare it *possible* that within relatively few years a number of great art enterprises, like the Moniteur

Universel for instance - and others still more overexpanded - will dwindle down - will fall into decadence as quickly as they came up? All art business that remained in touch with real art began to flourish within a relatively few years. But it became too much a money speculation, and is so even now - I do not say *quite* - I simply say *too much* so; and being a speculation, why shouldn't it go, as with the bulb trade? You will say that a picture is no tulip. Of course there is the widest difference, and of course *I* who love pictures, and tulips not at all, am perfectly well aware of this.

But I am sure that many rich people who buy expensive pictures, for some reason or other, do not do so because of the art value they find in them - the difference which you and I see between a tulip and a picture is invisible to such people. They, the speculators and “pochards blasés” and many others, would buy tulips now just as before - if only it were fashionable.

There are real, serious connoisseurs, yes, but it is perhaps only a tenth of all the business that is transacted, perhaps even a much smaller part of it, of which it can be said that it was really done for the love of art. Of course I could go on enlarging on this theme forever, but without insisting on it further, I think you will agree with me that in the art-dealing business there is much that in the future might prove to be empty air.

The price of pictures, now raised enormously, may go down. If you ask me, Can Millet and Corot go down? I say, *In price*, *Yes*.

From an artistic point of view of course, Millet is Millet, Corot, Corot, fixed like the sun itself - in my opinion at least.

Five years ago I thought differently, I thought that, for instance, Millet would remain stable *even* in price; but since then - just because I see how generally Millet is completely misunderstood since he has become less obscure and more widely reproduced, for instance, than when he was ignored - I have feared he will never be appreciated by the public at large, and - it is not sure that those who understand him best will have to pay so much money for his pictures later on as they must now. Rembrandt's work also went down *in price* during the periwig-and-pigtail period.

I should like to ask you frankly, Do you believe that the present prices will hold? I tell you frankly, *I do not think so*.

But at the same time, for me Millet is Millet, Rembrandt is Rembrandt, Israëls is Israëls, etc., whether their pictures cost twopence or a hundred thousand guilders. Consequently, I do not give much thought to the art-dealing business. I do so only when I think of you, and when I want to ask you if *you really can like it*, if you will not see, especially later on, many things that are too distasteful for you to stand. You will say, “One gets used to everything”; or rather you will say, “We must live on until our hearts break within us.” Maybe so, I agree with you in this - but if our hearts needs must break within us, we are still free to act in one way or another. And as to you or me, we are what we are, and as we have enthusiasm for art within us, we should, each in his own way, stick to our opinion about Millet, for instance, even if the most absurd things happened.

But I ask you, In case of a gradual decline in the enormous prices for pictures, how can the great houses make up for it, which yearly spend formidable sums on advances, etc., which have to be deducted from their profit - they will soon have to be contented with great deficits. Such trees do not fall at the first stroke, but they can molder away inside and fall at last, without one stroke of the axe, only by the wind; when? I have no idea of the exact date.

just write me on this question in general, for instance, what you think of the stability - in the long run - of an establishment such as you say Moniteur Universel is - or Petit - or Arnold & Tripp. I tell you frankly, I do not see how they can keep it up in the long run. I think such things must collapse.

I think it must be rather uncomfortable to assist at such a thing - I prefer to sit and paint by a peat fire.

Then one feels only a certain “qu'est ce que ca me fait” [what do I care] for the whole art-dealing business - except - except - that I personally think it very unpleasant to be too short of money.

You always remained your own calm self in Paris, very simple, and certainly cooler than a man like Tripp, for instance.

You care to see things only as they are; you, as well as I, *cannot* help analyzing. And yet *even* you do not use your knowledge of a situation primarily to profit by it in spite of difficulties.

I mean, fishing in troubled water is not in your character.

But I ask you frankly, how is it? do you really believe Moniteur Universel will ask anything else of its employees than G. & Co. does ? Moniteur, G. & Co., Tripp, Petit - they are all alike to me. I myself believe that having been thrown out of one, I should be thrown out of all. If old Mr. Goupil says, You are not the man for us, I believe other managers would think the same.

Now as for you, I think what is happening to you at Goupil's would happen to you in any other firm - and setting up in business for oneself at a time when a cooling off and decline in the market is to be expected is something which in my opinion one would not undertake enthusiastically.

Do you have confidence in the present times, do you believe trade will remain at this high pitch?

If you believed it, I should respect your opinion and hold my tongue, but I do not know *if you are aware that I do not exactly believe that the very big business* *will prove reliable*.

Do write me about this, then it will be so much easier for me to speak about it. I feel a little embarrassed with you just now, and I want you to know my possibly nervous opinion that, in the first place, I do not believe those inflated affairs will last, and in the second place, though they might last, I should not like to take part in them either directly or indirectly.

Another question is, If I can provide for myself by doing anything here or there, I will not look such a gift horse in the mouth.

If it proves to be my duty to do something or other, very well, I will not refuse the work, even unpleasant work.

I thought of you, brother, during that long walk across the heath, in the evening, in the storm. I thought of a passage, I don't know from what book: “Deux yeux éclaircies par de vraies larmes veillaient;” [two eyes were awake, brightened by genuine tears]. I thought, *I am disillusioned*. I thought, *I* have believed in many things which I now know are really sorry fallacies - I thought, Those eyes of mine, here on this gloomy evening, wide awake in this deserted region - if they have been full of tears at times, why shouldn't these have been wrung from me by a sorrow that disenchants - yes - and disturbs illusions - but at the same time - makes one wide awake.

I thought, *It's impossible* that Theo is satisfied with many things that worry me?

Is it possible that it is only my own melancholy when I cannot enjoy some things as I used to do?

In short, I thought, Is it possible that I take gold for tinsel? Do I call withered a thing that is in full bloom? I could not find an answer, can you? Are you sure that there isn't a far-advanced, inexorable decadence everywhere? Give me courage, if you have courage yourself, but I ask you in my turn, “Do not flatter me.”

As to myself, I declare I believe that even if I became very clever (which I am not as yet) I believe - firmly believe - that I shall always be very poor, that it will be more than I expect if I succeed in keeping out of debt.

Those who are the coming men in Holland *now*, the mastodons, Mesdag, Israëls, Blommers, Maris, and so on, will under no circumstances earn more than was earned in the past, namely during the past twenty years, for instance. Not even in the case of cleverness - especially not then. One of the drawbacks of a period like the one which is approaching is that a time in which the prices are run up so high can be said to put a lien on the future, which makes the future dark for posterity.

You who are as clever as Uncle Vincent, for instance, will not be able to do what Uncle Vincent did. Why not? - because there are too many Arnolds and Tripps in the world. Insatiable money-wolves, compared to whom you are but a sheep. Please do not take my making this comparison as an insult, brother, it is better to be a sheep than a wolf, better to be slain than to slay - better to be Abel than Cain. And, and - I hope, or rather I am sure, that I am not a wolf either.

Suppose that it's not just in our imagination, but that you and I are really like sheep among our fellow creatures. All right - granting the existence of rather hungry and false wolves, it would not be impossible that we should be devoured someday. Well, this may not be so very pleasant, but I tell myself: It is, after all, better to be ruined than to do the ruining. I mean, there is no reason to lose one's serenity if one should realize that one might have to lead a life of poverty, even if one possesses all the qualities, the knowledge, the capacities, which make other people rich. I am not indifferent to money, but I do not understand the wolves. Well, with a warm handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

If you like, give me an answer to some of these questions while I am here at home; I am here to get some rest and to arrive at some decision.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 6-7 December 1883

Dear Theo,

I was lying awake half the night, Theo, after I wrote you last night.

I am sick at heart about the fact that, coming back after two years' absence, the welcome home was kind and cordial in every respect, but basically there has been no change whatever, not the slightest, in what I must call the most extreme blindness and ignorance as to the insight into our mutual position. And I again feel almost unbearably disturbed and perplexed.

The fact is that things were going extremely well until the moment when Father - not just in the heat of passion, but also because he was “tired of it” - banished me from the house. It ought to have been understood then that this was supremely important to my success or failure - that things were made ten times more difficult for me by this - almost impossible.

If I had not had the same feeling at the time which I now have again, namely that notwithstanding all good intentions, notwithstanding all the kindness of the reception, notwithstanding anything you like, there is a certain hardness in Father, like iron, an icy coldness - something that gives the impression of dry sand or glass or tinplate - for all his outward gentleness - if, as I said, I had not had this feeling already, I should not have resented it so much.

[Written in the margin] I am not so much interested in a kind or an unkind reception - it grieves me that they do not regret what they did at the time. Now I am again in an almost unbearable state of wavering and inner struggle.

You understand that I should not write as I do - having undertaken the journey hither of my own free will having been the first to swallow my pride - if I did not find real obstacles in my way.

If I had now noticed some eagerness to do as the Rappards did, with the best results, and as we began here with good results too - if I had noticed that Father had also realized that he ought *not* to have shut his house to me, then I should have felt some confidence in the future.

Nothing, nothing of all that.

In Father's mind there was not then, there is not now, the faintest shadow of a doubt that what he did was the right thing.

Father does not know remorse like you and me and any man who is human.

Father believes in his own righteousness, whereas you and I and other human creatures are imbued with the feeling that we *consist* of errors and efforts of the lost souls. I commiserate with people like Father - *in my heart of hearts I cannot be angry with him* - because I think they are more unhappy than I. Why do I think them unhappy? - because the good within them is wrongly applied, so that it acts like evil because the *light* within them is black and spreads darkness, obscurity around them.

Their cordial reception grieves me - their *indulgence* without acknowledging their error is for me, perhaps worse than the error itself. Instead of a ready understanding and a certain eager contribution to my, and indirectly their own, well-being I feel in everything a hesitation and delay which paralyze my own ardor and energy like a leaden atmosphere.

My masculine intellect tells me that I must consider it an irrevocable, fatal fact that in the depth of our souls Father and I are irreconcilable My compassion for Father as well as for myself says to me, “Irreconcilable?” - “Never!” - indefinitely, for ever and ever, there is the possibility of and one should have faith in the possibility of, a decisive reconciliation. But this - ah, why is it probable, alas, that it will turn out “an illusion”?

Do you call this moroseness on my part?

Our life is an appalling reality, and we ourselves are infinitely driven, things are - as they are - and whether we take them more or less gloomily does not in any way alter the nature of things. I think about it this way, for instance at night when I lie awake, or I think about it this way in the storm on the heath in the evening, in the dreary twilight.

In the daytime, in daily life, I sometimes look as thick-skinned as a wild boar perhaps and I can well understand that people find *me* crude.

[Here Vincent crossed out the text “People are much like brushes: those with the finest looks are not the finest in practice.]

When I was younger I myself also thought, much more than now, that things depended on coincidence, or small things or misunderstandings that were without any foundation. But getting older, I feel it more and more differently, and see deeper motives. Life is “a queer thing” too, brother.

You see how agitated my letters are, one moment I think that it *can be done*, the next, that it *cannot*. One thing is clear to me, “that things don't go readily, that there is no eagerness.”

I have decided to go and see Rappard, and tell him that I myself should be agreeable to staying at home, but that notwithstanding all the advantages this would have, there is a je ne sais quoi in Father which I am beginning to look upon as incurable and which makes me listless and powerless. Last night it was decided that I shall stay here for a time - and notwithstanding this, next morning

I again hear, Let's think it over some more - oh yes, sleep on it a night or so, and think it over!!! - *when they have been able to think it over for two years* - *ought* to have thought it over of their own accord, as a matter of course.

Two years, every day of which was a day of distress to me; for them - everyday life, as if nothing had happened, as if nothing could happen - the burden did not weigh on them. You say they do not express it, but they feel it - *I do not believe it*. I have thought so myself, but it is *all wrong*. One *acts* as one *feels* - our acts, our ready compliance or our hesitation, they are what people may know us by - not by what we say with our lips, kindly or unkindly. Good intentions, opinions, in reality all this is *less than nothing*.

You may think of me what you will, Theo, but I tell you that it is not my imagination. I tell you *Father will not cooperate*.

I see now what I saw *then* -I flatly *contradicted Father* then, I shall now speak out *in any case* whatever might happen *against* Father once more because he does not *want* it, he makes it *impossible.*

It is damned awful, brother, the Rappards acted intelligently, but here!!!!! And everything one has done and is doing about it, it is rendered ¾ useless because of *them*. It's tiresome, brother. With a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 7-8 December 1883

Nuenen, c. 7-8 December 1883

Dear Theo,

It is still early; I want to add a few words to yesterday's letter in order to try and make some things clearer to you. But I beg you to consider what I say in this letter something I should be silent about if I did not think I can always count on your discretion and intelligence.

I have not said a single word to Father and Mother about the *real difficulty* of two years ago. However, I did mention a matter of *secondary* importance - on their part Father and Mother do not even mention *her*, all right. *They* need not speak to *me* about it, neither need *I* to *them*. Indirectly, however, I touched upon the matter; I told Father and Mother that in my opinion it was seriously wrong that at a certain moment, two years ago, I was forced to leave the house. I said that for me this not only brought about considerable financial trouble, but also that it drove me to extremes, and that I was forced into a much more stubborn attitude than I should have adopted of my own free will.

By way of example I pointed out the contrast between the behaviour of the Van Rappard family and that of the Van Gogh family. I pointed out that at times Van Rappard also has a difference of opinion with his father about this or that, but that they always avoid extremes, not only for the world's benefit but also for their own sakes, and that Rappard, though he does not earn a cent from his work (which for all that is very sound and even very beautiful), can always face the world in a dignified manner, also as regards his outfit and studio and such things. And that the family always sees to it that there is no money owing to the colour dealers, and so on. I told Father how noble, how manly, how just I considered it of you, Theo, always to have come to my aid to the utmost of your powers. I pointed out that if Father had been less iron-like and obstinate at the time - in short, less unintelligent - your help would have been efficacious, whereas now your help is not efficacious, and we have only half succeeded.

To this extent I certainly did touch upon the past. At the same time I pointed out that at present it is again difficult for me to avoid extremes, as the terms I feel I am on with the family are so bad that it becomes clear to me that the tie between you and me cannot last if matters are forever being left as they are.

That on thinking it over, whether I do right or wrong in accepting money from you, I must take how it looks into consideration.

I tell you frankly that more and more I think the spirit prevailing in our family, especially in Father, and for instance in C.M. is wrong.

With regard to you my position is like this:

On the one hand I believe there is yet a possibility of your character, like mine, repudiating many things we have been taught - aye, I say it is possible that a revulsion of feeling will come about in your mind, either gradually or suddenly, and that this will force you to adopt a new conception of life, which perhaps will finally result in your becoming a painter.

On the other hand, in sharp contrast to this, there is, for instance, your saying last summer, “I am getting more and more like Father.”

If this were true - that is to say, if you were to become more and more a “Van Gogh,” a character like Father or C.M. and if by always being in business you should acquire a conception of life entirely different from mine - namely a commercial spirit - more or less a political personality - well, putting it bluntly, in this case I should prefer to have no intimate relations with you; then, instead of strengthening the ties between us, I would rather part company, both understanding that we are not well matched.

At the moment I am right under Father's nose - I see, I hear, I feel what Father is, and I do not approve of it, decidedly not - if you are like that and getting more and more like it, then it would be wise to part company.

Now to revert to the fact that I told Father it was wrong that two years ago we quarreled so violently that I was locked out of the house afterward (it does not matter so much whose fault it was - it would have been according to Father's own principles - if he had been consistent - to avoid this quarrel at all costs). And what does Father say to this? - Yes, but I cannot take back anything of what I did then; what I have done I have always done for your own good, and I have always followed my sincere conviction. To this I replied that it may happen that a person's conviction is completely at variance with *conscience*; I mean, *what one thinks one should do* may be diametrically opposed to *what one ought to do*.

I told Father that in the Bible itself maxims can be found by which we may test our “convictions,” to see whether they are reasonable and just.

And that Father was too much in the habit of omitting to do so, and of flying into a violent passion, in my opinion very unjustly and very arbitrarily - very reprehensibly - not as regards his “conviction” but as regards his conscience.

Enough, so I was standing before a barrier of implacability indeed - although Father tried to divert my reasoning and to confuse the issue, and to prevent my pursuing the subject. But I did not allow myself to be diverted, and I said, “Pa, here I am faced by your self-righteousness, which was and is fatal, for you as well as for me.”

Then Father said, “Do you expect me to kneel before you?”

And then I said that I took this very ill of Father, and that I thought it coarse of Father only to look at it that way, and that I should not waste my breath on the subject any longer.

There is no need for Father to say that he committed an error in my case, but Father should have learned what *I* learned in these two years - that it was an error in itself, and that it should be rectified immediately, without raising the question of whose fault it was.

Look, brother, in my opinion Father is forever lapsing into *narrow*-mindedness, instead of being bigger, more liberal, broader and more humane. It was clergyman's vanity that carried things to extremes at the time; and it is still that same clergyman's vanity that will cause more disasters now and in the future.

I do not beg for your mediation, I do not beg for anything personal on your part; but I ask you point-blank how we stand - are you a “Van Gogh” too? I have always looked upon you as “Theo.”

In character I am rather different from the various members of the family, and essentially I am *not* a “Van Gogh.” If you become a “personality” - if you were going to play a part in the world - like Father or C.M. or even V. - all right, I should not try to interfere, I should take you at your own valuation. I should be silent about it; but our ways would diverge so much that I should not think it advisable to continue our financial relations. I hope you will understand what I want to express. If not, you'll have to give it time.

Who knows whether in the course of the next three years you will not come to look upon certain questions the way I do. Why? Because you will be influenced by art and intercourse with artists, and, in short, in consequence you will get to be bigger and broader instead of smaller and narrower. Well, old fellow, try to help me get away from here if you can. Kind regards and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 17 December 1883

Dear brother,

I sense what Father and Mother *instinctively* (I do not say *intelligently)* think about me. They shrink from taking me into the house as they might from taking a big shaggy dog who is sure to come into the room with wet paws - and is so very shaggy. He will get in everyone's way. *And his bark is so loud*. In short, he is a filthy beast.

Very well, but the beast has a human history, and although he is a dog he has a human soul, and what is more one so sensitive that he can feel what people think about him, which an ordinary dog cannot do.

And I, admitting that I am a sort of dog, accept them for what they are.

This house is also too good for me, and Father and Mother and the family are so exceedingly refined (though not sensitive underneath), and - and - there are clergymen, lots of clergymen.

The dog appreciates that if they do keep him, they are only putting up with him, only just tolerating his presence “in this house,” so he will try to track down a kennel elsewhere.

In fact this dog used to be Father's son once upon a time, and it was Father who left him out in the streets a little too long, so he was bound to become rougher, but seeing that Father forgot this many years ago and has never thought *deeply* about what the bond between father and son means, we had best say nothing about it.

And then - the dog could easily bite - he could easily become rabid - and the village policeman would have to come round and shoot him.

Oh yes, all that is perfectly true, no doubt about it.

On the other hand, dogs can also be guard dogs. But there's no need for that, they say, it's peaceful here, there's no question of any danger. So I shall say no more about it.

The only thing the dog regrets is that he came back, because it wasn't as lonely on the heath as it is in this house - despite all that kindness. The poor beast's visit was a weakness, which I hope will be forgotten, and which he will avoid repeating in the future.

Because I have had no expenses since I have been here, and because I have twice received money from you, I paid for the journey myself and also for the clothes Father bought me because mine weren't good enough, and at the same time I have repaid the 25 guilders to friend Rappard. I'm sure you'll be pleased about this, everything was such a mess.

Dear Theo, enclosed is the letter I was writing when I received yours. Which I shall now answer, having carefully read what you say.

I shall start by saying I think it noble of you that, believing that *I am making things difficult* for Father, you take his part and give me a brisk dressing-down. I value this in you, although you are taking up arms against one who is neither Father's enemy nor yours but who would nevertheless like to present a few serious questions for Father's consideration and yours, who tells you what I am telling you because that is the way I feel, and who asks: Why is this so?

In many respects, your answers to various passages in my letter bring out certain aspects of the matter with which I am not unfamiliar myself. Your objections are partly my own objections, but they are not sufficient. So once again I appreciate your goodwill and likewise your desire for reconciliation and peace - which, indeed, I have never doubted.

Even so, brother, I could easily raise a great many objections to your suggestions, except that I think that would be tedious and there is a shorter way. There is a desire for peace and reconciliation in Father and in you and in me. And yet we do not seem able to bring peace about.

Well, it is my belief that I am the stumbling block, and so it is up to me to find a way of not to "*making things difficult*" for you or for Father any longer. And I am now prepared to make things as easy as possible and as peaceful as possible, for both of you.

So you are also of the opinion that I am the one who is *making things difficult* for Father and that I am a *coward.* So…

Well, I shall do my best in future to keep everything from you and from Father, I shan't visit Father again and, if you approve, shall stick to my proposal that (for the sake of our mutual freedom of thought, and for the sake of not making things difficult for you as well, a view I fear you are inadvertently beginning to take) we put an end to our financial arrangement by March. I ask for a little grace for the sake of order and to allow myself time to take a few steps which, though they have very little chance of success, my conscience does not allow me to put off in the circumstances.

You must take this calmly and in good heart, brother - it is not an ultimatum to you. But if our feelings differ too greatly, well then, we must not rush to sweep everything under the carpet. Isn't that more or less your opinion as well?

You do realize, don't you, that I'm sure *you have saved my life* and I shall *never* forget that. *Even after we have put an end* to relations which, I fear, would place us into a false position, I shall still not only be your brother, your friend, but I shall also owe you an infinite debt of loyalty because you held out your hand to me and because you have gone on helping me…

Money *can* be repaid, not kindness such as yours.

So leave me to carry on by myself - I am only sorry that a complete reconciliation has not proved possible, and wish it might still come about, but you people do not understand me, and I am afraid you *never* will.

Please send me the usual by return of mail, if you can, then I shan't have to ask Father for anything when I leave, which I *ought to do as soon as possible*.

I gave all the 23.80 guilders you sent on December 1 to Father, for 14 guilders borrowed and 9 guilders for shoes and trousers. I gave all the 25 guilders you sent on December 10 to Rappard. I still have a quarter and a few cents in my pocket. So that is the financial position, which you will understand if you also take into account that I paid for the expenses in Drenthe over a long period out of the money from November 20, which arrived on December 1, because of some hitch that was later put right, and that I paid for my journey, etc., out of the 14 guilders (which I borrowed from Father and have since given back).

From here I shall go to Rappard's. And from Rappard's, perhaps to Mauve's. My intention is thus to try to do everything in a calm and orderly fashion.

There is too much in my candidly expressed opinion of Father which I cannot take back in the circumstances. I appreciate your objections, but many of them do not convince me, others I have already thought of myself, even though I write as I do. I have put my feelings in strong terms, and they have naturally been modified by my appreciation that there is much good in Father - that modification has been substantial, of course.

Allow me to tell you that I never knew that someone of 30 was `a boy', particularly when he has probably had more experience than most during those 30 years. But do think of my words as the words of a boy if you want. I am not responsible for how you view what I say, am I? That is *your* business.

And as far as Father is concerned, l shall take the liberty of putting what he thinks of me from my mind the moment we part.

It may be politic to keep what one feels to oneself, but it has always seemed to me that serenity is a duty, especially for a painter - whether people understand what I say, whether they judge me rightly or wrongly, is neither here nor there as far as I am concerned, as you once pointed out to me.

Well, brother, even if there is a separation in whatever way, know that I am your friend, perhaps *much more than you realize or understand* - and even Father's friend. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

In any event I am neither Father's enemy nor yours, nor shall I *ever* be.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 18 December 1883

Dear Theo,

Mauve once told me, “You will find yourself if you persist at your art, if you go more deeply into it than you have been doing up to now.” He said that 2 years ago.

Lately I have been thinking a lot about those words of his. I have found myself - I am that dog. The notion may be a bit overstated - real[ity] may have less pronounced, less starkly dramatic, contrasts - but I believe that fundamentally the rough character-sketch applies.

The shaggy sheepdog I tried to portray for you in yesterday's letter is my character, and the animal's life is my life, if, that is, one omits the details and merely states the essentials. That may seem exaggerated to you - but I do not take it back.

Personalities aside, just as an impartial character study - as if I were talking about strangers and not about you and me and Father - for the sake of analysis I draw your attention once more to last summer. I see two brothers walking in The Hague (look upon them as *strangers*, as *other people*, do not think of yourself or of me or Father).

One of them says, “I am getting more and more like Father - I have to maintain a certain social position - a certain affluence (very moderate both in your case and in Father's) - I must stay in business. I don't think I'm going to become a painter.”

The other says, “I am getting [less and less] like Father - I am turning into a dog, I feel that the future will probably make me uglier and rougher still and I foresee `a degree of *poverty'* as my lot - but, but, *man* or *dog*, I shall be a painter, in short a creature with feeling.”

So, for the one, a certain position or affluence, and a dealer. For the other, a degree of poverty and exclusion, and a painter.

And I see those same brothers in earlier years - when you had just entered the art world, had just begun to read, etc., *etc.* - near the Rijswijk mill, or, for example, on a winter outing to Chaam across the snowy heath early one morning! *Feeling, thinking and believing the same* to such an extent - that I ask myself, can those be the same two? The question is, what will the outcome be - will they separate for ever, or will they take the same path once and for all?

I tell you, *I am choosing the said dog's path*. I am remaining a *dog*, I shall be *poor*, I shall be a *painter*, I want to remain *human*, *in* nature. To my mind anyone who turns away from nature, whose head is forever filled with thoughts of keeping up this and keeping up that, even if that should remove him from nature to such an extent that he cannot help admitting it - oh, going on like that, one so easily arrives at a point where one can no longer tell white from black - and, and one becomes the precise opposite of what one is taken for or believes oneself to be.

For instance at present you still have a manly fear of mediocrity in the worst sense of that word. Why then, in spite of that, are you going to kill, to extinguish the best in your soul? Then, yes, then your fear might well come true. How does one become mediocre? By complying with and conforming to one thing today and another tomorrow as the world dictates, by never contradicting the world and by heeding public opinion!

Do not misunderstand me, what I am trying to say is just that basically you are better than that - I see this when, for example, you take Father's part once you think I have made things difficult for Father. If I may say so, to my mind your opposition in that case is misdirected. I do appreciate what you are doing, and I say, do be more sensible, direct your anger elsewhere and fight with the same strength against other influences than, of all things, mine, and, and then you will probably be less upset.

I don't mind Father when I consider him on his own, but I do mind him when I compare him with the great Father Millet, for instance. His doctrine is so great that Father's way of thinking looks extremely petty by comparison. Now you will think this is terrible of me - I can't help that - it is my deep conviction and I confess it freely, because *you* confuse *Father's* character with Corot's, for instance. How do I see Father? As someone with the same kind of character as *Corot's father* - but Father has nothing of Corot himself. Anyway, Corot loved his father, *butdidnotfollow him*. I love Father, too, so long as my path is not made too difficult by differences of opinion. I do *not* love Father at the moment, when a certain petty-minded pride stands in the way of the generous and satisfactory accomplishment of a complete, permanent and most desirable reconciliation.

I had no intention whatever of putting you or Father to expense by the steps I had in mind when I came back home. On the contrary, I wanted to use the money to better advantage so that we should lose less, that is, less time, less money and less energy. Am I to be blamed when I point to the Rappards who, although richer than Father or you or I, manage things more sensibly and get better results from acting in concord, though it is probably not always very easy for them either?

Am I to be blamed for wanting to put an end to the discord in the family with a “thus far but no further”? In what respect am I wrong for wanting this to be brought about *thoroughly* and conclusively and for *not being content* with a *sham* or a too *half-hearted* reconciliation? Reconciliation with mental reservations, conditions, etc., bah! It just won't do. *Readily* or *not at all* - with empressement [eagerness], otherwise it is absolutely useless and worse may be expected.

You say you think it *cowardly* of me to rebel against Father. In the first place this is a verbal rebellion - no violence is involved. On the other hand it might be argued that I am all the sadder and more disappointed and I speak all the more gravely and resolutely precisely because Father's grey hairs make it evident to me that the time left to us for reconciliation is perhaps, in truth, not very long. I do not much care for deathbed reconciliations, I prefer to see them *during life*.

I am quite prepared to grant that Father means well, but I should far rather it didn't stop at meaning well but might, *for once*, lead to a mutual understanding, though it has been left very late. But I am afraid it will never happen! If you knew how sad I think this is, if you knew how I grieve over it.

You say: Father has other things to think about - oh, really, well, to my mind those things preventing Father from thinking matters through, year in, year out, are quite *unimportant*. And that is just the point - Father doesn't feel that there is anything to be reconciled about or to be made up, Father has other things to think about - very well - leave him to his other things, I am beginning to tell myself. Are you, too, sticking to *your* “other things”? Father says, “We have always been good to you,” etc., and I say, “Oh, really, you may be satisfied, I am not.”

Something better than the days of the Rijswijk mill - namely the same thing but for good and all - two poor brother artists - bound up in one and the same feeling, for one and the same nature and art - will it ever come to that? Or will the certain social position, the certain affluence, win the day? Oh, let them win it - but I foresee that it will only be for a while, that you will grow disillusioned with them before you are 30. And if not, well, if not - then, then, then - tant pis [too bad]. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

[Enclosed in this letter]

Dear brother, these are certainly ticklish questions to discuss, but do not take offense at my being unable to find better words for what is in my mind, and look upon my attempts to speak to you confidentially and unreservedly as a brother toward a brother, as a friend toward a friend.

Theo, in the past I often quarreled with Father, because Father said dictatorially:

"It is like this," and I told him, "Pa, you are contradicting yourself, what you say militates absolutely against what you vaguely feel at your heart's core, even if you do not want to feel it." Theo, I stopped quarreling with Father wholly and completely long ago, because it is now clear to me that Father has never reflected upon certain very important things, and never will reflect upon them, and that he clings to a system and does not reason, nor did he ever, nor will he ever reason on the basis of the naked facts. There are too *many* who do as he does, so that he always finds certain support and strength in the thought, Everyone thinks this about it (namely primarily all the well-regulated, respectable clergymen). But he has no other strength, and it is all built on convention and a system, otherwise it would collapse like any other vanity. Father does not wrestle with the plain truth. But now I am of the opinion that one is one's own enemy it one does not want to think things out, if one does not say (especially in one's youth): Look here, for myself I do not want to be sustained by a system, I want to attack things according to reason and conscience. I take less notice of my own father, though he is not a bad man, and though I do not speak about him, than I do of people in whom I find more truth.

You see, dear brother, I feel a deep, deep, deep respect for Millet, Corot, Daubigny, Breton, Herkomer, Boughton, Jules Dupré, etc., etc., Israëls - I am far from confusing *myself* with them - I do not consider myself their equal - no - yet I say, however conceited or whatever else people may think me - for all this I say, *You* will show me the way, and I am ready to follow your example rather than Father's, or some schoolmaster's, or whoever else's.

I myself find in Father and Tersteeg something of the school of Delaroche, Muller, Dabuffe, and so on - I may think it clever, I may be silent about it, may take it at its face value, I may even have a certain respect for - but all this does not prevent my saying, The least painter or man who wrestles directly with the naked truths of nature is more than you are.

In short, my dear fellow, neither Father nor Tersteeg has given other than a spurious tranquillity to my conscience, and they have not given me freedom, not have they ever approved of my desire for freedom and plain truth and of my feeling of ignorance and darkness.

Now, left to myself, I have not attained the light of what I wanted to do yet, never mind; but by resolutely rejecting their systems I think I have gained a certain hope that my exertions will not be unavailing.

And that, before I close my eyes forever, I shall see the rayon blanc. However fierce the struggle in my mind may have been because of my not having found it, I have never regretted saying that I considered the rayon noir the rayon noir, and having definitely avoided it - except that one should not quarrel over it, and it I ever quarreled over it, it was a mistake.

Now for myself, knowing what I know, I look at you and ask the question, “What shall he do with it?” Theo, when we quarreled a little some time ago in The Hague, and you said, I feel more and more drawn to Father, I told you, Boy, this is a difficult question, follow your own conscience. But since then I have tried to explain to you too that for myself I cannot find tranquillity in Father's and H. G. Tersteeg's way of thinking, the latter's being about the same, I think - and that I have become increasingly aware of the fact that there is a rayon noir and a rayon blanc and that I have found their light to be black and a mere convention compared to the cool honesty of Millet and Corot, for instance. Now I have been thinking all this over four years longer than you have, as I am four years older and calmer - in any case time and experience have induced me to reject and avoid certain things. And I do not want to influence you, but on the other hand I do not want to conceal myself from you, or to do otherwise than speak openly.

I come to the following conclusion:

What Father and Tersteeg tried to force on me as a *duty* was the *spectre* of a duty. What they *really* said was (though not in so many words) “Earn money, and your life will become straight.” Millet says to me: *Make your life straight* (at least try to do so and to wrestle with the naked truth), *and even earning money can be managed, and in this too you will not be dishonest*.

And I felt then, and I feel more and more strongly now, that Father and Tersteeg, and for instance C. M. and I don't know who else (although they thought their intentions straight, and I do not suspect them of dishonesty - but as I said, I take them at their face value - and leave them alone), that they and all the influences of the past dragged me more and more *out* of nature. Now, whatever may be said of Millet, at least it was he who took me back *into* nature, more than any other might have been able to do in my desperate state of mind.

My youth was gloomy and cold and sterile under the influence of the rayon noir. And, brother, essentially your youth too. My dear fellow, this time I will not flatter you. After all, I will reproach nobody but myself with it - yet the rayon noir is unutterably cruel - unutterably - And at this moment I feel within myself as many repressed tears as there are in a figure by Monteyne!

But, brother, my very grief over so much proves to me that I myself have definitely *done* with the systems in question. I have suffered from them, but in my heart of hearts I no longer belong to that side of life. And now I say to you, as brother to brother and as friend to friend, Though your youth was gloomy and frustrated, *in the future* let us seek that soft light for which I know no better name than the white ray of light or the good.

Not looking upon ourselves as having obtained it, of course, but as seeking it, believing in it with the foi de charbonnier. Whatever may be true of my losing patience with Father as well as with Tersteeg, etc., etc., do not think of me as being in the least influenced by hate or spitefulness toward them. I do not envy them, in my opinion they are not happy themselves, and in my heart of hearts I am certainly not their enemy nor do I bear them malice, neither do I look upon them as my enemies, although it is a fact that I do not recall their influence with much pleasure. I do not suspect them of wicked intentions. I think they do follow their conscience, but that it is haunted by ghosts. And I *do not* see in Millet or Corot that there were ghosts haunting *their* consciences. There I see greater calm and serenity of a higher quality. Once again: I am far removed from this myself. However, every study I make, every attempt in the direction of painting, every new love for or struggle with nature, successful or unsuccessful, gets me one little unsteady step nearer. As far as religion is concerned, I find less of it in Father than in Uncle Jan, for instance, though it stands to reason that many would say the reverse. I think Father the opposite of a man of faith. Well look here, going in for painting requires a certain foi de charbonnier because one *cannot* prove at the outset that it will succeed and everyone takes a gloomy view of it. But, Theo, though it be true that you as well as I begin with as many repressed tears as the figures by Monteyne and Grollo, at the same time we have a little quiet hope mixed with all our sadness. In the first years of hard struggling it may even be a sowing of tears, so be it, but we shall check them, and in the far distance we may have a little quiet hope of the harvest.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Since writing the enclosed letter, I have thought some more about your remarks and have spoken to Father again. I had as good as made up my mind not to stay on here - regardless of how they might take it or what the result might be. But then the conversation took a fresh turn when I said, I have been here now for 14 days and feel I have got no further than during the first half hour, had we understood each other better we should have settled all sorts of things by now - I have no time to waste and must reach a decision. A door has to be either open or shut, I cannot see how there can be anything in between, and in fact there cannot.

It all ended with the little room at home where the mangle now stands being put at my disposal for storing my bits and pieces and if need be for use as a studio too. And a start has been made with clearing the room, which had not been done while things were still in the air.

I want to tell you something that I appreciate better now than when I wrote to you about Father. My opinion has softened, not least because I can see that Father (and one of your hints seems to bear this out to some extent) is genuinely unable to follow me when I try to explain things to him. He hangs on to a *part* of what I say, and that makes no sense when it is taken out of context. This may all be due to more than one cause, but old age must bear most of the blame. Well, I respect old age and its weaknesses as much as *you* do, *even though* it may not seem so to you or you may not credit me with it. What I mean is that some of the things I should take amiss in a man in full possession of his mental powers, I shall probably put up with in Father's case - for the above-mentioned reasons.

I also thought of Michelet's saying (who had it from a zoologist), “Le mâle est très sauvage.” [The male is very savage.] And because at this time of my life I know myself to have strong passions and believe that I should have them, I grant that I may well be “très sauvage” myself. And yet my passion subsides when I face someone weaker than myself, and then I don't fight. Although, mark you, taking issue in *words* or over principles with a man who holds a position in society, and please note, as a guide to man's spiritual life, is not only permissible but cannot possibly be cowardly. After all, our weapons are equal.

Do please think it over, the more so as I tell you that for many reasons I want to give up even the verbal struggle, because it occasionally occurs to me that Father no longer has the full mental power it takes to concentrate one's thoughts on a single point. Yet in some cases a man's age grants him additional power.

Getting to the heart of the matter, I take this opportunity of telling you that, in my view, it was Father's influence that made you concentrate on business more than is in your nature. And that I believe, no matter how certain you may now feel that you must remain a businessman, that a certain something in your original nature will *endure* and may well produce a stronger reaction than you bargain for.

Since I know that our thoughts coincided during our early days at G. & Co, that is, that both you and I then thought of becoming painters, but so deep down that we did not dare tell even each other straight out, it might well happen, in these later years, that we draw more closely together. The more so because of circumstances and conditions in the trade itself, which has undergone a change since our early years and in my view will change even more.

At the time I did violence to myself, and was moreover so oppressed by the preoccupation that I was no painter, that *evenafter I had left* G. & Co, I never thought of becoming one but turned to something else (which was a second mistake on top of the first), feeling discouraged about my prospects because the timid, very timid, approaches to a few painters were not even acknowledged. I am telling you this, not because I want to *force* you to think as I do - I do not force anybody - but only out of a sense of fraternal and friendly concern.

My views may sometimes be incongruous, that may well be so, but I do believe that there must be some truth in them and in their action and direction.

It was not primarily for selfish reasons that I tried to get them to open up the house to me again, even to give me a studio. What I do feel is that, though we do not see eye to eye in many things, Father, you and I have the will to pull together, either all the time or by fits and starts. Our estrangement having already lasted so long, it can do no harm to place some weight on the other side, so that to the eyes of the world, too, we do not look more divided than we actually are, so that to the eyes of the world we do not seem to have gone to extremes.

Rappard said to me, “A human being is not a lump of peat, since a human being cannot bear being flung into a loft to be forgotten there.” And he pointed out that he considered it a great misfortune for me not to be able to live at home. Do please give that some thought.

I believe a little too much emphasis has been laid on the charge that I acted willfully or recklessly - well, you know that better than I do - when in fact I was forced to do certain things and could not act differently from the way they saw me act or wanted to see me act. And it was their biased view that my objectives were base, etc., which made me grow cold and feel quite indifferent toward many people.

One more thing, brother - at this time of your life you would do well to reflect deeply on this: I believe you are in danger of taking a distorted view of a great many things, and I think you will have to examine your perspective on life very carefully and that your *life will improve* as a result. I am not saying this as if it were something I know and you do not, I am saying it because I am coming to see more and more how terribly hard it is to tell where one is right or where one is wrong.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 21 December 1883

Dear Theo,

I received your letter today, and also one from friend Rappard in the same mail. Let me begin by thanking you for the money.

And let me add at once that I appreciate it that both you and Rappard approve of my coming here. This gave me courage at a moment when I myself was hopelessly discouraged about my coming here, and bitterly regretted it, because on my part I perceived deep in the background of all the discussions I had with Father a je ne sais quoi of cold reticence over reconciliation, a cold evasiveness, which made me desperate because I saw that there would remain a cancerous root which would later make everything as impossible as in the past.

But your letter and a very intelligent, very kind, very cordial letter from friend Rappard, and both your opinions that my journey hither might bring about some good, have induced me not to consider the case as lost yet, but to practice patience and wisdom.

Have patience with me, brother, and do not suspect me of ill will.

As for me, in many respects I know Father very intimately and thoroughly, and in the matter we are faced with it is impossible for me to leave things as they are. I had to get Father's opinion about this and that in order to compare it with certain precedents. For instance, I directed the conversation to subjects that had nothing to do with the matter in question, and then I got enough troubles.

Do you know, your advice “do not speak to them about certain things” makes me think you refer to one particular thing, of which you take a correct view.

But in reality that question of long ago was of the utmost importance (at least to me personally, I mean) - entering upon a new future with Father is once again a highly important thing, which nobody can ask me to engage upon, leaving things as they are.

At the moment, particularly after the receipt of your letter, Father and I are on the best possible terms, and Father is not even disinclined to make certain arrangements.

Besides, I want you to know I quite agree with you that they mean well - I do not suspect them of consciously *wishing* any adversity to befall me, although at times they bring it on me, or of *intentionally* putting obstructions in my way, although occasionally I am thwarted by them (“not without good intentions,” as

Mauve would express it). But Father's character is highly variable and at the same time highly obstinate - (I know, most people do not know this) - Father's character is dark (rayon noir, I once reminded you), Father has a very narrow-minded or rather icy cold quality. I cannot express this, I can only feel it. I have often thought this problem over, I have paid a great deal of attention to Father, I know Father from various angles, very often I have tried to come to an agreement with Father, yet I *do not* think Father *good.* I *cannot* declare that I think Father straightforward or simple or clear-headed enough.

And now there is, and there will remain, a je ne sais quoi that worries me, and at the back of it all I am aware of the same fatal atmosphere as in the past.

I was struck by the fact, Theo, that friend Rappard *now* writes that he had perceived that during the summer of the year I stayed at Etten I changed so much (it was then that I met her). And at the same time he hints that he understands *something* happened then, *though he does not know what.* As I see it, Father and Mother and some others acted with very little delicacy at the time.

If you should be able to agree with me on that, Theo, I should like to say to you, They show the same lack of delicacy now, and you should know something of it.

So, although you need not attach much importance to some conversations with Father in the beginning, by which I only attempted to discover what Father thought of things, although all this means nothing, and at the present moment some arrangement might he made, which in many respects would make my work easier for me and give me the inner quiet to work, yet I see at the outset a je ne sais quoi, especially in Father, which fills me with anxiety, a heavy, still anxiety about the future.

Keeping the peace with Father is a hard job. Once again I understand my own rebellious attitude in the previous period. I do not say it will lead to nothing, but I point out - it will be difficult. You will point out to me what I know full well myself, that in many respects I personally am very difficult to deal with. Yes, that is true, and I must take it into account, too. There is an excuse for me, and that is the passion and the frequent absorption which everyone who paints, writes, or composes must needs have.

Does the same apply to Father? No - it is something else. If you should say, But Father is also a thinker and a writer - then I answer, I wish he were this in another way, for now I cannot call him happy. I say this more sadly than you may think; what I say *is serious.* Is it impossible for you to enter into my feelings?

I wrote you my last letter in a moment's desperation, of which the real purport was, “I *cannot* do it after all.” And I thought a decisive separation from Father, irrevocable and with éclat, the only thing I could do. “If I do not do this, I should seem to be of one mind with a person whose principles I do not even respect, and I cannot stand the least appearance of being in agreement with him, for I am dead against him, absolutely in opposition to him.”

But now today I received your letter, and at the same time a letter from Rappard, written in a tone which I can understand and appreciate. And after another discussion with Father, we have arrived at a provisional arrangement and calmness.

A calmness which perhaps is “It,” but which to a far greater extent is not “It.” Que faire?

I hereby declare that, for myself, I agree with Rappard when he says, “Stay at home for a *long* time” - he stresses this.

There are a lot of reasons for this, Theo. Oh, if only you could see all that I see in it - how much security it might grant us for the future! - I hope it will prove to be possible.

In Father's case there is an eternal contrast between what he says and what he does, but it took me a long time to discover it and to understand that usually Father is not conscious of it, so that one is often unable to decide whether he really wanted to do what he actually did. I shall tell you frankly, brother, what I think of it. Father does not always know what he *does* - though he chooses his words awfully systematically, his actions are most haphazard.

In short, *it will be a hard job* to get good results from my stay here.

However, the circumstances are such as to make it urgently necessary that an arrangement is brought about that will really be carried through.

I have proposed that the room that can most easily be spared shall be used to keep my things in, and if necessary as a studio, in case not only *I* but *you and I* think it necessary and suitable that I work at home for a time, especially when there are financial reasons to force us to it. Business is business, and it is clear enough to you as well as to me that this is a good arrangement.

I have been too long without this resting place, and I think that it must be settled in this way if we want to succeed in our enterprise.

I believe it is possible, and I shall have the courage to start it when you and I agree that we must carry it through and settle that you will not be vexed with me if, in case of some disagreement with Father, I do not take it as seriously as I did two years ago.

I will go my own way quietly and follow your advice *not*to speak with Father about several things provided only that I find in you the person to whom I *can* speak about them, and to whom I can say, I should like to do this or that, for this or that reason.

Then I *can* leave Father out of it, and *not* discuss the problems with Father. But it was necessary to break the ice, and this I did by going to Nuenen, and on that occasion I *had to* have an explanation with Father; however, *I am going to leave it at that*.

I can tell you now that I have succeeded in getting Father's permission to fix a room here.

If you approve of it, *this will become my regular storeroom and my studio in times when we have no money to be elsewhere*. And about further arrangements and business, I will not speak first with Father but with you - and you and I together will get Father so far that things will steadily improve in the long run too.

I think you will approve of my having insisted on getting some fixed arrangement. I think it *decidedly a good thing* that I shall have a studio here (though I shall not always be in that studio).

So let's stick to that, and let this letter, and not the last one, be our starting point. Well, brother, I am only writing you on this one subject, but your letting me know what you think of the Paris trade is very important to me. I *shall let you do whatever you want to do, even in case you should turn to painting, for in the latter case I am convinced you would land on your feet.*

With a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Yes - que faire? I tell you I do not choose to go through the same experiences as two years ago. *It does not depend on me alone* (no more than it depended *on me alone* at the time) to keep the peace. *Can*, *must* one keep the peace with Father?

Perhaps you do not understand this - my even saying “must,” my going so far as to say that. I shall give you an example: if they should reproach you, Rappard, or me with something - suppose *undeservedly* - we should never budge, we should answer back, and we should make them feel our nails a little. But because we are what we are, we should *never* say, You must not reproach me with anything. We should say, *Reproach me as much as you like, I am a match for you.* Father sees sacrilege in observations *that are not reproaches at all*, observations unavoidable when discussing things. Observations that one should never avoid if they refer to things about which an understanding must be arrived at before one engages in an enterprise. Proudhon says, “La femme est la désolation du juste” - I think one can feel and understand this pronouncement, although one does not claim to be “un juste” oneself, or to be looked upon as such. Although in general a clergyman, and in particular Father, is certainly not a *woman*, there is something equally unutterably hopeless in his way of speaking and acting.

A phenomenon I have often tried to analyze, but which remains a mystery to me, for which I can give no other and no more correct definition than Hugo's words: “Il a le rayon noir,” or the words of somebody else, “The gentlest of all cruel men.”

I say this to explain what I think, and in order to throw light on the problem which we face. *You* will gradually have begun to understand that usually my mind is calm.

But now, what is to be done? If it were possible, it would be an excellent thing if I could get a studio at home. In Rappard's case things went marvellously well, and Rappard writes me, “I considered it *your greatest misfortune* that you could not live at home.” And this is true, and I felt it terribly, not only afterward, but also at the moment, two years ago now, when I had to face it. Father did not do this intentionally - I say Father has little delicacy of feeling, and even now, although I at last told him so for the first time, Father does not yet know that it was a great difficulty for me. Father still says - and this is something so icy cold that I shudder when I think of it - Father says after two years *that in the past he acted according to his convictions and principles.* An ordinary person, you or I, if we had done something like that, we should, I believe - I hope - I trust - have already regretted it for a long, long time, whether it was our fault or not. If you say Father did not mean to do so much harm, it may be true, but what one means to do is one thing, and the result of what one does is another. However, Father's convictions are undoubtedly well-intentioned and all that - but as for myself I hope his Honour is not going to acquire new convictions of the same kind.

[Enclosed in letter 348] What Father is like you may see from what he went on to say, for instance, after stating that he could not take back anything of what he did in the past and so on, which in fact embodies a basic implacability. He - immediately followed up with, “But we do not lack indulgence.”

Indulgence combined with implacability.

This too is in reality a “désolation du juste.”

In short, *this* is what Father is - he is “*a stupid one*.” To speak with whom is unutterably hopeless for me.

If Father were not Father, I should not worry, but can one always act as if one's father did not exist? This is impossible for me too.

But the fact is that I am not the man to swallow “indulgence” when basically I see implacability.

Every once in a while C. M. also used to trot out the word “unpardonable.” And people like Father and C. M. stick to it - and act upon it year after year - save for “indulgence.”

Bah, I think it's utterly disgusting. Approving of it, and entering into it - no! Then I prefer a refreshing row, and I personally will not mince words. You see what I am, brother, and think whatever you like, but never suppose that I will have anything to do with that sophism of indulgence together with implacability.

I want to be reconciled *“efficaciously”* - *effectively,* thoroughly, else I prefer an open disagreement, a conflict, in such a way that the world can perceive it - ah well….

Vivre tout haut is simply one's duty - one should not act like the Jesuits and their kind.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 22-25 December 1883

Dear Theo,

I am writing a line to tell you that on account of the arrangement with Father and Mother to let me use the present laundry room as a studio and storeroom for my things, I went to The Hague to pack up and send off my studies, prints, etc., *etc.* A thing I must attend to myself.

I also spent the day with Rappard, who was very cordial, and rather reassured me as to some scruples I had regarding the possible duration of the arrangement.

Well, I saw drawings (watercolours) and painted studies of his which I thought *very good*.

Especially those of the workhouse at Terschelling. What a change you would find in his work.

I have seen the woman again, a thing I had greatly longed for.

I feel that it would indeed be difficult to begin anew. But for all that, I do not want to act as if I had forgotten her entirely.

And I wish that Father and Mother would realize that pity is not limited in the way the world thinks. You were the one to understand me in this matter. She has behaved bravely under the circumstances, a reason for me to forget the difficulties I had with her at times. And just because I can hardly do anything for her now, I must at least try to encourage and fortify her.

I see in her a woman, I see in her a mother, and I think every man who has the least manliness in him must protect such a one if there is an occasion for doing so. I have never been ashamed of it, nor ever shall be.

Well, I am writing in a hurry. A handshake,

Yours, Vincent

My address is: Kosthuis No. 1
Assendelftstrasse 16

But of course I shall not stay here long.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late December 1883

[The first part of the letter is missing.]
…If you think it necessary for me to explain matters more clearly, well, here you are. You say yourself that you want me to leave the woman, yes, leave her completely. All right, but I can't and I won't. Do you understand, my friend? Such a thing would be treacherous - I am thinking of the old Scripture word, “Hide not thy face from thy neighbour,” and *now* I tell you flatly, No, Theo. (And in case you want to assume that I intend to do this, that or the other thing, you may think exactly what you want; I shall *do* what I want, Deo volente.)

I know quite well that this is a delicate point, related to money matters - not only in the sense you refer to in your letter, but primarily in another sense. If I accept money from you and do something which you definitely object to, it would be wrong. I have always discussed everything candidly with you, and shown myself exactly as I was; I have aimed at straightforwardness, but I never acted without seeking your advice. Well, if this should stop and we should no longer associate with each other in private life, something like a false position would emerge. And this I reject.

I have spoken without reserve about Father, I have spoken without reserve about you with reference to this summer - why? To induce you to adopt my point of view? No, but because I should consider myself dishonest if I kept such things locked inside my mind. The fact is that I am not perfidious, and if there is something I object to in a person, I say so and am not afraid of the consequences, however serious.

I cannot change, I am made this way. I myself want to clear up the situation, and then I say, Stop a bit, for I think quite differently about this or that, and I cannot keep up the same cordial intercourse with you as before. (I am not saying I won't have any intercourse at all with Father or yourself - I'm not as stubborn as that.)

But if something is broken, I feel it. And I say, What is broken, *is* broken. If I do, at least I regain my serenity; I should lose my serenity if I were not frank enough. I am not afraid to face the future as long as I need not be involved in things which I feel to be dishonest.

And if you want still another reason, then listen to this: In order to keep the woman from ruin, I should even be willing to swallow my pride over this or that principle as far as money is concerned, and more than once I did so for her sake and the children's; but if the woman were *not* there, I should be prouder than ever. (This is what I told you in The Hague in reply to something you said about being good friends with H. G. T., when you said, “Yes, that's what I thought.”) And as I see it the situation is this: under the circumstances, if I get no support, *e.g.* from you, I can do practically nothing for the woman; for I think myself that it is *not* in *my* power to assist her, at least not at once. So you have me at your mercy, you particularly, along with many others, none of whom can agree with me. *And yet you will not be able to force me to renounce her*, whatever your financial power. And seeing that I shall make no concessions in the matter of the woman - and I will clearly declare it, loud enough for even ears that are most hard of hearing - I announce in advance that I have resolved to share with her all that is my property and I do not wish to accept any money from you, except what I may regard as my property without arrière pensée.

Vincent

As I myself do not coerce anyone, so I do not want to be coerced myself; I who respect the liberty of others insist on my own liberty.

As for the woman and her children, she is attached to me, *even after the separation*, and I to her. And now I should in some way agree, tacitly or not tacitly, to abandon her? No, this time I shall make no such agreement. I do not ask you to be responsible for any expenses whatever; on the contrary, I tell you that you may reduce the money or stop sending it altogether, but she shall have her share of all I have.

I should be a coward, brother, if I were ambiguous about this. And if it should come about that I have nothing myself, all right - this would be the very worst that could happen, and perhaps there might be others besides you who would be willing to make life possible for me. And if not, so be it.

In short, rest assured that I believe I am *entitled* to do anything which does not hurt anyone else and it is my duty to live up to the liberty which not only I myself but every human being has an unlimited and natural right to - this liberty, I say, being the only *station in life* one should live up to. Before I act, I most decidedly ask myself, Shall I hurt anyone by doing this or that? but unless it is irrefutably proved to me that I shall hurt someone by doing a particular thing, I need not refrain from doing it.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late December 1883

Dear Theo,
Mind you, I mean what I say about the woman.
Mind you, all the disappointment that your visit of last summer caused me (more than you know) is something that does not count seriously with me - as far as I myself was concerned - but the other thing - namely finding her in such a condition that my heart melted in my breast - that - it will remain something insuperable between you and me - *unless she can still be saved*. At the time you were frivolous when uttering your words - you did not think over what you said, and evidently spoke on insufficient grounds - and what do I think about it? I tell you without reserve that you have this much in common with Father, who often acts in the same way, that you are *cruel* in your worldly wisdom.

Cruel, I repeat the word, for what can be more cruel than depriving such an unfortunate and withered woman and her little child of support. Don't think you will be able to delude yourself into the belief that it was nothing, or only my imagination. Don't think it will help you if you reason that it was only a question of a faded whore and of bastards. So much the more motive for deep compassion - which I showed for that matter.

I have only just noticed that during all that time you have not written *a single word* about her, and that you *did not reply* when I wrote you that I had heard from her.

And there are more things that I have only just noticed *now*, and *because* I notice them now, I no longer address you in the same tone as formerly.

Oh, I know that to a certain extent you did it with good intentions - I know how you always try to keep the peace with everybody (which I don't believe can be done) - I know that even in this case you probably haven't got the faintest notion that you did something that was not right - but being good friends with the world and following our conscience just *don't* go together - you do not give your *conscience* its due.

I also know that not everybody in my case and in my circumstances would dare contradict you, but granted that not everybody would do so, I for my part want to tell you that there is something in you that I object to, and that in general I warn you against your “politics.” Which I think *too* politic.

For I foresee later on (perhaps much later on) you will be sorry for many things you think right now. Why do I think so? For the time being I need not give a reason because you would not believe me.

The period of separation has spoiled most of what I had gained for her preservation, and this makes matters even more difficult. Can anything be done about it now? But in what way?

Truly, it is not a question of money alone, for the poor woman also misses myself too, the way I was to her and her children, that is to say, I had an affection for them, just as I now feel an equal and even greater affection for them.

What you wrote in a certain letter about “that I should render her and myself a disservice,” kindly take it back, bearing in mind the service you rendered her last summer, her, her children and myself - really you cannot be too silent about it!

Moreover, you *presume* in the letter in question, which contains the only reference to her that you have written since last summer - you *presume* that I should like to take “that person,” as you called her, with me to Drenthe. I should not be able to, *even if I wanted to*, because I haven't got the money for it.

As regards the money - brother - you will understand that I no longer take any pleasure in it, won't you? You do understand this thoroughly, don't you? I took pleasure in it because it served to keep not only myself but also these poor creatures safe.

This is a sad letter at the end of the year - sad for me to write, sad for you to receive (although you are at liberty to dismiss it from your thoughts; this is something you must decide for yourself), but it is worse for the poor woman.

Goodbye,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I have received more news from her, for I sent her to a doctor, and now I have heard particulars about it.

Further, brother, my answer to your intimation that a calamity which threatened you had been averted - you know that my answer was cool; in this matter I have no other answer than, “So much the worse for you, my friend.” Perhaps you will understand why later on. I do not say it would not have been a calamity, but…There are moments in life when it is better that the blow is dealt, even if it be a hard blow, rather than that one is forced into the position of one who is *spared* by the world, I think.

As for me, I am chained to misfortune and failure; it is damned hard at times, but never mind, for all that I do not envy the so-called fortunates and the ever successful, as I can see through it too much. Take “The Prisoner” by Gérôme - the man lying fettered is most certainly in an unpleasant situation, but to my way of thinking he is in a better condition than the fellow who has the upper hand and is harassing him. I tell you this in order to point out the extremes of certain conditions. I am far from confusing my own fate, for instance, with the terribly aggravated misery of the prisoner. Notwithstanding which, something of what I want to point out may be seen in our society.

As to me, I *do not congratulate* you on the fact that it may be expected that you will be able to keep the peace with certain authorities. It appeared to me that it was not superfluous to explain myself to you. You can interpret this precisely as you like.

I do not forget either that at first you had compassion for the woman in question. But the very fact that I was and am far from blind to her faults, and notwithstanding this tried and am trying to save her, ought to have induced you, I think, to respect my feelings more and to understand them better - in that case you would have been able to stand up for me more resolutely against those who knew less about it than you, and for me things would not have come to such a pass that I *had to* give it up.

Now I caution you, because perhaps it is not too late yet; if things become worse, the time for cautioning will be past.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 25-28 December 1883

Dear Theo,

Last night I came back to Nuenen, and I must tell you at once what I have on my mind.

I packed my painting materials, studies, etc., at The Hague, and sent them here, and Father and Mother having cleared the little room, I am already settled in that new studio, where I hope I shall be able to make some progress. Then I must tell you that I have seen the woman, and that we have decided more definitely than ever to live apart, at least so that the world cannot justifiably find fault with it.

Once separated, we shall remain so, but we regret not having chosen a middle course after all, and even now an attachment remains which is too deeply rooted to pass away.

I now have to say a number of things that I shall not refer to after this - which you may take any way you like - which you will be free to think over or to dismiss from your mind - that's no affair of mine - decide for yourself.

Know then that I look back on your visit of last summer, on our conversations at the time, and on what resulted from them with deep regret. Time has passed over it, but on looking back I cannot deny that in my opinion we did not act rightly. And now I look upon your words and yourself somewhat differently, and I cannot think of you with exactly the same feelings as in the past.

The fact is that now I see more clearly that you and others seemed to wish I should part company with her.

I do not doubt your good intentions.

The decision lay with me, and if I did what I think was wrong, you are not the *first* I should reproach with it (I reproach myself *first*), but then you *second*. The levers that were applied to my mind, so that I lost my self-command - in which you were concerned at least to a certain extent - were firstly, that touching upon an infinitely tender affair of the past, which disturbed me, and secondly, your saying that perhaps “my duty” would force me to part.

Well - if what you said then were an isolated occurrence, I should not feel induced to refer to it - but it tallies too much with the opinions of others with whom I disagree for me to regard your opinions as wholly independent. I accepted your point of view - although I suppose with intentions quite different from what you imagine, concerning which time will clarify certain things for you that it would be premature to discuss now.

You pointed out a certain case to me in which “it had worked,” namely that a certain man had left a certain woman.

This may be true in itself - very true even - but *in this case* it was not relevant, look, to her and me that is another matter. And I have taken the liberty of thinking over “whether it has worked.” And, my friend, this is exceedingly doubtful.

I can tell you that the woman has behaved well, *has worked* as a washerwoman to earn a living for herself and the children, so that she has done her duty, notwithstanding great physical weakness.

You know that I took her into my house because, at her confinement, things had happened which made the doctor at Leyden advise her to stay in some quiet place, for her own sake and for that of the baby.

There was anemia, and perhaps the beginning of consumption; well, as long as I was with her, she did not grow worse, but in many respects stronger, so that several ugly symptoms disappeared.

But now everything has changed for the worse, and I fear for her life; and the poor little baby too, whom I cared for as if he were my own, is no longer what he was.

Brother, I found her in great misery, and I am in great sorrow over her. I know, of course, that it is more my own fault than anyone else's, but you too might have spoken differently.

Now that it is too late, I understand better some fits of temper in her, and some things which I thought she did wrong on purpose I now see as nervous symptoms, done almost unconsciously.

Just as she told me on more than one occasion afterward, “Sometimes *I do not know what I do*.”

For me, as well as for you, there is an excuse in the fact that one does not know to what extent such a woman can be relied upon, and in the financial obstacles besides - but we should have chosen a middle course, and if we could still find it - though it will be difficult to find now - it would be more humane and less cruel. However, I did not want to give her hope, and I have encouraged her and tried to comfort and fortify her *on the path which she follows now*, living alone, working for herself and her children. But my heart goes out to her in the same great pity as it used to do, a pity which has been alive in me all these past months, even after our separation.

Well, our friendship, brother, has received a bad shock from this, and if you were to say we certainly did not make a mistake, and if it should appear to me that you are still in the same frame of mind - then I should not be able to respect you as much as in the past. Because at the time I respected you for the very fact that, at a moment when others cut me because of my being with her, you were the one to help me keep her alive. I do not say there was no need for a change or a modification, but - I think we, or rather I, have gone too far.

As I now have a studio here, more than one financial difficulty is less ruinous perhaps.

I will end by saying: Please think it over - but if your state of mind remains the same as last summer after what I have said, I cannot feel the same respect for you as in the past. For the rest, I have resolved never to speak another word with you about the possible change in your circumstances and your career, for it is as if I see two natures in you, struggling within your breast - a phenomenon I perceive in myself too, but it may be that some problems are solved because of my being four years older, problems which in your case are more or less in a state of ferment. Think over what I have said, that would be excellent - but you can also dismiss it from your mind. However, for my part I wanted to speak frankly about it, and I cannot conceal my feelings from you.

As to my opinion how far one *may* go in a case of helping a poor, forsaken, sick creature, I can only repeat what I told you already on a former occasion: *infinitely*.

On the other hand, our cruelty can be infinite too.

With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

1884

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 2 January 1884

Dear Theo,

I still have to thank you for your letter of January 1, and the enclosure.

With regard to being brotherly it would appear to me that this is dependent on taking the same view of things or not - which I pointed out to you - seeing that it seemed to me that perhaps our opinions were going to deviate considerably - if they haven't already. If I observed a deviation already (not simply imagined it), I repeat, I mention it because with you I do not want to pretend to be different from what I am, and because of the very fact that I do not want to quarrel. In the long run I should prefer to do without your support, however much your help means to me, to keeping it on condition that i act contrary to what I think is right. The more so because in later years, if we live to see them, it is possible that you will not continue really believing in what you now suppose to be unshakable. But this is not the point under discussion.

As to what you say about my perhaps becoming quite isolated, I do not say that this will not happen, I expect little else, and shall be content if life remains possible and bearable for me.

But I declare to you that I should not consider this a deserved fate, for I believe that after all I have never done, and shall never do, anything to make me lose the right to feel one with my fellow creatures.

Others would be greatly to blame for it too. Well, I try to look at myself as if I were somebody else, that is to say, objectively, so that I try to see my own shortcomings as well as perhaps their compensations. And I know several stories of men who had to live relatively very isolated lives just because *neither of the two parties* found them exactly as they wanted them to be.

There are two kinds of fellows who stand between the parties, firstly those who have no personal character, but secondly those who most decidedly have character but, as I said, who are not exactly what either one of the parties which have the say wants them to be.

Isolation is bad enough, it is a kind of prison. To what extent I shall become so cannot be guessed now with any degree of certainty. Nor do you say so, in fact.

I for my part often prefer to be with people who do not even know the world, for instance the peasants, the weavers, etc., rather than being with those of the more civilized world. It's lucky for me.

So since I have been here, for instance, I have been absorbed in the weavers.

Do you know many drawings of weavers? I know only a very few. I began by making three watercolours of them.

Those people are very hard to draw because one cannot take enough distance in those small rooms to draw the loom. I think that is the reason why so many drawings turn out failures. But I have found a room here where there are two looms, and where it can be done.

In Drenthe, Rappard painted a study of it which I like very much. It is very gloomy - they are but poor creatures, those weavers. I have also made a drawing, just an impression, of a lumber auction.

I wish you could understand that if at times I wish you had other thoughts about some questions than you have at present, I do so only because I believe you would profit by it, and not because I should want to make a proselyte for *my own opinions*. I do not believe my opinions to be better than those of other people. But more and more I begin to believe that there is something compared to which *all* opinions, mine included, become as nothing.

Certain truths and facts, which our opinions can change little or not at all, and which I hope not to mistake for my or other people's opinions, as this would be an error on my part.

Opinions can as little change certain standard truths as weathercocks can change the direction of the wind. The weathercocks do not make the wind east or north, nor can opinions make the truth true.

I do not know whether you will understand me, but I wanted to make clear to you that I - thinking as I do - could hardly get cross with anyone merely on account of an *opinion*. Not counting my own *opinions* for much. But my not being able to resign myself to the fact that I see many persons lead a life, rather rashly I think, too far removed from what is *true for all* is quite another thing. So if I get cross, it might be because of something that has nothing whatever to do with my having a high opinion of myself.

There are things as old as humanity itself, and which will not disappear in a hurry.

I know of an old legend, I don't know of what people, which I love; of course it did not happen literally, but it is a symbol of many things.

In that story, it is said that the human race descends from two brothers.

These two were allowed to choose what they wanted above all things. The one chose gold, and the other chose the book.

The first, who had chosen gold, became prosperous; but the second one fared poorly.

The legend - without explaining exactly why - tells how the man with the book got banished to a cold and miserable country, and got *isolated*. But in his misery he started reading that book, and he learned things from it. So he managed to make his life more bearable, and invented several things to get out of his difficulties, so that at last he acquired a certain power, but always by working and struggling.

Then afterward, just when he had become stronger with the book's help, the first one grew weaker; and so he lived long enough to learn that gold is *not* the axis round which *everything* turns.

It is only a legend, but for me there is a depth in it which I find true.

“The book” does not mean *all* books or literature, it is at the same time conscience, reason, and it is art.

Gold does not stand for money alone, but it is at the same time a symbol of several other things.

But do not suppose that I want to force anything in this respect, these things must establish themselves.

But saying a few words about things is different from forcing them - at certain moments keeping silent about something is nearly identical with dissimulation. I just did not want to do that.

As for the rest, whether isolated or not, I will try to manage so that I can work on; and as to my opinions - I sometimes think of what Taine says, “Il me semble que pour ce qui est du travailleur personallement, il peut garder ça pour soi” [It seems to me that as far as the worker is personally concerned, he can keep that to himself], so it was probably a mistake on my part not to keep things strictly to myself. And bear in mind that I do not want you to consider the help you give me as a thing you are obliged to do, for you were not obliged to do it in the past, nor are you now, it has been a voluntary thing on your part for which I, for my part, feel, and I repeat, shall certainly always feel, a real *obligation to you*.

Wishing you success in your business,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

[On enclosed loose leaf]

Once I read a remarkable saying somewhere about the possibility of becoming decidedly different in later life. In a biography of Corot I found the following observation on the influence he had on Français. I read: “à trente ans Français ignorait ce que c'est qu'on ton neutre” [at thirty F. did not know what a neutral tone was].

I only want to say that until late in life one may have, surely as an artist no less than as a “human being” - until late in life one may have a certain stiff, rigid, let's say iron-like way of doing things, *and* of looking at things, *and* of working, too - but for all that one may gain, later on in life, gentler, more intelligent, more reasonable, more humane views.

I only want to point out that it is quite possible that as a human being and as a workman you will acquire more of nature, more tranquillity, that you will get to be more “your own self.” I want to point out that now and then I do think you unnatural, for instance last summer in The Hague. At present this means nothing - and I don't in any way look upon this as your fixed and unchangeable character or state of mind, but as a curious phenomenon. Which I observe with interest and attention for the very reason that I myself have known moments of this state of mind just at a time when I was on the brink of a mental revolution. Ah, well…

There is something else that I want to tell you about my talk with Father. I pointed out to Father that in my present condition and state of mind I sometimes think of going back to the woman I lived with - yes, that I might even decide to marry her. You should know, however - but Father need not know this - that up to the present I have not changed my mind about my decision that it would be impossible, and that living together again is out of the question.

I mentioned it to Father in order to bring up again the question of the “paternal right” to prevent such a thing, a question put forward by Father himself. On this subject I said that Father's becoming my opponent in legal proceedings would in my opinion be anything but sensible.

That moreover, in such a lawsuit it would be necessary to use trickery and false witnesses in order to give a semblance of justice to the obstruction of my intended marriage.

That I for my part, if people should try to put obstacles in my way under such circumstances, should defend myself quite calmly and collectedly, insisting on my rights, and that I should never give in.

Because I am convinced that it would be the kind of case in which the judge himself would urgently recommend an amicable settlement.

Thus I spoke to Father about the matter of marrying, taking the woman with whom I lived as an example of what might happen. But mind you, in this matter I see no reason to go back on my resolution not to go and live with her again. A resolution that is known to her too.

Before I could change my mind with regard to this matter, a great many things would have to happen, things that are quite out of the question at present. So now you know what I want you to know, but I have discussed the matter with Father with the object of making it clear that, if I should want to, Father would never be able to prevent it; that whatever may be said about a “paternal right,” I cannot find anything within the meaning of the law that would apply to me and could be used as an obstruction to me.

Father has hinted at it so often, very vaguely but very palpably for all that, that

I on my part decided to tell him flatly how absurd and coarse I should consider such a proceeding.

It is a fact that now and then I think marriage would be a highly desirable thing for me, but as to this I nevertheless have no definite plans, certainly not as regards the woman I lived with.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Furne

Nuenen, 3-16 January 1884

[Letter to his friend `the land surveyor']
Amice Furnée,
This morning I received your letter informing me of your departure for the East Indies, which is to take place soon.
Little had I thought it would happen so soon. From the bottom of my heart I hope that you will acclimatize yourself successfully in the Indies. Perhaps this will be easier now than if you had stayed in Holland for a long time, and had done a lot of painting here. In such a case, if one had lost oneself in the grey gloom of this country, it might be difficult to enter into the character of the Indian scenery. But under the circumstances, if you try hard to enter completely into the character of the scenery there, I think you will succeed yet. And who knows what curiously picturesque scenes you may find over there?

Many French painters and others have felt the advantage of going to Algeria or Egypt, and I have the impression that the Indies will present similar effects to a certain extent.

Similarly, some painters went to China and Japan, and I have seen excellent things from these countries.

It pleases me very much that you go on being warmly attached to painting, and I believe that, provided you persevere, you will go a long way. Especially as you will have to be outdoors a good deal professionally.

With me things are going fairly well here in Brabant, at least I find nature here very stimulating.

Now the last few weeks I have done four watercolours of *weavers*. And some others of a lumber auction and an interior with a little seamstress and a gardener, all watercolours. Herewith some sketches of them.

[Sketch “Gardener with Wheelbarrow, JH 440]

Enclosed another order for your father. I hope you will be kind enough to select the watercolour brushes yourself, not too thin and not too thick; the same as are generally used. Something like this:

Well, amice, I shall always remember with great pleasure many a walk we took together last summer.

And be assured I shall never forget you, and you will greatly oblige me by letting me hear something from you as soon as you are over there. On my part I am going to send you a few sketches of things I am working on.

And now I wish you a pleasant voyage and prosperity in your enterprises, and particularly prosperity in your painting too.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Kindly tell your father that I shall send him the money for the bill outstanding and this order by January 20.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 17 January 1884

Dear brother,
I just have to tell you something that has happened.
Something has happened to Mother.

On getting off the train at Helmond, Mother hurt her leg.

Father says the doctor told him it was undoubtedly a fracture of the thighbone, near the pelvis and the hip joint.

I was present at the setting, which came off comparatively well, so that I am almost inclined to think it more a dislocation.

The doctor assures us there is no real danger, but considering Mother's age, it will take a long time.

I wanted to tell you the exact truth, supposing that you would prefer that. But I give you my word of honour that it is not worse than I tell you. For the present I will let you hear every day. By the same mail I am writing to your address Rue de Laval, so that you may hear it as soon as possible, either at home or at your office. Tomorrow I shall write again as soon as the doctor has been here. It is a great misfortune indeed.

I was painting at the farm when they sent for me.

Mother is resting quietly now. Goodbye, boy. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 18 and 19 January 1884

Dear Theo,

According to my promise I am writing you again, now that the doctor has been here again. The first night has been very quiet, and seeing that much depends on quiet, the doctor was very satisfied.

We asked him again to tell us plainly what it was, and it is a fact that the thighbone is broken right beneath the joint.

You know that I was just going to pay off some debts with the money you sent. But as there will be many extra expenses, of course I told Father he was welcome to use it; the other things can wait, and it was only by chance that I had not yet sent it off. I am afraid it will be a long time before Mother recovers.

With a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Saturday morning.

I can tell you that this night has also passed quietly, and Mother has slept pretty well. She sends you her love. But it will last some time, brother, before everything is all right again.

Theo, think it over well, if you cannot find some way or other for me to earn something. Money will be needed, and we must also consider once more the chances of selling my work. If it were only possible for me to pay my working expenses myself, so that you could give Mother what you would otherwise give me.

I told you already that I am doing watercolours of the weavers here. I shall try to finish some. But I cannot give all my time to them, and I must be at home as much as possible, at least these first days. Well, as soon as the doctor has come again today, I shall send you a postcard. Goodbye.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, c. 18-20 January 1884

Amice Rappard,

I want to tell you in a few words something which our minds are full of these days. My mother had a pretty serious accident getting off the train - she broke her right thighbone. The setting of the fracture went off rather smoothly; she is quiet and does not suffer much pain. But I need not tell you that we are all greatly worried about it.

Now I am glad I am here, as my sisters are physically weak too, and I can easily find something useful to do. My sisters are well enough otherwise; the one who is usually at Soesterberg is the weaker of the two. I can hardly find words to describe how bravely the sister who was at home when you were staying with us is bearing up these days.

My mother will require a lot of nursing - the doctor assures us that she *can*recover completely - but *under the most favourable circumstances* it will take at least half a year before she can walk again and even then that leg will be shorter than the other one.

Just imagine that at present there is no doctor here in the village (at least my father will have nothing to do with the one there is), and so a doctor from Eindhoven must come in a cab every now and then.

It certainly is a calamity - the consequences of which I think are hard to foresee. Well, of course we must live from day to day, as sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.

Fortunately she is quiet and clear-headed about it, so that she is co-operating to preserve the necessary calm.

Please write me soon. Have you started something new since I saw you?

I am still working on the weavers, but I'm afraid I'll be able to work only half time for a while on account of the unfortunate event, which has resulted in a lot of other things to do.

As I wrote you, I have done several watercolour studies direct from nature. I am going to start more elaborate watercolours after them, for I have to stay at home most of the time these days.

My mother and father join me in sending you kind regards. My mother had taken the train from Nuenen to Helmond in the morning just to do some shopping. As she was getting off the train in the station at Helmond, she seems to have missed her footing. They had to take her home by carriage. It is indeed fortunate that, considering this transportation, things haven't turned out much worse, and that the setting of the fracture went off so well (though it was bad enough, considered by itself). But all the same - a lot remains to be done.

Write soon if you can. With a handshake in thought,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 20-24 January 1884

Dear Theo,

Up to now Mother has been pretty well, in so far as the leg remains in its bandage as it was set.

But for all that, the days are rather gloomy. And I am afraid lying still in bed will become more and more difficult for Mother.

We have just been talking over your letter, in which you write you intend to come.

Of course it would be a great joy for Mother to see you, but on the other hand there is something which calls for caution. And that is the parting, when you would have to go back.

And then it *might* be that Mother might take your coming as a sign that she is in a very bad way.

But it is a fact that Mother would be very glad if you came.

I write about that coming because, in case you should do so, I should think it better *not to surprise her*, but to write about it to Mother first.

If there should unfortunately be a change for the worse, we should wire you at once, you may always depend on it. Of course, your coming or not is a question which can only be decided by yourself. There is no definite, immediate danger, but it is impossible to know how things will continue. I suppose Father has written you all the details, and he will write you again one of these days.

I have no head for writing now, and I have little time for it, for when I am not with Mother, I am near by at the weavers', where I am working on two painted studies.

Write soon again. With a handshake,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 24 January 1884

Dear Theo,

I was glad to get your letter of today, and the enclosure, and thank you very much for both.

It seems to me that up to now Mother's recovery is very satisfactory in general. And that there is less and less *immediate* danger, and that it is more and more reduced to a question of time.

Nevertheless - Mother will certainly not be quite the same after the fracture is healed. I believe that the effect on her, and the unavoidable countereffect on Father, will be that it will prove to have pushed them a long way into old age.

Under the circumstances I was glad to be at home, and as the present accident has pushed some questions (in which I differ from Father and Mother) entirely into the background, we get on pretty well; and the result may be that I shall stay more and longer at Nuenen than I thought possible at first. As a matter of course I shall be able to lend a helping hand, especially later on when Mother will have to be moved more often, *etc.*

Since the panic of the first days has calmed down a little, I can do my work pretty regularly.

Every day I am busy *painting* studies of the weavers here, which I think are technically better than the painted studies done in Drenthe, which I sent you.

Those subjects of the looms, with their rather complicated machinery with a little figure sitting in the middle, will also lend themselves to pen drawings, I think, and I will make some, according to the hint you gave me in your letter.

Before the accident happened, I had settled with Father that I should have free board and lodging here for some time, so that I might use your money to pay off some bills at the beginning of the year. And the money you sent on New Year's Day and about the middle of January was lying ready for that. But as I gave it to Father when the accident happened, this time it will be those colour bill's turn. The more so because Father has had a windfall, as Uncle Stricker sent him 100 guilders, which I think very kind of Uncle S.

So, as far as the money goes, I have not profited from being here.

And I am firmly resolved to carry on the work vigorously.

After about a year Father will feel more keenly the financial difficulties which Mother's accident cannot fail to bring in its train. Therefore, in the meantime let's try to do something with my work. After all, *Father and Mother personally* will be secure for life, Father's pension being equal to his present salary. But, brother, *the poor sisters* - without capital at a time in our society when the inclination to marry a penniless girl is not great - for them life might remain dark and dreary - and their normal development frustrated.

But let's not anticipate things.

It is difficult to say in advance how the constant lying still in bed will influence Mother's health.

All precautions we can take to prevent bedsores are, of course, of the greatest importance. We have made a kind of stretcher to move Mother if necessary, but at present the less it happens the better. The most important thing is for her to lie quietly.

Taking her difficult situation into consideration, I am glad to say Mother's spirits are very even and bright. And she is amused by trifles. The other day I painted for her a little church with the hedge and the trees (like this).

You will easily understand that I love the scenery here. When you come, I shall take you into the cottages of the weavers. The figures of the weavers, and the women who wind the yarn, will certainly strike you.

The last study I made is the figure of a man sitting at the loom, the figure apart, the bust and hands.

I am painting a loom of old, greenish, browned oak, in which the date 1730 is cut. Near that loom, in front of a little window which looks out on a green plot, there is a baby chair, and a baby sits in it, looking for hours at the shuttle flying to and fro.

I have painted that thing exactly as it was in reality, the loom with the little weaver, the little window and the baby chair in the miserable little room with the loam floor.

Please write me some more details about the Manet exhibition; tell me which of his pictures are there. I have always found Manet's work very original. Do you know that article of Zola's on Manet? I am sorry to have seen so very few of his pictures. I should especially like to see his figures of nude women. I do not think it exaggerated that some people, for instance Zola, *rave* about him, though I, for my part, do not think he can be reckoned among the very first of this century. But his is a talent which *certainly* has its *raison d'être*, and that is a great thing in itself. The article which Zola wrote about him is published in the volume Mes Haines. For my part, I cannot agree with Zola's *conclusions*, as if Manet were a man who opens a new future to modern ideas of art; I consider *Millet*, not Manet, to be that essentially modern painter who opened a new horizon to many. Goodbye. With a handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Love from all. *Write to Mother a little more often,* letters are such a distraction.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 1 February 1884

Dear Theo,

Last night I received your letter with the enclosed 100 francs. I can tell you that, having had less expenses through my temporary stay here, I am now at a point where I can cover my last year's deficit.

I draw your attention to this in order that you may see I hate carelessness in business as much as you do, and that I make a point of meeting my obligations to other people. And that I am in no mood to be careless in business matters, *on the contrary*, I assure you.

It is my firm intention to try to carry on my work, and you must not think I work less hard here every day than I used to.

All's well that ends well, says the proverb. Now, as to the misgivings I wrote you I felt about continuing to accept money from you. We *can* wind up now, at a moment when I can get off without a deficit; all the more reason for me always to call the way you dealt with me financially *most generous*. And I do not at all pretend it was your fault that I had a deficit at the end of last year. I only repeat that I am very glad no bill is left unpaid now.

Supplies of colours and other things have all been treated honestly and are paid.

I owe a great debt to you, however, and if I continued in exactly the same way, it would grow worse and worse. Now I want to make you a proposal for the future. Let me send you my work, and keep what you like for yourself, but I insist on considering the money I receive from you after March as money I have earned. And I quite approve of it being, in the beginning, less than I have received up to now. Toward the end of January or in the beginning of February I wrote you that, on my coming home, I was struck by the fact that the money I was in the habit of receiving from you was looked upon in the first place as something *precarious*, and secondly as what I will call charity for a poor fool. And I could establish the fact that this opinion was even communicated to people who had absolutely *nothing* to do with it - for instance, the respectable natives of this region - and I was asked at least three times in one week by absolute strangers, “Why is it that you never sell your work?”

Just how pleasant one's daily life can be under such circumstances, I leave to you to decide.

For my part, I say most decidedly that whatever you may think of what I have received from you up to now, I for my part consider it as a thing which I shall pay back if possible.

If I have some luck with my work, I shall most certainly pay it back. For the present, there can be no question of it, so we will not mention it.

Toward March I shall send you some watercolours from here. If you do not want them, I will take them to somebody else, *but I prefer to deal with you*.

Those watercolours will have their faults, yet I do not think it foolish of me to start showing my work, to bring it before the public's eye.

At a certain moment Rappard did the same, and carried it through from the very beginning.

I, for my part, do it rather reluctantly, but I must do it.

So from March on I shall begin to send my work here and there regularly. And first to you, but do not think yourself obliged to take anything which you do not really care for.

I should think that in consequence of this, however much our feelings might differ or come to differ, we should not be obliged to speak about such things, and still less quarrel over them, which in my opinion one is *obliged* to do if one has a relation with someone like the one we have had up to now.

I repeat, I should object to continuing *on the same footing*. But I should continue our relation in a somewhat modified way with the greatest pleasure.

I do not say that I want you to look upon the things you might accept from me as something you must try to sell at *once*.

If for the time being you should take my work, not in the first place in your capacity as a dealer, but more especially in the quality of one who has it in his heart to do something for fellows like me, who are only just starting - that is enough for me.

But after March I will accept no money from you - or at least absolutely as little as possible - for which I do not give some work in return.

I should not be able to continue *on the same footing* with animation, but I shall start on the new thing with animation as soon as the old thing is cut off - at least this is my opinion. If you do not want to entertain the other proposal, then leave it alone.

I want to feel free with you, but at the same time with *equal* sincerity I want you *to feel free with me*. If there should be something in my work that pleases you, I shall feel very happy; and if it should not please you and you should not want to have anything to do with it, then I should not be able to say anything about it.

Moreover, whatever the difference in feelings may be, and the difference over this or that, we are brothers, and I certainly hope that we shall go on behaving like brothers.

I also hope that you and Father will not thwart me if I take no other studio for the present than the little mangle room here.

I shall take another, and not live with Father any longer, as soon as my work brings in enough money to pay for my taking a house again.

Since I have been here, not a day has passed, I think, when I have not been working from morning till night on the weavers or the peasants; I shall be very glad if you approve of my proposal. Then extremes will be avoided and we shall keep a straight course. If you know of a better plan, I shall be glad to hear it. Goodbye, and thanks for what you sent. With a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 13 February 1884

[Postcard]
Nuenen, 13 February 1884
Dear Theo,
Today I am sending you by parcel post three little panels and nine watercolours. Please acknowledge receipt and tell me if there is anything among them which pleases you any better. Mother is about the same. I am painting some more weavers, you will get it later.
Goodbye.
Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 18-23 February 1884

Dear Theo,

Just a word to tell you - that partly as a result of your letter, in which you mention pen-and-ink drawings - I can send you 5 such drawings of weavers, which I drew after my painted studies, and which are a little different - and I think more vigorous of technique, than the pen drawings of mine you have seen up to now. I am working at them early and late, for except the painted studies, and the pen-and-ink drawings, I have also some new watercolours of them on the easel.

My thoughts have been with you often recently, partly owing to a little book which you sent originally and which I borrowed from L. - Poems by François Coppeé. I knew only very few of them, but they had already greatly struck me at the time.

He is one of the true artists - “que y mettent leur peau” - which is evident from more than one poignant confession. Artist the more because he finds his inspiration in so many very diverse things, and can paint a third-class waiting room full of emigrants who are spending the night there - everything grey and gloomy and melancholy - and in another mood he can draw a little marquise dancing a minuet, as elegant as a little figure by Watteau

That losing oneself in the present - that being quite carried away and inspired by the surroundings in which one chances to be - how can one help it? And even if one should resist it at will, of what use would it be, why shouldn't one yield to what is directly before one, this being après tout, the surest way to create something.

I was struck by the last poem in the book, called: “Désir dans le spleen,” which I copy to remind you of it:

Tout vit, tout aime, et moi, triste et seul, je me dresse
Ainsi qu'un arbre mort sur le ciel de printemps…
[All life, all love, and I, sad and alone, I am sanding
like a dead tree against the sky of spring…]

and then this:

DOULEUR BERCÉE

Toi que j'ai vu pareil au chêne foudroyé
Je te retrouve époux, je te retrouve père…

[SORROW ASSUAGED

You, who I have seen like a lightning-struck oak,
I find you again, a husband, I find you again, a father…]

And then this:

BLESSURE ROUVERTE

O mon coeur, es tu donc si débile et si lâche,
Et serais tu pareil au forçât qu'on relâche…

[REOPENED WOUND

Oh my heart, are you then so feeble and so cowardly,
And would you be like a convict whom they release…]

Sure this is poetry, and of the best.

“Désir dans le spleen” especially I think so true, it paints how, in those very souls that are exhausted and on the verge of dropping, there arises at moments that infinite renewal of desire, as if they had no past behind them. I thought of Rembrandt's “Jewish Bride,” and what Thoré says of it. Thoré in his prime, and Théophile Gautier and so many others - how things have changed since then - and how much duller everything has become. If one wants to keep some of the sacred fire alive nowadays, in short, one must show it as little as possible to others.

Did you receive the package I sent you last week? I must keep the pen-and-ink drawings here for another week, because I need them to finish other things which I started at the same time.

However, you will receive them soon, but please let me know if the package arrived all right, and if it had enough stamps.

Because drawings perhaps count as manuscripts, more may be due for them.

Goodbye, I hope you will be able to find some use for them.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Father wrote you a few days ago about Mother; since then all is well, and today the doctor said that at first he had not dared to hope that all would go so favourably.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 25 February 1884

Amice Rappard,
I can hardly call it friendly that you haven't written me a single word in all this time; but as I suppose you will agree with me on this point more or less, I will not pursue the subject right now. Another matter is that my mother's recovery is progressing better than was expected in the beginning. And the doctor says that he now dares assure us that she will be well again in about three months.

I have thought repeatedly about the fact that we made some sort of agreement that I was to send you a few watercolours this winter. But, as I heard absolutely nothing from you, I must tell you frankly that I did not feel the slightest inclination to do so. So the whole thing came to nothing - although I have done some.

I have mostly been painting these past weeks - those weavers - it was rather a laborious job. And during these last mild days I have been painting in the fields: a little country churchyard.

Five pen drawings of weavers besides.

I haven't found many more wood engravings this winter - except one very beautiful sheet by O'Kelly, "Irish Emigrants" - and one by Emslie, "A Cotton Mill," and then the sheet in the Christmas number of the Graphic, *"For Those in Peril upon the Sea"* [written in English].

Do you know the poems of Jules Breton - "Les Humbles" and "Promenade" and "Intérieurs"? - I read them again recently together with another little volume of French poems by François Coppée. Coppée's are very beautiful too. Characterizations of workmen - also demimonde with a great deal of sentiment in it.

Have you been so busy with your Dominican monk - or what is the reason you haven't written?

Good-by,

Ever yours, Vincent

[On the back of the envelope]

P.S. I have also got hold of a spinning wheel.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 1 March 1884

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter - Mother is doing well - at first the doctor said it would take half a year for the leg to heal - now he speaks of a good 3 months - and he told Mother, “But we have your daughter to thank for that, for I have rarely, very rarely, come across care as good as she gives.” What Wil does is exemplary, exemplary, I shan't easily forget it.

Almost everything fell on her shoulders from the beginning and she has spared Mother a great deal of misery. To give just one example, it is undoubtedly thanks to her that Mother has so few bedsores (which had been absolutely dreadful in the beginning and in quite an advanced condition). And I assure you that the chores she has to do are not always pleasant.

Now look, when I read your letter about the drawings I immediately sent you a new watercolour of a weaver and five pen drawings. I must also tell you frankly that for my part I'm sure you're right to say that my work must improve a great deal, but at the same time I also think that your efforts to do something with it could become a bit more determined. You have *never yet* sold a *single thing* I have done - whether for a lot or a little - *in fact, you haven't even tried*.

Look, I'm not *angry* about it, but we need to speak our minds now for once. I could certainly not put up with it in the long run. You, for your part, can also continue to speak frankly.

As far as saleability or unsaleability is concerned, that's a dead horse I don't intend to go on flogging. Anyway, as you can see, my answer is to send you some new ones - and I shall be very happy to go on doing so - I should like nothing better. Only be unsparing for once with your candour - which is what I much prefer - about whether you intend to bother with them or whether your dignity will not allow you. Leaving the past aside, I have to face the future, and regardless of what you think about them I shall definitely try to do something with them.

The other day you told me yourself that you are a *dealer* - all right - one does not indulge in sentimentality with a dealer, one says, “Sir, if I give you some drawings on commission, may I then count on your showing them?” The dealer must know for himself whether his answer will be yes, no, or something in between. But the painter would be mad to send them on commission if he could tell that the dealer looked on his work as something that ought not to see the light of day.

Well, my dear fellow, we both live in the real world, and precisely because we do not want to put a spoke in each other's wheel we must speak candidly. If you say, “I can't be bothered with them” - all right, I won't be angry, but I'm not obliged to take you for an infallible oracle either, am I? You say the public will take offense at this little smudge or that, etc., *etc.* Now listen, that may well be true, but you, the *dealer*, are *even more* upset by that sort of thing than the public in question, as I have observed so often, and you *set out* with that idea.

I, too, must make my way somehow or other, Theo, and with you I am still in precisely - precisely - the same position I was a few years ago. What you say about my current work - “it is *almost* saleable, *but* - ” is *literally the same thing you wrote to me when I sent you my first Brabant sketches from Etten*.

That's why I tell you - it's a dead horse. And I have to conclude that you'll go on saying the same thing for ever - and that I, who have been consistently chary of going to the dealers up to now, am going to have to change my tactics and try my very best to get my work sold.

It's become very clear to me by this time that you couldn't care less about my doings, but while you couldn't care less, I cannot help thinking it is rather wretched of you, and I dread certain things that are bound to occur - namely that people will say, how strange, don't you do any business with your brother or with Goupil? Well, what I'll say then, is - it is beneath the dignity of Ces Messieurs G. & Co., Van Gogh & Co. That may well give them a bad impression of me - for which I am quite prepared by now - but I also foresee that I shall grow cooler and cooler towards you.

I have now painted the little old church, and another weaver. Are those studies from Drenthe as bad as all that? I don't feel disposed to send you the painted studies I have done here, no, we won't start with them - you can see them if you come here in the spring.

What you write about Marie is quite understandable - if a woman isn't all milk-and-water, I can well imagine her not showing much enthusiasm for moping about in the company of cantankerous fathers as well as spiritual sisters. In any event, a woman no less than a man would feel sorely tempted to end the stagnation quand même [at all costs] - stagnation which may start out as splendid resignation, but which, alas, one will generally be made to regret as soon as one feels one is going freeze solid in the end. Once I read a passage by Daudet about spiritual women. “Ces deux visages se regardèrent - elles échangèrent un regard méchant froid fermé - qu'a-t-il? Toujours la même chose - elle.” [Those two faces looked at each other - they exchanged a spiteful, cold, secretive glance -

what's the matter with her? Always the same thing - she is.] There you have it, that singular look of Pharisees and devout ladies. Yes, and as for us, too, is - la même chose.

So, what am I to make of what you say about my work - say, the studies from Drenthe. Some of them are very superficial, and I said as much myself. But why do I get chided for those painted out of doors, quietly, calmly and simply, in which I was trying *to express nothing but what I saw*? What I get is: aren't you too obsessed with Michel?

(I am referring here to the study of the cottage in the twilight, and to the largest of the sod huts, namely the one with the small green field in the foreground.)

You would no doubt say exactly the same thing about the old churchyard. And yet, faced neither by the churchyard nor by the sod huts did I think or Michel, I was thinking of the subject I had before me. A subject that I believe would indeed have stopped Michel short, and touched him, had he passed by.

As far as I am concerned, in no way do I put myself on a par with Master Michel - and I most certainly do not imitate Michel either.

Well, perhaps I shall try to sell something in Antwerp, and I'm going to put a few of those very same Drenthe studies in a black wooden frame - I'm approaching a carpenter here about it - I prefer to see my work in a deep black frame, and he makes them cheaply enough.

Don't take offense at my mentioning it, brother. I am trying to put something quiet and calm into my work. You see, I approve *just as little* of it lying about unseen as I would of seeing it displayed in fluted frames in the leading galleries.

Now is the time to start taking that middle course, in my view, so I must know fairly definitely how I stand with you, or rather, I must tell you again that, although you are still evading the question, I'm sure that you are not, in fact, going to show the work, and I don't think you'll be changing your mind for the time being either. I won't enter into whether or not you are right about this.

You will tell me that other dealers will treat me in just the same way, except that you, although you cannot be bothered yourself with my work, nevertheless provide me with money, and other dealers will certainly not do that, and that without money I shall be completely stuck. I shall reply that things are not as cut and dried as that in real life, and that I shall try to get by, living from day to day.

I told you beforehand that I wanted to settle matters this month, and so I must. Anyway, seeing that you may already be planning to come here in the spring, I am not going to insist that you make a final decision *immediately*, but I must tell you that as far as I am concerned, I cannot leave matters as they are. Everywhere I go, and especially at home, a constant watch is being kept on what I do with my work, whether I get anything for it, *etc*. In our society virtually everybody looks out all the time for that sort of thing, trying to find out everything about it. And that is quite understandable. But being permanently in a false position is a wretched business for me. Allons - things cannot be allowed to remain as they are. Why not? Because they can't, that's why.

Seeing that I am as cool as can be towards Father, towards C. M. - why should I act any differently towards you, once I've noticed that you use the same tactics of never speaking your mind? Do I consider myself better than Father or you? Most probably not, most probably I distinguish less and less between good and bad - but I do know that this tactic does not behove a painter, and as a painter one should speak one's mind and cut some Gordian knots. Well, I believe qu'une porte doit être ouverte ou fermée [that a door must be either open or closed].

Anyway, I'm sure you do understand that a dealer *cannot* be neutral toward painters - that it makes *absolutely* no difference whether you say no with or without beating about the bush, and that it's probably even more annoying when you dress it all up in compliments.

This may be something you'll understand better later on than you do at the moment. I pity dealers when they grow old - though they may feather their own nest, that isn't any cure-all, at least it won't be by then. Tout se paye [everything has its price], and things can often turn out to be an icy-cold wasteland *then*.

But you may perhaps have different ideas about this. You may point out that it's a bit sad as well when a painter dies miserably in a hospital and is buried alongside the whores in the fosse commune [common grave], where many lie, after all - especially when one bears in mind that dying is perhaps not as difficult as living.

Anyway, a dealer cannot be blamed for not always having the money to help out, but in my opinion a certain worthy dealer can indeed be blamed if he's all kind words but is ashamed of me in his heart and ignores my work altogether.

So, frankly, I shall not blame you for telling me candidly that you don't think my work is good enough, or perhaps that there are other reasons why you cannot be bothered with it, but if you put it away in a dark corner somewhere and do not show it, it isn't kind to couple that with the assurance - *which is not accepted* - that you yourself see something in it.

I don't believe it - you mean hardly one word of it. And from the very fact that you yourself say that you know my work better than anyone else, I am entitled to conclude that you must have a very poor opinion of it indeed if you won't soil your hands with it. Why should I force myself upon you? Well, regards,

Ever yours, Vincent

Apart from a few years which I can scarcely comprehend myself, when I was confused by religious ideas, by some kind of mysticism - that period aside, I have always lived with a certain warmth. Now everything is getting grimmer and colder and more dreary around me. And when I tell you that in the first place I *will* not stand it, quite apart from the question of whether or not I *can*, I am referring to what I told you at the very beginning of our relationship

What I have had against you this past year is a kind of relapse into cold respectability which seems to me sterile and futile - the diametrical opposite of everything that is active, and of everything that is artistic in particular.

I am putting this to you bluntly, not in order to make you miserable, but so that you can see, and if possible feel, what has gone wrong, why I can no longer think of you as a brother and a friend with the same pleasure as before.

There needs to be more gusto in my life if I am to get more brio into my brush - exercising patience will not get me a hair's breadth further. If you, for your part, do relapse into the above-mentioned state, don't blame me for not being the same towards you as I was during, say, the first year.

As to my drawings - at this moment it seems to me that the watercolours, the pen-and-ink drawings of weavers, the latest pen-and-ink drawings on which I am working now, are not on the whole so boring as to be utterly worthless. But *if* I should come to the conclusion myself that they are no good and Theo is right not to show them to anybody - then, then, it will be *one proof more* to me that I am right to object to our present false position, and I shall try all the harder to make a change quand même, for better or for worse, just as long as things don't remain the same…

Now supposing I realized that you, in the belief that I had not yet made enough progress, were trying to do something to further that progress - for instance, Mauve having fallen by the wayside, to put me in touch with some other able painter - or, anyway, *something*, some sign or bother that would prove to me that you really believed in my progress or had it to heart. But instead there is - the money, yes - but for the rest nothing but “just carry on working,” “have patience,” as cold, as dead, as arid and as insufferable as if Father, for instance, had said it. I cannot live on that, it is getting too lonely, too cold, too empty and too dull for me.

I am no better than the next man, inasmuch as I have my needs and desires as everybody else, and it is perfectly natural to kick when one *knows for certain* that one is being kept dangling, being kept in the dark. If one goes from bad to worse - which is not impossible in my case - what difference does that make? If one is badly off, one simply must take the chance to better one's lot.

Brother, let me remind you once more how things stood with us when we first worked together. I even felt free to draw your attention to the problem of women. I still remember taking you to Roosendaal station that first year and telling you then that I was so set against being alone that I would sooner be with a bad whore than be alone. You may perhaps remember that.

At first the idea that our relationship might not last was all but intolerable to me. And I would have been tremendously pleased if it had been a simple matter to change things. But I *cannot* keep flying in the face of the evidence and fooling myself that it *is*. The resulting depression was one of the causes for my writing from Drenthe and urging you so strongly to become a painter. And it subsided the moment I saw that your dissatisfaction with business had disappeared, that you were once again on a better footing with Goupil. At first I though less than sincere of you - then later, and even now, I find it entirely understandable and consider it more a mistake on my part to have written, “become a painter,” than a mistake on your part to have resumed your business with gusto once things had become more acceptable and the machinations to make things impossible for you had ended.

It remains a fact, however, that I do feel depressed about the falseness of the position between us. At the moment it is of greater importance to me to sell for 5 guilders than to receive 10 guilders by way of patronage.

Now you have repeatedly written, very firmly, that neither in the first place as a dealer (I shall leave it at that for the moment and do not at any rate hold it against you), nor in the second place in your private capacity (which I do hold against you a little), have you taken, are you taking, or do you think you will be able to take for some time to come, the very slightest, smallest possible, step to further my work.

I mustn't be supine or spineless about this, so, to be blunt: if you do nothing with my work, I do not want your patronage. I state the reason plainly, the more so as I can hardly avoid giving you some explanation for it. So it is not that I am overlooking the help you have given me since the beginning or wish to belittle it. The fact is that I see more good in the most miserable, most wretched drudgery than in patronage, into which matters are degenerating. In the very, very beginning one cannot do without it, but for heaven's sake, it is time for me to try and muddle along, God knows how, rather than acquiesce in something that, after all, will get us *no further*.

Whether brotherly or otherwise, if you can do absolutely nothing except give financial assistance, you might as well keep that to yourself too. As matters are now, and have been during the past *year*, they have, if I may say so, been exclusively confined to money. And although you say you leave me completely free, it seems to me that ultimately, for example, if I keep company with a woman of whom you and others do not approve, perhaps rightly, though sometimes I don't give a damn about that, there is a small tug at the purse strings to make me feel that it is “in my own interests” to defer to your opinion.

When it came to that business with the woman, you also had your way, and it came to an end, but…I'm damned if I'll practice morality in order to get a little bit of money. Yet in itself I do not think it was absurd of you to disapprove when I wanted to go through with it last summer. But I can foresee the following in the future: I shall again have a relationship with someone from what you people call the lower orders - and, should I still have a relationship with you, meet with the same opposition. Opposition from all of you that might have some semblance of justification if I were given enough money to live differently. Which is what you do not, cannot or will not give, après tout - neither you nor Father nor C. M. nor any of the others who are in the forefront when it comes to disapproving of this or that, and which I don't want from you, après tout, seeing that I do not give a great deal of thought to the question of lower or upper orders.

Do you see why I wasn't being foolhardy, and wouldn't be if I tried the same thing again? Firstly, because I have no pretensions, *do not feel the slightest* urge to maintain any sort of position in society or whatever you call it, and secondly because, as I do not receive the necessary means from anyone, nor do I earn them, I consider myself absolutely free to consort with the so-called lower orders if the opportunity should arise.

We should be perpetually coming back to the same problem. Now, just ask yourself if I am alone among those in my trade who most decidedly refuse the kind of patronage that entails being obliged to keep up some sort of position while the money is below the requisite level, so that they incur debts instead of making progress. Could it be done on the money, I might perhaps knuckle under like so many others. But we have certainly not reached that point yet - as you said yourself, I still have a good many years to get through during which my work will have precious little commercial value. All right - then I would rather end up having to eke out a living and manger de la vache enragée [go through hard times] than fall into the hands of Messrs. Van Gogh.

My only regret about quarrelling with Father at the time is that I didn't do it 10 years earlier. If you continue to follow in the footsteps of Father, etc., you will find yourself gradually getting bored - and becoming a bore to certain people. But those are “mauvais coucheurs” [awkward customers] you will say, people who carry no weight.

Just think it over, my dear fellow - I do not hide my innermost thoughts from you - I weigh the pros and cons on both sides. A *wife* you cannot give me, a *child* you cannot give me, *work* you cannot give me.

Money, yes - but what good is it to me? If I have to forgo the rest, your money remains sterile, because it is not used in the way I have always told you it should be - a working man's household if needs be, but if one doesn't make sure of having a home of one's own, then art cannot flourish.

And as for me - I told you plainly enough, to be sure, in my younger days: if I cannot get a good woman, I shall take a bad one, better a bad one than none at all. I know enough people who profess the exact opposite and who are as frightened of “children” as I am of “no children.”

And as for me - just because something often goes wrong - I do not give a principle up lightly. And the reason why I have few fears for the future is because I know how and why I have acted in the past. And because I know that there are others who feel the way I do.

You say that you are suspicious - but why, of what, and what good will it do you or me? Do you grow wiser by being suspicious? I hope you realize the contrary is true - but again, it is loyal of you to admit that you are suspicious - and that is why I reply, something that would otherwise have been beneath me. And my reply is very short: I mean neither you, nor Father nor anyone else any harm, but I am very seriously thinking of deciding to part company with you and of seeking a new relationship, precisely with a view to preventing further harm. Sooner or later we would clash as Father and I have clashed *and then Icould not allow myself to yield*. Voilà tout [that's all], on the one hand my duty commands me to love my father and my brother - *which I do* - but we are living in an age of renewal and reform and many things have become completely outmoded, and consequently I see, I feel, I believe differently from Father, differently from you. And because I try to distinguish between the good as an abstract ideal and my own imperfect self, I do not come out with big words, but simply say, the way to stay good friends is - to part company. It is a hard thing for me to say, but I am reconciled to it.

You will probably gather that though I may be unclear about the future, I am not afraid. And am even in a very tranquil frame of mind. And yet, there is a great deal going on inside me, in part from a keen sense of obligation, which is sure to persist - and on the other hand from a feeling of disappointment, seeing that the reasons why my career must be broken off as it began, namely with your help and support, strike me as being utterly *absurd*.

Still, it would be wrong to carry on, since - *if* we did - we should most probably have a violent quarrel in a few years' time, and it might end in hatred. Now I still have time to look around - and if I should be forced to do battle elsewhere, then at least it will not be with my brother. And - isn't that looking at things coolly and weighing up the pros and cons?

I shan't be depressed as a result, believe me, but neither am I being reckless. I have found peace of mind now that I have resolved on a separation, because I am convinced that *if* we went on as before, we should *later* become of a hindrance to each other rather than a help.

Rappard said, don't go to Antwerp before you are sure of finding something there - but how can one tell in advance what one may come across? And if I keep my studio here as a refuge, then now is the time to make a start. It will always be there, so it is certainly not my immediate intention to turn my back on these parts completely.

You probably realize, Theo, that on my long walks I have thought things over at length and often. I do not want to get embroiled in a second series of quarrels, of the kind I had with *Father I*, with *Father II - Father II being yourself. One is enough*. That phrase is planted fair and square at the center of my thoughts - draw your own conclusions.

What's more, let me also tell you that I never behaved towards Father, nor do I want to be aggressive towards you, my brother. I have often restrained myself - when with strangers I would have fought quite differently and more fiercely.

But this is just what ties my hands in the circumstances. There is a new field over there for me and one where I can do as I please, as a stranger among strangers - over there, I shall have neither rights nor duties. And I shall be able to be more offhand - bonne volonté d'être inoffensif, certitude de résister [willingness not to cause offense, confidence to stand firm], that is my goal and I am in search of it with all there is in me.

But taking everything lying down has to be paid for later - so - one has to act. Working here and looking for new contacts is the way forward. Unfortunately money is needed for both and the prospects for making a breakthrough are poor. And - time is money, too - and by carrying on as I am now I shall not get any richer.

But now you know my motives - if I should go on, you would become Father II in my life, and although I know that you mean well - you don't understand me at all, and so no headway can be made.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, c. 1 March 1884

Amice Rappard,

Herewith some of Coppée's poems which I promised to send you. “Tristement” reminds me of a Poplar Avenue by Hippolyte Boulanger - I think it is called “La Vallée de Josaphat.” How much of an autumn atmosphere there is in it! I thought you would admire them too. There are many more in the same little volume; I chose only a few at random.

These past few days I have made a number of studies in the open air; I am sending you a little sketch of one of them.

My mother is recovering steadily; the fracture is healed now, and the plaster cast has been taken off. But she will still have to keep her leg in a horizontal position for about six weeks. Yesterday, however, we carried her to the living room on a kind of litter as a trial, and later on we shall be able to carry her into the open air too once in a while.

I am adding to Coppée's poems an Arabian fable that I found this week in an article by De Lesseps, “Voyage dans le Soudan.” I thought the idea subtle, and I believe it *may* be so. Seen from this point of view, human males do not play a very noble part - oh well, that may happen too sometimes. But in general it won't do, for after all... does the candle burn for the moth's sake? If one knew that for certain - well - it might be worth while to commit suicide in this way.

But what if the candle itself should snigger at the burned wings...?

I was struck by it, whatever the truth of it may be. And - I firmly believe that there are things like that in the depths of our souls - and that they would cut us to the quick if we knew about them. At times we are quite disenchanted by mankind - our own selves included, of course - and yet - seeing that we are going to pop off soon enough after all - it would hardly be worth while to stick to our displeasure, even if it were well founded.

And in case our ideas about the worthlessness of mankind were unfounded, our mistake would be all the worse for us. In my opinion the worst evil of all evils is self-righteousness, and exterminating it in ourselves is an everlasting weeding job...all the more difficult for us Dutchmen, as so often our very education must induce us inevitably to become highly self-righteous. But let's stop harping on the subject.

I repeat that my idea about my drawings, and the reason I asked you to show them to people if you have a chance, is based on circumstances which are to a great extent not my fault - I am reproached quite often with “not selling anything.” I am asked quite often, “Why do others *sell* and you don't?” I answer that I certainly hope to sell in the course of time, but that I think I shall be able to influence it most effectively by working steadily on, and that at the present moment making desperate “efforts” to force the work I am doing now upon the public would be pretty useless - and consequently that the problem leaves me rather cold, as I am concentrating on getting on. But all the same, because I am so often reproached with it, and because I am so often hard pressed to make both ends meet, I must not fail to do anything that gives me the slightest chance to sell something. But, I repeat, as a matter of course I am reconciled to the fact that it won't succeed all at once.

But, speaking for myself, this showing of my work to others once in a while is something that stimulates me, now that I have started to do so (perhaps it is very foolish of me).

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 9 March 1884

Dear Theo,

One of these days I am going to send you another pen-and-ink drawing of a weaver - larger than the other five; the loom seen from the front - it will make this little series of drawings more complete; I believe they will look best if you have them mounted on grey Ingres.

It would rather disappoint me if you sent these little weavers back to me. And if none of the people you know would care to take them, I should think that you might take them for yourself, as the beginning of a collection of pen-and-ink drawings of Brabant artisans.

Which I should love to make, and which, as I shall be in Brabant pretty often now, I should be very eager to do.

On condition of making a series of them, which must be kept together, I will price them low, so that though I might make many drawings of the same kind, they might be kept together. But I, for my part, will agree to what you think best.

And you see it is not my aim to break off relations with you; I only wanted to point out that it seemed necessary to me that, when I send the pen drawings, you at least show them to somebody.

As to the matter you wrote me about, I think in such a case, when one sees no possibility of carrying it through, there is one thing one must not forget.

That is, if the woman has loved you, has really cared for you, and you for her, this period of love is a piece of good fortune in life.

She, the woman, may be beautiful or plain, young or old, better or worse, that affects it only indirectly. The only thing that matters is that you have loved each other. On parting - don't smother it or try to forget it - the only cliff to be avoided then *is* that of self-righteousness, one must not pretend then that the woman is under great obligations to the man, one must part as if one were under an obligation oneself - that is, in my opinion, more courteous and humane - perhaps that is your opinion too. Love always brings difficulties, that is true, but the good side of it is that it gives energy.

Of myself I believe - and I think it possible that it is the same with you - that I have not yet had enough experience with women. What we were taught about them in our youth is quite wrong, that is sure, it was quite contrary to nature, and one must try to learn from experience. It would be very pleasant if everybody were good, and the world were good, *etc.* - yes - but it seems to me that we see more and more that we are not good, no more than the world in general, of which we are an atom - and the world no more good than we are. One may try one's best, or act carelessly, the result is always different from what one really wanted. But whether the result be better or worse, fortunate or unfortunate, it is better to do something than to *do nothing*. If only one is wary of becoming a prim, self-righteous prig - as Uncle Vincent calls it - one may be even as good as one likes. Well, goodbye,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 11 March 1884

Dear Theo,

I just received your letter. As your letter crossed one of mine, written in the same tone as the one you answered today, you will see that I am speaking in a different mood than the rash one which you suppose. Just because I say what I have to say quietly, be it not in tone which is used every day (it is a serious question here), I cannot avail myself of your kindness in considering it said “in haste.”

That very idea of yours (that I should have spoken in haste, and rashly) is sufficient proof to me that we have come to a point where mere words won't do any good, and I think it better to let this question rest

You say, you *must* speak about the financial side. So must I.

Brother, know it well, I repeat what I said before about your noble help without any alteration - and that “money *can* be repaid, but not kindness such as yours.”

But this is what I want, and what you yourself will call reasonable. I must take such measures as are necessary to have freedom in disposing of what I receive.

I mean that I can only accept such money as I can spend as I like, without having to ask anybody's opinion.

I would rather have 100 francs a month and the free use of it, than 200 francs without that freedom.

If we were more of one mind in our way of looking at things, I should think an agreement like the one between you and me up to now by far the best.

And because of too great a difference in our ways of looking at things, because of our understanding each other too little, an agreement like the one between you and me is neither tenable nor sensible.

Supposing that your character *as well as* mine wants to avoid disorderliness or outbreaks of violence after all; we must part company quietly and collectedly - but decisively, in such a way that neither you nor I can be reproached with foolishness or recklessness.

I should like to receive the usual amount until March. That will enable me to pay everything I have to pay, and to lay up a supply of necessary things. This is the first measure to be taken.

Last year, the year '83, was a hard, sad year for me, and the end especially was

- bitterly, bitterly sad.

Well, we will not speak of that any more.

After March we shall both be free. But if you could pay Father some allowance for a time, as I do not want to be too great a burden to him, that will be wise and well, I think.

However, this must be between Father and you. If necessary, I shall then try and get a job. I do not even care what kind. But bear in mind that, realizing the fact that obviously we could not agree sufficiently if we continued together, I am absolutely serious about trying not to accept favours from you in the form of money any longer if they should not leave me quite free in my concept of life.

You will say that you leave me free, yes - but there is a certain restraint after all. And I prefer to have less from somebody else, when *after all I am not free in things that are nobody's business but my own*.

You must not infer from this that I want to have done with you, on the contrary - you are an art dealer, very well, when I make something which you think saleable, I should prefer to sell it to you rather than to somebody else, but it must be an arrangement which does not put me in a false position; but in point of fact what I want is to *sell* in the literal sense.

I thank you for your letter, I appreciate many things in it. Goodbye, and believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, mid March 1884

Amice Rappard,
Your letter about the drawings delighted me. As for the weaving loom, the study of that apparatus was indeed made on the spot from start to finish, and it was a hard job - on account of the fact that one must sit so close to it that it is difficult to take measurements; I did include the figure in the drawing after all. But what I wanted to express by it was just this: "When that monstrous black thing of grimed oak with all those sticks is seen in such sharp contrast to the greyish atmosphere in which it stands, then *there* in the centre of it sits a black ape or goblin or spook that clatters with those sticks from early morning till late at night." And I indicated that spot by putting in some sort of apparition of a weaver, by means of a few scratches and blots, where I had seen it sitting. Consequently I hardly gave a thought to the proportions of the arms and legs.

When I had finished drawing the apparatus pretty carefully, I thought it was so disgusting that I couldn't hear it rattle that I let the spook appear in it. Very well - and - let us say it is only a mechanical drawing - all right, but just put it beside the technical design for a loom - and *mine will be more spectral all the same, you may be sure of that.* As a matter of fact it is no mechanical drawing - or it may be except for a "je ne sais quoi." And - if you were to put my study beside the drawing of a mechanic who had designed a weaving loom - mine would express more strongly that the thing is made of oak grimed by sweaty hands; and looking at it (*even if I had not included him in the drawing at all,* or even if I did add his figure out of proportion), you could not help thinking occasionally of the *workman,* whereas absolutely nothing like it would occur to your mind when you looked at the model of a loom drawn by a mechanic. A sort of sigh or lament must issue from that contraption of sticks now and then.

I very much enjoy seeing your drawings of machines. Why? - because when you draw *nothing but* the flywheel, I for one *cannot help* thinking of the boy who turns it, and I feel his presence in a way I can't define. And those who look upon *your* mechanical drawings as *designs for apparatuses* do not understand your art at *all.*

But - if one draws such an apparatus - taken by itself - then I agree with you that one ought to do it in as mechanic-like a way as possible, if one wants to profit by it as a study.

Meanwhile I quite understand your idea that, if it were to be a *black-and-white* drawing - which I *hope* to make it someday, if I can get hold of the right model - that little black spook in the background must be the centre, the starting point, the *heart* of it, most deeply felt, most elaborately finished, and all the rest must be kept subordinate to it.

Well, I was pleased to hear that you liked my winter garden a little [F 1130, JH 465]. Indeed, this garden sets me dreaming, and since then I have made another one of the same subject, also with a little black spook in it, which this time too appears in it not as an example, worthy of imitation, of the correct drawing of the structure of the human body, but as a contrast [F 1128, JH 466]. I am sending you a few others too - a sepia sketch of “Het Broek” - pen-and-ink drawings, “Pollard Willows” [F 1240, JH 469] - “Poplar Avenue” [F 1239, JH 464] - “Behind the Hedges” [F 1129, JH 461] - the “Kingfisher” [F 1135, JH 468] - “Winter Garden.”

I sent them rolled up, but please put them into the portfolio along with the others, especially when you return them, in order to keep them as flat as possible. I added a piece of grey paper; they will show up better if you place them against that.

As for these drawings and art shows, I am not interested in art shows. But what I am interested in is this. I work every day, of course - and not a week passes without my doing some studies like these. I always consider it possible that some day I shall find an art lover who would like to buy them from me - not one or two but fifty for instance.

I have heard of more than one painter who was forced to part in this way with his studies (which he most probably would have kept himself if *he had been able to*), but who on the other hand got some money to tide him over the bad times.

And if I ask you to show them to people as the opportunity arises, I repeat, I do this because it is *not altogether impossible* that you will be able to bring me into contact with such an art lover. If it does not happen, well, then it doesn't; but, inasmuch as my life is getting more difficult instead of easier, it is my bounden duty to look for opportunities to hunt up chances to sell my work. And I therefore ask you to show them when there is a favorable opportunity; if they take no notice of them, all right - I am prepared for that too. To give a one-man show of my work is something I do *not* desire at all for the time being.

As for the people who are interested in drawings - among the ordinary art-loving public there is always a *chance* of finding some *feeling* - a little faith and belief; but among the superficially initiated like the art dealers (without exception) one *certainly* does not find *any* feeling, belief or faith, but only old files of superficial judgments, generalizations, *conventional* criticism ... old files, which I think it would mean losing one's time on - and losing one's teeth - to *blunt* one's dental equipment.

So - show them, if you find an opportunity, but please do not do so *especially* - do not force things - but I repeat, I for my part have to do it. If I were not *forced* to do it, should very much prefer to keep at least the studies myself, and I *would never* sell them. But... you know the rest.

Well, goodbye - I have taken up painting again recently.

Ever yours, Vincent

At times I think of never doing anything but pen-and-ink drawings and painting.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 21 March 1884

Dear Theo,

Look here, this will not do. In your letter you speak about an “amour traînant” [flagging love] and that when you had to face that question, you finally broke it off. Well, this as at least a manly action.

I am involved - not exactly with an “amour traînant” - but with an “amitié traînant.”

Don't you think we might apply the same system to it?

One of the things of which I say “this will not do” is that you send me a third of the money, and write, “I could send you the rest, but it suits me better to do so toward the end of the month, if it doesn't inconvenience you.” Now must you ask me if it suits me or not? You know yourself how last month I used three-quarters of the money to pay things off. But I did not complain, not even when the money arrived as late as March 10.

But now, when I promised to pay various other things in March which I owed when I came here, to have to wait now till the end of the month again, whether that is exactly a piece of good fortune for me, I leave you to decide.

Allons, Brother - I suppose you will not think it “brotherly” of me if I class our friendship, such as it is at present, very decidedly among the things without pith and marrow - but in the past I should have been greatly worried by that question of being brotherly or not brotherly. And now - I shall not be worried by it. And I shall feel pretty indifferent to what you think of my doings. I know that for myself, just because we began as friends and with a feeling of mutual respect - I know that for myself I will not suffer its degenerating into protection - I decline to be your protégé, Theo. Why? Because! And more and more it threatens to degenerate into this.

What you say about my work is silly - I call it silly when you tell me how the Salon's jury would judge my work when I never said a syllable about sending it to the Salon - I think it silly and insipid…oh, there are more things I think silly and insipid, and then the other part is the concluding nice little compliment of this type - if I did this or that, I should be the person to make you feel more at peace with this, that and the other thing.

If you do not care so much for Lhermitte any more, I tell you that the fault lies with you. I agree with you that I rate Millet perhaps even higher, but damn! To see so many things of Lhermitte's as you do, and not to be sufficiently impressed, to forget all comparisons - I call that narrow-minded. Something which, for that matter, you are going to be subject to more and more, I fear.

I never mentioned sending my work to the Salon, did I? But I did speak to you at the time about the people at the illustrated papers, especially about Buhot. And I don't take it back that I urged you to do so.

If you meant it seriously that, after another period of hard work on my part, you would try to show my drawings, I should be perfectly willing not to bring them before the public before we had some thoroughly good drawings.

On one condition, however - that in the meantime my life would not be too lonesome and miserable, my position not too false, but that I could accept the present with a sense of freedom. But how is it at present? You do *absolutely nothing* to procure me some distraction, which I sometimes need so badly, by meeting people, or seeing things.

In short, I feel that nothing would please you more than my not bringing myself to your personal notice.

It has already been this way for more than a year, and now the reaction is that I say, None of it's of any use this way - *neither for you nor for me,* and it would be stupid to go on in this way, stupid!

When I read over the letters you've sent me recently, I see in them that you exert yourself to make it look as though I am the one to blame if we part company.

This is such a dear little Van Goghish trick, such a nice bit of self-righteousness; for my part I shall not grudge you it if it means something to you. Father would do the same. I know for myself what I have felt during the past year, and what my thoughts are about our friendship - *as it is now - unbearable.*

Whatever may be thought about whether I do right or wrong in speaking as I do, at any rate *I'm the one who's taking a chance*. Theo, it is more convenient for you to be completely rid of me - personally, if I break with you, especially in financial matters, I have absolutely nothing else, and such a way of doing things is the opposite of the usual tactics of Messrs. Van Gogh & Co.

Take this in whatever way you like — — —

Conclusion: You indicate that if my drawings were so beautiful that you could put them next to Millet's and Daumier's, you would occupy yourself with them.

Of course I on my part am willing to believe this, but at the same time I know something else - that in that case there are other fellows whom I could apply to. And if you try to make it appear that the house of Goupil & Co. deals principally in the Millet and Daumier type of art, I tell you that Messrs. G. & Co. *most certainly* did *not* occupy themselves with Millet *at the time,* before the big Millet sales - and they did about as little for Daumier. Then, in Daumier's and Millet's younger days, Messrs. G. & Co. were busily occupied with Julien Brochard and *Monsieur* Paul Delaroche - in my eyes not such a very fine *Monsieur* Delaroche, you know. So much for the house of G. & Co.

Goodbye,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

I know beforehand that I shall be sorry, and at times even very sorry if we part.

And perhaps - although in your case no inconvenience and cares are involved - you on your part might think it more or less unpleasant.

But having called the thing by its true name, amitié traînante, half-hearted friendship, what is left except separation? And to tell you the truth, I have repeatedly thought that things would become impossible between you and me unless I could renew some relation, however slight, with Goupil & Co. - Goupil & Co., toward whom after all I have never misbehaved myself, except that during six long years I worked for them to the best of my ability. Which was most certainly a serious misdemeanour on my part, and surely a sufficient reason for hating each other, hein? - such is commerce after all.

But you were too high and mighty to take the slightest notice not only of my work but also of what I told you about what happened to me during these last years in The Hague, which might and should have been redressed.

Speaking of “brotherly,” do such things belong among the brotherlinesses? And can I think otherwise than that it's more and more insufferable of you to write something like, *Therefore* have a little patience?

Look here, I need my patience for my work, my friend, and if I am a little short with you and others, the reason is that I think it mean to put a fellow off with fair words, such fair words as, Therefore have a little patience.

So now I am quarreling with you - and high time too.

In the beginning you used to show my drawings to Heyerdahl - to Buhot - why not later?

Really and truly I am furious that you have been so terribly lax since then - I am furious for this reason - it is not because of anything else - it is because of that damned way you have of saying over and over again, “Keep on working,” “have a little patience,” whereas in the meantime you do not lift a finger to see that I get satisfaction out of my work.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half March 1884

Dear friend Rappard,
Many thanks for your letter, which I was pleased to get. I was very glad to hear that you saw something in my drawings.

I shan't enter into generalities concerning technique, but I certainly foresee that as I gain more of what I shall call expressive force, people will say not *less* but *even* more than they do now that I have *no* technique.

Hence I absolutely agree with you that what I am saying in my present work will have to be said more *forcefully*, and I am working hard to strengthen that aspect, but - that the general public will understand me better *when I do* - no.

That doesn't alter the fact that, in my view, the reasoning of the artless fellow who asked of your work, “Does he paint for money?” is the reasoning of a bloody idiot, since this intelligent creature evidently considers it axiomatic that originality prevents one from making money with one's work. Trying to pass this off as an *axiom*, *because* it can decidedly *not* be proved as a *proposition*, is, as I said, a common trick of bloody idiots and idle little Jesuits.

Do you really think I don't care about technique or that I don't try for it? Oh, but I do, although only inasmuch as it allows me to say what I want to say (and if I cannot do that yet, or not yet perfectly, I am working hard to improve), but I don't give a damn whether my language matches that of the rhetoricians (you remember making the comparison: if someone had something useful, true and necessary to say but said it in terms that were hard to understand, what good would that be to the speaker or to his audience?).

Let me just hold on to this point - the more so as I have often come across a rather peculiar historical phenomenon. Don't misunderstand me: it goes without saying that one must speak in the mother tongue of one's audience, if that audience knows one language only, and it would be absurd not to take that for granted.

But now for the second part of the question. Suppose a man has something to say and says it in a language in which his audience, too, is at home. Time and again we shall find that the *speaker* of *truth* lacks *oratorical style* and does *not* appeal to the g*reater part* of his audience, indeed, is scorned as a man “slow of tongue” and *despised* as such. He can count himself lucky if he can edify just one, or at best a very few, with what he says, because those few are not interested in oratorical tirades, but positively listen out for the true, useful, necessary content of the words, which enlighten them, broaden their minds, make them freer or more intelligent.

And now for the painters - is it the object and the “non plus ultra” of art to produce those peculiar smudges of colour, that waywardness in the drawing - that are known as the refinement of technique? Certainly not. Take a Corot, a Daubigny, a Dupré, a Millet or an Israëls - men who are certainly the great forerunners - well, their work goes *beyond the paint,* standing out from that of the fashionable crowd as much as an oratorical tirade by, say, a Numa Roumestan differs from a prayer or a good poem.

So the reason why *one must* work on one's technique is simply to express better, more accurately, more profoundly what one feels, and the less verbiage the better. As for the rest, one need not bother with it.

Why I say this is because I think I have noticed that you sometimes disapprove of things in your own work which in my opinion are rather good. In my view, *your* technique is better than, say, Haverman's, because your brushstroke often has an individual, distinctive, reasoned and deliberate touch, while what one invariably gets with Haverman is convention, redolent at all times of the *studio*, and never of nature.

For instance, those sketches of yours I saw, the little weaver and the Terschelling women, appeal to me, they are a stab at the core of things. All I get with Haverman is a feeling of malaise and boredom, little else.

I am afraid that you - and I *congratulate* you on it - are going to hear the same remarks about your technique in the future *as well*, and about your subjects and . . . about everything, in fact, even when that brushstroke of yours, which has so much character already, acquires still more of it. *Yet there are* art lovers who, aprés tout, appreciate most what has been painted with emotion. Although we no longer live in the days of Thoré and Théophile Gautier, alas.

Just consider whether it is sensible to talk a great deal about technique nowadays. You will say that I myself am doing just that - as a matter of fact, I regret it. But as far as I am concerned, I am determined, *even* when I shall be much more master of my brush than I am now - to go on telling people methodically *that I cannot paint*. Do you understand? *Even when* I have achieved a solid manner of my own, more complete and concise than the present one.

I liked what Herkomer said when he opened up his own art school to a number of people *who already knew how to paint* - he urged his students to be kind enough *not* to paint the way he did but in their own way. “My aim,” he said, “is to set original forms free, not to recruit disciples for Herkomer's *doctrine.*” Entre lions on ne singe pas. [Lions do not ape one another.]

Anyway, I've been painting quite a bit lately, a seated girl winding shuttles for the weavers and a weaver on his own. I'm rather anxious that you should see my painted studies one of these days - not because I'm satisfied with them but because I think they'll convince you that I really am keeping my hand in, and that when I say that I set relatively little store by technique, it's not because I'm trying to save myself trouble or to avoid problems, for that is not my way.

Apart from that, I am looking forward to your getting to know this corner of Brabant some day - in my opinion it is much more beautiful than the Breda side.

These last few days it has been delightful. There is a village here, *Son en Breughel*, which bears an amazing resemblance to Courrières, where the Bretons live - though the figures are even more beautiful over there. As one's love for the form grows, one may well come to dislike the “Dutch national costume,” as it's called in the photograph albums they sell to foreigners.

I detest writing or talking about *technique* in general, Rappard - though I may occasionally get the urge none the less to discuss how to execute some idea or other of mine, be it with you or with someone else, and I never make light if the practical value of such discussions. But that doesn't gainsay my first thought - which I may not have expressed properly.

That thought, I can't find the right words, is based not on something negative but on something positive. On the positive awareness that art is something greater and higher than our own skill or knowledge or learning. That art is something which, though produced by human hands, is not wrought by hands alone, but wells up from a deeper source, from man's soul, while much of the proficiency and technical expertise associated with art reminds me of what would be called self-righteousness in religion.

My strongest sympathies in the literary as well as in the artistic field are with those artists in whom I see the soul at work most strongly - Israëls, for example, is clever as a technician, but so is Vollon - but I like Israëls more than Vollon because I see something more in Israëls, something quite different from the masterly reproduction of the materials, something quite different from light and brown, something quite different from the colour - yet that something quite different is achieved by the precise rendering of the light effect, the material, the colour.

This something different of which I find so much more in Israëls than in Vollon is pronounced in Eliot, and Dickens has it as well. Does it lie in their choice of subjects? *No*, for that, too, is only an *effect*.

What I am driving at, among other things, is that while Eliot is masterly in her execution, above and beyond that she also has a genius all of her own, about which I would say, perhaps one improves through reading those books, or perhaps these books have the power to make one sit up and take notice.

In spite of myself I keep writing about exhibitions, though actually I give them precious little thought. Now that by chance I do happen to be thinking about them, I am examining my thoughts with some surprise. I should not be expressing them fully enough if I didn't add that in some pictures there is something so thoroughly honest and good that no matter what is done with them - whether they end up in good or in bad, in honest or dishonest hands - something good emanates from them. “Let your light shine before men,” is, I believe, the duty of every painter, but in my view does not mean that letting the light shine before men must be done through exhibitions. Believe me, I just wish there were *more* and *better* opportunities than exhibitions to bring art to the people. Far from wanting to hide the light under a bushel, I would sooner let it be seen. Well, enough of this.

I have recently been reading Eliot's Felix Holt, the Radical. This book has been very well translated into Dutch. I hope you know it. If you don't, see if you can get hold of it. It somewhere contains certain views of life that I find outstandingly good - profound things expressed in a droll way. It is a book written with great verve, and various scenes are described as Frank Holl or someone similar might have drawn them. The way of thinking and the outlook are similar. There are not many writers as utterly sincere and good as Eliot. This book, The Radical, is not as well known in Holland as, say, her Adam Bede, and her Scenes from Clerical Life are not all that well known either - more's the pity, much as it's a great pity that not everyone knows Israëls's work.

I am enclosing a little booklet on Corot, which I believe you will read with pleasure if you don't know it already. It contains a number of accurate biographical details. I saw the exhibition at the time for which this is the catalogue.

It's remarkable, I think, that this man should have taken so long to settle down and mature. Just look what he did at different periods of his life. I saw things in the first of his *real* contributions - the result of years of study - that were as honest as the day is long, thoroughly sound - but how people must have despised them! For me Corot's *studies* were a lesson when I saw them, and I was even then struck by the difference between them and the studies of many other landscape painters. I would compare *your* little country churchyard with them, if I didn't find *more technique* in it than in Corot's studies. The sentiment is identical, an endeavour to render only what is intimate and essential.

The gist of what I am saying in this letter is this. Let us try to grasp the secrets of technique so well that people will be taken in and swear by all that is holy that we have no technique. Let our work be so savant [skillful] that it *seems* naive and does not reek of our cleverness. I do *not* believe that *I* have reached this desirable point, and I do not believe that even *you*, who are more advanced than I, have reached it yet.

I hope you'll see something more than verbal nitpicking in this letter.

I believe that the more contact one has with nature herself the more deeply one delves into her, the less attracted one is by all the trucs d'atelier [studio tricks] and yet I do want to give them their due and *watch* them painting. I often look forward to visiting studios myself.

Niet in boeken heb ik het gevonden
En van “geleerden” - och, weinig geleerd.
[Not in books have I found it
And from the “learned,” ah, but little have I learned]

says De Genestet, as you know. By way of a variation one might say,

Niet in `t atelier heb ik gevonden
En van de schilders/de kenners - och, weinig geleerd.
[Not in the studio have I found it,
and from painters/connoisseurs, ah, but little have I learned.]

Perhaps you are shocked to find me putting in painters or connoisseurs indiscriminately.

But to change the subject, it is fiendishly difficult not to feel anything, not to be affected when those bloody idiots say “does he paint for money?” One hears that drivel day in, day out, and one gets angry with oneself later for having taken it to heart. That's how it is with me - and I think it must be much the same with you. One doesn't really care a rap, but it gets on one's nerves all the same, just like listening to off-key singing or being *pursued by a malicious barrel organ*. Don't you find that to be true of the barrel organ, and that it always seems to have picked on you in particular? For wherever one goes, it's the same old tune.

As for me, I'm going to do what I tell you: when people say something or other to me, I shall finish their sentences even before they are out - in the same way as I treat someone I know to be in the habit of extending his finger to me instead of his hand (I tried the trick on a venerable colleague of my father's yesterday) - I too have a single finger ready and, with an absolutely straight face, carefully touch his with it when we shake hands, in such a way that the man *cannot* take exception, yet realizes that I am giving as good as I damned well got. The other day I put a fellow's back up with something similar. Does one lose anything as a result? No, for to be sure, such people are sent to try us, and when I write to you about certain expressions of yours I do so only in order to ask you: are you certain that those who are so loud in their praises of technique are de bonne foi? [of good faith] I'm only asking because *I know that your aim is to avoid studio chic*.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half March 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half March 1884
Amice Rappard,
Herewith a few more poems by Jules Breton; if you don't have them, I feel sure you will be greatly impressed by them. Today, or rather during the past few days, I painted a study of the weaving loom of which you have the sketch. I am also trying to find the colour of the winter garden. But it is already a spring garden by now; it has changed into something quite different.

Goodbye,
Ever yours, Vincent

You are now in for a little scolding - that is to say - when I was with you last winter you were opposed to “enthusiasm” - I mean, you said that Jaap [Jacob] Maris said that enthusiasm was I don't know what. But he, that is, Jaap, didn't exactly put this into practice in his own life - even though he may have said something like that, applying it to some special case - since he himself continued to paint under *all* circumstances. If it were so, then birds would stop singing and painters would stop painting if they were forever asking themselves whether or not they were too ardent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 26 March 1884

Dear Theo,

I am rather surprised that I haven't heard from you, seeing as you wrote, “if it inconveniences you to wait, write me by return mail.”

Well, I wrote to tell you that it certainly did inconvenience me to wait longer - but I got no direct answer to that. The purport of my letter was exactly that, as I thought too much half-heartedness was creeping into our friendship, it was not stimulating, etc., which I need not repeat. It is certainly a bad economy, time is money too, and as I even have to wait for my colours, it is perfectly *absurd* in my opinion. But you know all that - after all my business is not your business - and if you do not understand it of your own accord, why should I lose patience and time harping on it?

As long as there is any spirit left in me, you can hardly expect me to agree to this slackening more and more.

You should carefully train yourself in that system of prudence and respectability and all the rest of it, for then you will make great progress - precisely in the direction of mediocrity, I mean to say. *The one* leads to *the other* - *straight*. Not because I say so - but because one has only to open one's eyes and take the trouble to look about one to see it happen a thousand times.

But I hear that your friend Braat has fallen ill - (in fact I always found him so during the short time I knew him) - perhaps that was the reason you forgot it - well.

However it may be, be so kind as to answer my last letter, and to let me know whether or not you will change it in that way.

Mother is gradually improving.

Goodbye,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

In the normal case of being on good terms with each other there could never be any question of stipulating that we should not meddle with each other's private affairs, and if you felt the least bit of warmth for my work you would not neglect it absolutely. And I write you as I do more particularly to make you feel how cold you have become toward what we undertook together full of courage, and moreover that too much coldly respectable diplomacy is creeping into your life - I say this much more emphatically than I would if I attached much value to an agreement being more or less fixed.

The real cause of the question is understanding or misunderstanding each other - a question of coolness or warmth of feeling between us.

And I find what Zola says about “dragging on a connection” as true as you do - it deadens all energy. But the question remains, What is the cause of this dragging on?

I, for my part, who like to live in the country rather than the city, certainly do not want to break with you; but as it is now, when I see that notwithstanding my working all day long I do not get any further with you, I cannot stand it, as I see in it a neglect of my own affairs, for which, after all, *I* should be responsible later on. Will you see to it that my work is brought under the eyes of those people who, if not now then later on, must become its buyers? - all right - then! I need not bother about it, and only have to occupy myself with my painting.

But leaving it alone *the way you do* is *negligence*. If you want to think this conceited of me - well, that's your own business - but for myself I think *you* conceited where there is no occasion for it. Because of the very fact that again this month you haven't the money for the usual remittance, you may as well reflect whether playing the big bug will get us anywhere.

If I did not feel more strongly every day that I must earn some money, I should keep my studies quietly for myself, as Rappard does. But, as you say, we are not in Rappard's position - but for all that I am getting more and more cramped. Today I brought home my ninth painted study of a weaver; painting costs money, and when I have to wait for the colours - as it now happens over and over again - I lose time. And look here - if you had a little more interest in it, we should have what we need. And what kind of impression will it make on others if *you* act *like this*? Truly, this is not conducive to inspiring confidence.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 1 April 1884

Dear Theo,

I just received your letter and enclosed 250 francs. If I may consider your letter an answer to my proposal, I can indeed agree to what you say. In short, to avoid further discussion or quarreling, in order to have some answer when those leading ordinary lives accuse me of being without any “source of income,” I want to consider the money I receive from you as money I have earned.

Of course I will send you *my work every month*. As you say, that work will be your property then, and I perfectly agree with you that you have every right to do anything with it; even I couldn't make any objection if you should want to tear it to pieces.

I, for my part, needing money, am obliged to accept it, even if somebody said to me, “I want to put that drawing of yours away, or I want to throw it in the fire, you can get so much money for it”; under the circumstances I should say, “All right, give me the money, there is my work, I want to get on.” I must have money, in order to get on; I try to get it, and therefore - even if you were completely indifferent to me - as long as I get your monthly allowance, without conditions forbidding me to do certain things, I will not break with you, and I agree to everything if need be.

My way of considering you and your money matches your way of considering me and my work - and as long as the balance is kept - I agree to it. If I receive money from you and you receive drawings or paintings from me, and if I have something to justify myself in the eyes of the world, though we might have nothing else in common, though we should write and speak about nothing, even then I feel satisfied for the moment, and I agree to it completely.

Even if it should be your high pleasure to tear up my work, or maybe leave it peacefully alone, or if you should try to do something with it, I have no right to find fault with you. *But only if I am allowed to consider it a purchase on your part*.

Be so kind as to inform me what abusive term I used with reference to your friend Braat in my last letter.

As far as I can remember there is nothing in it about Braat except the remark that during the months I spent at Goupil & Co.'s in Paris, I already thought him in poor health. If my memory does not deceive me, we were often in each other's company, and I fail to understand what gives you the impression that I “do not like him very much.” So many years have passed since then, and my life has changed so much in these years that the people I knew in those days have left no more than rather vague and effaced pictures in my memory - and that I seldom or never think of them - which nobody can reproach me with, I think. But as to Braat, now that you write about him in such a way as to suggest that I do not particularly want to take notice of him, I say, far from it - will you kindly assure him that I pity him, as I do all those who suffer, and that, if he should happen to remember me, I send him my kind regards, and that I wish him as much peace and serenity as one can possibly have in such a situation? What use is such a wish to him? - not much - therefore one wants to keep such things to oneself unless one is called upon to say something. At the same time I beg of you, in case you should have said something about my having written in the way you reproach me with, to tell him that you have only imagined the abusive term. For most decidedly you will not find it in my letter.

You write that you tried to answer my letters, but refrained. In the same way I on my part intended to write you another letter, but I refrained too.

However, I want you to know that if you feel inclined to leave the work you are going to buy from me alone, or even tear it up, this is no reason for me not to do my best on it.

For this month I have some pen-and-ink drawings for you, in the first place those that are at Rappard's for the moment, about which I had a letter from him, telling me that he liked them *all*, and *especially* admired the sentiment in “Behind the Hedges” and “The Kingfisher,” and the first three “Winter Gardens” which he also liked very much.

Beside those, I have a few painted studies which are *your property*, which I will send you *if you like*, but if you don't care to have them, I will ask you if I may keep them for some time, as I need them for my work. The one is a large study of a weaver, weaving a piece of red cloth - the little church in the cornfields - a view of a little old village here in the neighbourhood.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early April 1884

Dear Theo,

Because it may be that you did not quite understand what I asked you at the time, and in order to exclude the possibility that later on there might be a misunderstanding, I will say it again.

Late in January or in the beginning of February I wrote you that, on coming home, it suddenly became only too clear to me that the money I was in the habit of receiving from you was looked upon in the first place as something absolutely uncertain, *precarious* - and secondly as something in the nature of what I will call charity for a poor fool.

And at the same time I could establish the fact that this idea was communicated to persons who had absolutely nothing to do with it - for instance, the respectable natives of these regions - and further that I was asked three times in one week by absolute strangers, “Why is it you never sell your work?”

To this must be added the fact that last summer, because of your making me feel the bridle a little in order to impress upon me that it was in my interest to be compliant in some things, I had already made up my mind to let you feel in return that I for my part, if I were inconvenienced by too much tugging at the bridle, *should be quite willing to leave the bridle in your hands, as long as I was not attached to the other end*, or in other words - if I am not free in my private life, I decline the subsidy. In short, that whether I should be able to get along financially would depend on my *work* (*and not on my private life*), at least as far as the 150 francs a month was concerned.

Summing up these and similar things, I said in my letter of the end of January that I should be unwilling to go on in the same way as up to then, that is to say, *without* a definite agreement.

That however I should be willing to - nay, glad to - nothing could be more pleasant to me than to go on in the same way on condition that a definite agreement was made about the supply of work. And that in order to make a trial I should send a number of things toward the beginning of March.

Your reply was evasive, it certainly was not straightforward, I mean it was not something like this: “Vincent, I see the reasonableness of a number of your grievances, and I approve of your proposal to make an agreement that every month you will send me a number of drawings that you consider equal in value to the 150 francs I am in the habit of sending you, so that you will be able to look upon this money as earned money.”

Most positively I noticed that you did not simply write something like this!

Well, I thought, towards the beginning of March I shall send him some things and wait for the result. Then I sent you nine watercolours and five pen drawings, I wrote you I had yet a sixth pen drawing and the painted study of the old tower, which at the time you said you were eager for.

But now that I see that your expressions remain *as vague as ever*, I cannot but tell you without reserve that I do not consider this the way to treat me.

As for my work - up to now it seemed incontrovertible that you would rather I did not send anything than that I did.

If this is still the case - well then, I am of the opinion that *either* I am not worth your protection, *or* you think a little too frivolously of my work. *I have never withdrawn* my proposal to send you my work regularly.

When I mention that I desire to look upon the 150 francs, or more or less as the case may be, as equal in value to what I send you, this is *to a certain extent* quite a private matter, and in no way do we touch upon the question whether my work has commercial value or not.

But in that case I shall be more justified in the eyes of Tom, Dick and Harry, and shall not have to put up with being reproached with idling away my time - or even being *absolutely* looked upon as “having *no* means of subsistence.”

At the same time it is proof on your part of your confidence in my future, which, however, I shall most certainly not extort from you - and I repeat that however you may decide in this matter, it will have no influence on my opinion of the past, and that I shall never ignore your help during these years, but on the contrary, appreciate it highly.

But you will have to decide quite independently whether our relations will be continued in the future or not - for instance during the current year.

However, I end with the assurance that in case you refuse to accept my proposal to send you my work regularly (you can do or not do whatever you like with it, at least as far as doing business with it is concerned, but at all events I insist on your showing it from time to time, as you did at the very beginning, and in my opinion rightly so), I shall carry through the separation - so *either* this alteration - *or else* finished.

All yours, Vincent

I did not send you the sixth pen drawing because, just as I insist on your showing my work now and then, I am going to show Rappard something once in a while - as he knows a lot of people - and that drawing was at Rappard's, and I should have had it back, but up to now he has kept it, along with two other pen drawings, “Winter Garden.”

Well, and as to the painted study, I said a few words in my previous letter to the effect that I felt discouraged about sending it, because you did not think the one from Drenthe any good, and I do not think this one would please you either. If I can trust my memory, there are some among those made in Drenthe which I should do in exactly the same way if I had to do them all over again. As for the current month I already have the following drawings, which under other circumstances I should have sent you in April:

Winter garden - pollard birches - poplar avenue - kingfisher.

[Further enclosed in this letter]

Another thing I should not want to hear later on is that what I call an agreement about this or that should be ascribed to my interpretation instead of being considered the intention of the other party - in other words, you. You know that you told me that C. M. said something of the sort about me to you. From this I learned how important it is to dot my *i's* and cross my *t's* in the matter of agreements.

I think - seeing that in the past I repeatedly wrote you about the proposed alteration, and that now I have given a summary of it all - everything has been explained sufficiently clearly, and I am now entitled to a plain Yes or a plain No.

[Another postscript obviously written after the receipt of a letter from Theo]

I want to say a few words with regard to your letter about my drawings - which you say I have interpreted in a most extravagant way.

What I say is:

1. Among the things you told me there were a few of which the purport was that in tone and sentiment there were some particulars that pleased you - well, all the better - if you like it, I shall say, I am delighted to hear it.
2. In the letter there is a comparison between Millet's and Lhermitte's methods. In what you said about Millet I found better and more sensitive expressions than I am accustomed to from you - however, this was overshadowed by the manner in which you said that now you were sick of Lhermitte again, and what I should like to say about your whole dissertation is: Tu files ton coton trop fin, you are cutting it too fine. Why not take a broader view of it all, and feel one and the same enthusiasm for them both (who bear the same relation to each other as Rembrandt to Maes, as I see it), without getting engrossed in hair-splitting casuistry about who is the greater man?
3. Something was missing from the letter - namely a reply to the

question of whether we should go on or not.

The question was urgent, and as my work is dependent on my colours and tools - to an extent which I cannot ignore - and these again on my receiving or not receiving money, it is impossible for me to consider your letter very useful.

It would be less impossible for me to keep my temper in our correspondence if, when on the critical date you have not got the money, you should write, I haven't got it, you will get it on such and such a date. Now you did not write a single word in response to my saying, I am surprised that - taking into consideration that you told me I could get the money by return mail if I wanted it, and my having told you that I would rather have it at once than later - I have not heard anything about it.

If you had written at the time, I am sorry, but I haven't got it, I should not have tortured my brain with thoughts such as that you commit this negligence on purpose in order to make life a little more difficult for me. And - if you haven't got the money, I cannot reproach you with anything - but if you neglect sending it - on purpose or not on purpose, that does not matter - then it is something I wish you would unlearn - something that forces one to lose one's temper.

What I said about my trying to do something with my work for instance in Antwerp - this is definitely my intention - and I should assuredly not accept but reject your letter, if in addition you had not also written: [Here an ink line points to the passage beginning “I am not conscious of…” at the end of the paragraph following the sketch below]

Your present frame of mind about me, and my frame of mind about you, is cool enough to allow for coolly asking questions and coolly answering them.

So to cut matters short - leaving caring for each other or not out of it - can I count on it that there is a definite agreement for one year that in exchange for the work I shall supply you, I shall go on receiving the usual monthly amount? The reason why I have to know this is that, if I can definitely count on it, I shall get a more spacious apology of a studio somewhere, a studio I need in order to work from the model.

The one I have at present has the following geographical situation:

Studio immediately adjoining coal hole, sewers and dung pit, and my imagination is not strong enough to see this an advance on last year's situation. However, this does not alter the fact that, as soon as I complain about something, I find passages in your letters like “I (Theo) am of the opinion that now your situation is better than last summer” - you see? And I also draw the little ground plan in answer to your expression, “I am not conscious of,” *etc.*

To this I have to say, I am indifferent to your being conscious or not conscious of the fact that there is something wrong with this or that - at least as long as you do not demand that I should go about anesthetized on the point, and as long as you provide me with the means of correcting things that are wrong I haven't the slightest objection to your being “conscious” of all manner of things.

I hope this letter is as cool as your own - and I thank you very much for the money sent - which makes up for a good deal - at least makes up for all the other things, because I can now count on its continuing for a year, and I shall make no additional demands on you, and shall be delighted to send you my work.

And there is one little thing I should like to add to this: if I should succeed in selling anything in Antwerp or elsewhere, I shall inform you, and the amount will be deducted from the 150 francs.

I never write Rappard about business matters - at least I have not told him that the terms we have been on lately were not as good as before.

Now please think over whether it is right that you, who know Rappard, have seen nothing of his work, and have not the remotest idea what he is about - that you do not take the slightest notice of him any more, unless perhaps from hearsay, when I tell you something. For all that he is one of the fellows who will make their influence felt - whom they will have to reckon with - of whose work they will be obliged to take notice. At one time Rappard came to you, and felt small in your presence because you knew so much about art. Since that year he spent in Paris - what enormous progress he has made! - but you - haven't you been resting on your laurels a little??

[On a separate leaf in this letter]

Your letter about Millet contains good passages, indicating a better insight than what you say about Lhermitte, toward whom you might continue to feel sympathetic, I think. Do not lose yourself in that absolutely sterile twaddle about who is first, and who is second, and so on - that is nothing but nonsense, and stupid. There are plenty who do this; you be one of those who think Millet very beautiful and Lhermitte too, so that no room is left for idiotically pondering on who is the best, who is the first - they are both above the average level. What would be the use of drawing comparisons between Rembrandt and Nicolaes Maes or Van der Meer? - nonsense, isn't it? - so stop it.

I have this question to put to you about Millet. Do you happen to think that Millet would have become Millet if he had lived without children and without a wife? It was all the easier for him to find his inspiration, his feeling for the simple people was so much purer and deeper, because he himself lived in the way a labourer's family lives - but with infinitely more feeling than the common labourer. Millet's maxim was, God blesses big families - and his life shows that he meant this, because it was in harmony with what he said.

Would Millet have been able to do without Sensier? Perhaps not. Why did Millet break with those men who were his friends at first, and from whom he nevertheless received an annuity? Sensier gives enough particular to suggest that the basic trouble was that they thought Millet personally a mediocrity and his work mediocre, and annoyed themselves and Millet with it until at long last the pitcher broke. Yet Sensier does not give a detailed account of the happenings in those days, as if he understood that Millet thought that time a period of execrable bother, and preferred not to be reminded of it. Somewhere Sensier says, When Millet thought of his first wife and the worries of those days, he clasped his head with both hands in a gesture as if once again he were overwhelmed by the huge darkness and unutterable melancholy of that period.

The second time his family life succeeded better - but then he was no longer in contact with those big fellows.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, April 1884

Dear Theo,
The drawings for this month are still at Rappard's, else I should have sent them to you already. And as Rappard intends to come soon and stay with us for some time, I have asked him to bring them with him then.

It gives me much pleasure that you wrote about Cor in the way I learned from your letter to Father and Mother. How fortunate that Braat is recovering - I trust you will have seen in the meantime that in what you thought you had to write about him you were radically wrong - am I right? I hope you will have seen it.

Further, I want to revert to what I wrote you about Rappard. I do not think it necessary to talk much to him about you, as long as you and I are not on better terms than we are at the moment.

Now, just think whether it wouldn't be very unkind of you toward him if you took no notice of his visit when he comes here before long. Think over whether it is right that you, who know Rappard, have seen nothing of his work, do not even know what he makes except for what I tell you, that you do not take the slightest notice of him. Yet he is one of the people that will count - who will assert themselves - of whose work one will have to take notice. At one time Rappard came to you, and felt small in your presence because you knew so much about art. Since that year he spent in Paris - what enormous progress he has made!

I don't think you would regret it if you took my hint to heart. I simply want you to renew the acquaintance with him.

There is all the more reason for it because he is more advanced than I am. I say this simply to prevent your being guilty of negligence.

I do not know what impression it would make on Rappard if I told him what has been wrong between us recently.

But I know for certain that the work I showed him during these last months pleased him. I should greatly prefer being able to tell him that all was well between us.

But I shall not bore you with this. If you want to divide art - by drawing sharp, straight, rigid lines - into things that one may show in the full light of day and things that one should calmly neglect with great singleness of purpose - well, that's your affair.

And at the moment the whole question is so deeply repulsive to me that I for my part will not expiate on it.

As to Rappard, it is curious what absurd things he sometimes hears about his work, which he takes quite coolly. One must be prepared for that, and have a certain self-confidence, so as not to let oneself be confounded or upset. Friends whose cordiality makes up for the bother the work causes are of great value to a painter. If you should feel personal sympathy for Rappard's work, he would certainly not feel indifferent toward you either.

But he as well as I, we are getting more and more disillusioned about finding sympathy, and are more and more determined to persevere without minding what anybody says.

As for Mother, the fact is that there is nothing the matter with her any more, except that she must learn to walk all over again - and that the leg must be loosened up by means of regular exercises. It might have been worse. Goodbye.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, April 1884

Dear Theo,
I am enclosing a sketch of a picture which is one of those I'm working on; this is an afternoon effect of trees in blossom. There are three on the same subject among the drawings you will get as soon as Rappard comes here; what struck me in reality was the remarkably quaint, half old-fashioned, half rustic character of that garden. And I made three pen-and-ink drawings of that same nook, besides several studies which I destroyed, just because I wanted to render that character in some intimate details, which are not expressed easily or without effort or by chance.

If I, for my part, have some confidence in my own work, it is also because it costs me too much effort for me to believe that nothing will be gained by it or that it is done in vain.

And I repeat, I shrug my shoulders at the banalities in which most connoisseurs seem to indulge more and more.

Rappard was working on a few pictures which he saw a chance of finishing with models he could get, so he wrote to tell me that instead of coming at once, he will come in May, and perhaps would ask then to be allowed to stay somewhat longer, if it were convenient, because he intends to work a little here.

I wish he could come at the same time as you.

You must by no means suppose that I have great illusions about the appreciation of my work; I think one must be satisfied if one succeeds in convincing a few people of the seriousness of one's intentions, and is understood by them without flattery.

For the rest, if there is anything more than that, so much the better, but one must think about it as little as possible. But yet I believe the work must be seen, because the few friends will sift down from that very stream of passers-by. But one need not mind what people in general say and do. Goodbye,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, April 1884

Amice Rappard,
I ask you - also on my parents' behalf - whether you would like to come here one of these days - as soon as you please.
My mother's recovery has now progressed so far that she can sit in an easy chair in the living room, goes out in a Bath chair, is beginning to walk again, etc., *etc.* So her recovery has gone more smoothly than we dared expect in the beginning.

The trees are blossoming outside, and at the moment the weather is still not too hot for long rambles.

A few days ago I sent you three more pen-and-ink drawings, "Little Ditch," [F 1243, JH 472] "Norway Pines in the Fen," [F 1249, JH 473] "Thatched Roofs" [F 1242, JH 474]; I thought you would like the subjects. As for the execution, I should have wished with all my heart that the direction of the pen scratches had followed the forms more expressively, and that the forces which render the tone of the masses expressed their shape more clearly at the same time. I think you will admit that I did not systematically or intentionally neglect the composition of things, their shape, but I had to take a shot at it in a rough sort of way in order to render the effect of light and brown - the atmosphere of the scenery as it was at that moment - the general aspect - as well as I could. For at present one can see these three things together only at special moments.

I hope you will come. Of course you will bring along your tools, and the more you bring of your work the better I shall like it. I should like to see that sketch of the "Females of Terschelling" and the "Little Weaver" again.

My parents join me in sending regards.

Ever yours, Vincent

I think that when you come it will be a good opportunity to bring with you all the drawings of mine that you have at home. Then we can resume our work together on a number of new subjects, if you feel like it.

It is always a good thing to let one's work wander around a bit; and if people don't like it, well, never mind - show it again later anyway. If some people you've happened to show these studies to have disapproved of them or laughed at them or said of them no matter what, they will change their minds if they continue to see them over and over again - not all of them, but some.

I am eager for you to see my painted studies again.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 30 April 1884

Dear Theo,

Many happy returns of the day.

That was important news indeed in your last letter, and I think you will be glad the situation has at least become clearer.

I am already looking forward to your next letter.

As to the work, I am working on a rather large picture of a weaver, the loom seen from the front - the little figure a dark silhouette against the white wall. At the same time another one, which I began last winter - a loom on which a piece of red cloth is being woven; there the loom is seen from an angle. I also started two more: effects on the heath. And a landscape with pollarded birches.

Those looms will cost me a lot of hard work yet, but in reality they are such splendid things, all that old oakwork against a greyish wall, that I certainly believe it is a god thing that they are painted once in a while. But we must try to get them so that the colour and tone will harmonize with other Dutch pictures. Soon I hope to start on two others of weavers in which the figure comes quite differently, that is to say, the weaver is not sitting behind it, but is arranging the warp threads of the cloth.

I have seen them weaving in the evening by lamplight, which gives very Rembrandtesque effects. Nowadays, they use a kind of suspension lamp, but from a weaver I got a little lamp like the one in “La Veillée” [The Night Watch] by Millet, for instance. They used to work by them before.

The other day I also saw coloured pieces of cloth woven in the evening; I will take you there when you come here. When I saw it, they were also just arranging the warp threads, so I saw dark, bent figures standing out against the light and against the colour of the cloth, big shadows of the laths and beams of the loom cast on the white walls.

Goodbye, write soon if you can.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 15 May 1884

Dear Theo,

I have waited too long to answer your last letter, and I will tell you why. Let me begin by thanking you for your letter and the 200 francs enclosed. And then I want to tell you that today I just finished arranging a spacious new studio I have rented.

Two rooms - a big one and a smaller one adjoining.

That kept me pretty busy these last two weeks. I think I shall be able to work much better there than in the little room at home. And I hope you will approve of the step I have taken when you see it.

For the rest, I have been very busy painting the large study of the weaver I told you of, and I have also started to paint the little church steeple, you know.

What you write about the Salon is very important. As to what you say about Puvis de Chavannes, I am very glad to see his work thus, and I perfectly agree with your appreciation of his talent. As to the colourists, after all I think the same as you do about them. I can become quite absorbed in a Puvis de Chavannes, but for all that I should feel exactly the same as you do in front of a landscape with cows by Mauve, and paintings by Maris and Israëls.

As to my own palette, you will *not* find the silvery tones in my work done here, but rather brown ones (bitumen for instance and bistre), which I do not doubt some people will disapprove of.

But you will see for yourself when you come here.

I have been so busy painting that lately I haven't made a single drawing. Van Rappard writes me that he will come by the end of this week; I am very glad.

Moreover I think he will come back this year for a longer time.

He is bringing a number of my drawings with him, which I will then send on to you at once.

After some time, perhaps I shall agree with you that last year's change has improved my position, and that it has been a change for the better.

But I shall always regret that at the time I had to give up a thing which I should have liked to carry through.

I think that Mother is getting on very well; yesterday she came in her Bath chair to see my new studio.

Recently I have been getting on better with people here than I did at first, which is of great importance to me, for one decidedly needs some distraction, and if one feels too lonely, the work always suffers from it; however, perhaps one must be prepared for it not to last.

But I feel quite optimistic about it, it seems to me that in general the people in Nuenen are better than those in Etten or Helvoirt; there is more sincerity here, at least that is my impression after having been here for some time.

It is true the people here look at things from a clergyman's point of view, but in such a way that I, for my part, don't feel any scruple in putting up with it.

And the Brabant of one's dreams, reality almost comes very near it sometimes.

I admit that my original intention of settling in Brabant, which came to naught, again has a strong attraction for me. But knowing how such a plan can fail, we must wait and see whether it would prove an illusion or not; well, for the present I have enough to do. I again have space enough to be able to work with a model, but there's absolutely no saying how long it will last.

Well, goodbye, the Salon will certainly give you a lot of work, but for all that, it will be an interesting time too.

Once more, thanks for what you sent, which indeed I really needed because of this change. I hope you will approve of it when you see how I have arranged things. Goodbye, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Love from all at home, they ask you to write to them.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late May 1884

Dear Theo,
I want to tell you that Rappard has been here some ten days, and that he sends you his best regards.
As you can imagine, we paid many a visit to the weavers, and took many a trip to all kinds of beautiful spots.

He was greatly pleased with the scenery here, which I too am beginning to like more and more.

As he has brought the pen-and-ink drawings with him, I can send them to you now.

Since I made them, though it is a relatively short time ago, I have somewhat changed my technique.

Recently I have done nothing but paint.

And I am curious to know whether you will find something in it when you come.

Last winter you wrote that in my watercolours of that time you found some parts which you thought more satisfactory in colour and tone than before. And you said something like “if you stick to that.”

Now you will certainly see how very decidedly I shall stick to that, and how the qualities of those watercolours are even more emphasized in what I have painted since.

Just now I finished a figure of a weaver standing in front of a loom, and one sees the machine in the background.

And I am working on a view of the pond at the back of our garden! Rappard has made here a little study of a weaver, which I like very much, and a bust of a girl spooling yarn.

While he was here, I also made a weaver's cottage in the evening, again in the style of those cottages in Drenthe.

Rappard is going to paint a large picture of the fish market in Utrecht, with many figures.

I hope I shall be able to show you some of his work when you come here this summer. For he has promised to send me some of his things, as I shall do with mine, in order to have at least an idea of what each of us are doing.

I am very much pleased with the new studio, it is large and quite dry. I hope to hear from you soon, for the new studio has caused many expenses. But of course it is a great advantage not to have to pay for my board and lodging; otherwise I should *not have been able* to paint as much as I have recently. And when you come, you will see that this has helped me to make some progress.

At least this was Rappard's opinion, with whom I should not like to change places at present, as regards colour.

Goodbye, write soon, and believe me, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

The drawing *Weaver* is the drawing of the machine out of that picture I am working on; apart from the machinery there is also something of the effects, and light and brown, of the loom, etc., in it. But *please* don't think that this is the general effect of the painting. For the painting isn't so tame.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, late May 1884

Amice Rappard,
I congratulate you with all my heart on the silver medal you received in London. It is a satisfaction to me to know that I said what I did about that picture at the time. And I repeated it only a short while ago, I mean during that conversation on Friday when I said, “I have found something in the *colour* of that picture of the `Woman Spinning' that seems *better* and *sounder* to me than what I have seen you paint here.”

Yet the “Little Weaver” is another exception to this, which I also stipulated at the time.

Starting a picture in a low pitch, and then trying to elevate it from this low key upward - I found this system in the “Woman Spinning” at the time, although it was a very original method of doing things. I reminded you of that picture that Friday. “There are prodigious forces in it,” I said. And that is what I have missed now and then in your later work.

I think of your visit here with great pleasure, and I don't doubt that the more you come here the more you will feel attracted to nature.

Since your departure I have been working on a water mill [F 048a, JH 488] - the one I inquired about in that little bar near the station, where we sat chatting with that man who I told you seemed to labour under a chronic shortage of small change in his pocket.

It is the same motif as the other two water mills we went to look at together, but this one has *two red* roofs, and you see it right from the front - with poplars around it. Even in autumn it will be superb.

Thanks for sending off the books.

Perhaps my brother Theo will come here during Whitsuntide, but not for longer than that, and only if he can manage to have the two days off. He will be delighted to hear you have been awarded a prize, as we all are.

Adieu. Write soon. Believe me, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early June 1884

Dear Theo,
I think I already told you in my last letter that I also wanted to start a large man's figure besides that woman spinning. Enclosed you will now find a sketch of it. Perhaps you remember two studies of the same nook, which I already had in the studio when you were here.

I have read Les Maitres d'Autrefois [The Masters of the Past] by Fromentin with great pleasure. And that book frequently deals with the same questions which have greatly preoccupied me of late, and which, in fact, I am continually thinking of, especially because when I was last in The Hague I heard things Israëls had said about starting with a deep colour scheme, thus making even relatively dark colours seem light. In short, to express light by opposing it to black. I already know what you're going to say about "too black," but at the same time I am not quite convinced yet that a grey sky, for instance, *must* always be painted in the local tone. Mauve does it, but Ruysdael does not, Dupré does not. Corot and Daubigny???

Well, it is the same with figure painting as it is with landscape. I mean Israëls paints a white wall quite differently from Regnault or Fortuny.

And consequently, the figure stands out quite differently against it.

When I hear you mention so many new names, it is not always easy for me to understand because I have seen absolutely *nothing* of them. And from what you told me about "impressionism," I have indeed concluded that it is different from what I thought, but it's not quite clear to me what it really is.

But for my part, I find Israëls, for instance, so enormously great that I am little curious about or desirous for other or newer things.

Fromentin says of Ruysdael that at present they are *much further* advanced in technique than he was, also much more advanced than Cabat, who sometimes greatly resembles Ruysdael in his stately simplicity, for instance in the picture at the Luxembourg.

But has what Ruysdael, what Cabat, said become untrue or superfluous for that reason? No, it's the same with Israëls, with De Groux too (De Groux was very simple).

But if one says what one has to say *clearly*, strictly speaking, isn't that enough? And it may become more pleasant to hear if it is said with more charm, something I do not disdain, yet it does not add very much to the beauty of what is true, because truth has a beauty of its own.

The measurements of the foregoing sketch are about 105 x 95 cm., and that of the little woman spinning, 100 X 75. They are painted in a tone of bistre and bitumen, which, in my opinion, are well suited to expressing the *warm* chiaroscuro of a close, dusty interior. Artz would certainly find it too dingy.

It has already annoyed me *for a long time*, Theo, that some of the present-day painters rob us of the bistre and the bitumen, with which surely so many splendid things have been painted, and which, well applied, make the colouring ripe and mellow and generous, and at the same time are so distinguished and possess such very remarkable and peculiar qualities.

But at the same time they require some effort in learning to use them, for they must be used differently from the ordinary colours, and I think it quite possible that many are discouraged by the experiments one must make first and which, of course, do not succeed on the very first day one begins to use them. It is now just about a *year ago* that I began to use them, chiefly for interiors; at first I was awfully disappointed in them, but I could not forget the beautiful things I had seen made with them.

You have better opportunities than I to hear about art books. If you come across good books, such as that book of Fromentin's on the Dutch painters, for instance, or if you remember any, don't forget I should be *very glad* if you bought some - provided they treat *technical* matters - and if you deducted the money from my usual allowance. I certainly intend to study theory seriously, I do not think it at all useless, and I believe that what one feels by instinct or by intuition often becomes definite and clear if one is guided in one's efforts by some really practical words.

Even if there might be just *one* or *very few* things of that kind in a book, it is sometimes worth while not only to read it but even to buy it, particularly now.

And then in the time of Thoré and Blanc there were people who wrote things which, alas, are already being forgotten. To give you an example.

Do you know what “un ton entier” and “un ton rompu” is? Of course you can *see* it in a picture, but can you also explain what you see? What is meant by *rompre*? Such things one ought to know theoretically also, either practically as painter, or in discussing colour as a connoisseur.

Most people give it *whatever meaning* they like, and yet these words, for instance have a very definite significance.

The laws of the colours are unutterably beautiful, just because they are *not accidentals*. In the same way that people nowadays no longer believe in fantastic *miracles*, no longer believe in a God who capriciously and despotically flies from one thing to another, but begin to feel more respect and admiration for and faith in nature - in the same way, and for the same reasons, I think that in art, the old-fashioned idea of innate genius, inspiration, etc., I do not say must be put aside, but thoroughly reconsidered, verified - and greatly modified. However, I do not deny the existence of genius, or even its being innate. But I certainly do deny the inference that theory and instruction should, as a matter of course, always be useless.

The same thing which I applied in the woman spinning and the old man spooling yarn, I hope, or rather I shall try, to do much *better* later on.

But in these two studies from life I have *been a little more myself* than I succeeded in being in most of the other studies - except perhaps in some of my drawings.

With regard to black - *accidentally* I did not use it in these studies, as I needed, among other things, some stronger effects than black; and indigo with terra sienna, Prussian blue with burnt sienna, really give much deeper tones than pure black itself. When I hear people say "there is no black in nature," I sometimes think, There is no real black in colours either.

However, you must beware of falling into the error of thinking that the colourists do not use black, for of course as soon as an element of blue, red, or yellow is mixed with black, it becomes a grey, namely, a dark, reddish, yellowish, or bluish grey. I found very interesting, for instance, what Ch. Blanc says about Velásquez' technique in Les Artistes de mon temps; his shadows and half-tones consist mostly of *colourless, cool greys*, the chief elements of which are black and a little white. In these neutral, colourless mediums, the least cloud or shade of red has an immediate effect.

Well, goodbye, do write soon if you have anything to tell me.

It sometimes surprises me that you do not feel *as much* for Jules Dupré as I should like you to do.

I am firmly convinced that, if I again saw what I saw of his work in the past, far from thinking it less beautiful, I should think it *even more beautiful* than I always instinctively did. Dupré is *perhaps* even more of a colourist than Corot and Daubigny, though these two are that too, and Daubigny especially is very *daring* in this colour. But in Dupré's colour there is something of a splendid symphony, *complete, studied, manly*. I imagine Beethoven must be something like that…

That symphony is *enormously* calculated, and yet simple, and infinitely deep as nature itself. That is what I think of Dupré.

Well, goodbye, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early June 1884

Dear Theo,

I still think of your pleasant visit very often, which I hope will soon be repeated, and then for a somewhat longer time.

Since you were here, I have been working hard on the figure of a woman spinning, of which I enclose a scratch.

It is fairly large sized, and painted in a dark tone; the figure is dressed in blue, with a mouse-coloured shawl.

I hope to make another one, of an old man at the spooling wheel, near a little window, of which you perhaps remember a small study.

I should be very glad to receive the measures of your frames soon, then I should be able to get going. Perhaps if the measure fits, I shall make a small one of that woman spinning.

I just copy for you the following passage from Les artistes de mon temps by Ch. Blanc.

Trois mois environ avant la mort d'Eug. Delacroix, nous le rencontrâmes dans les galeries du palais Royal, sur les dix heures du soir, Paul Chenavard et moi. C'était au sortir d'un grand diner où l'on avait agité des questions d'art, et la conversation s'était prolongée entre nous deux sur le même sujet, avec cette vivacité, cette chaleur, que l'on met surtout aux discussions inutiles. Nous en étions à la couleur, et je disais:

“Pour moi les grands colouristes sont ceux, qui ne font pas le ton local,” et j'allais développer mon thème, lorsque nous aperçumes Eugène Delacroix dans la galerie de la Rotunde.

Il vint à nous en s'écriant: je suis sûr qu'ils parlent peinture. En effet, lui dis-je, j'étais sur le point de soutenir une proposition qui n'est pas, je crois, un paradoxe, et dont vous êtes en tout cas meilleur juge que personne; je disais que les grands colouristes ne font pas le ton local, et avec vous je n'ai pas besoin sans doute d'aller plus loin.

Eugène Delacroix fit deux pas en arrière, selon son habitude en clignant les yeux: “Cela est parfaitement vrai,” dit-il, “voilà un ton par exemple (il montrait du doigt le ton gris et sale du pavé), eh bien, si l'on disait à Paul Veronèse: peignez-moi une belle femme blonde dont la chair soit de ce ton-là; il la peindrait, et la femme *serait une blonde dans son tableau*.”

[About three months before his death, Paul Chenavard and I met Eug. Delacroix in the Palais Royal galleries, about ten o'clock in the evening. It was after a big dinner, during which questions of art had been debated, and the conversation on the subject had been prolonged between us, with the liveliness and warmth which people tend to do in useless discussions. We were talking about colour, and I said:

"For me, the great colourists are those who don't paint local colour," and I was getting ready to enlarge on my theme, when we caught sight of Eugène Delacroix in the Rotonde gallery.

He came toward us, crying: I'm sure you are talking about painting. In effect, I told him. I was at the point of defending a proposition which is not, I think, a paradox, and of which you are a better judge than anyone; I said that the great colourists don't paint local colour, and with you I don't need to go any further.

Eugène Delacroix took two steps backwards, as was his habit, and blinking his eyes: "That is perfectly true," he said, "there is a tone, for instance (he pointed his finger to a grey and dirty tone of the pavement), very well, if one said to Paul Veronese: paint me a beautiful blonde woman whose flesh has that tone, he would paint her, and the woman *would be a blonde in his painting*."]

As to drab colour, in my opinion, one must not judge the colours of a painting separately; a drab colour, for instance, next to a strong brownish-red, a dark blue or olive-green may express the very delicate, fresh green of a meadow or a little cornfield.

And yet I believe De Bock, who baptized certain colours "drab colours," certainly would not contradict this - for I myself heard him say once that in some pictures by Corot, for instance in evening skies, there are colours which are very luminous in the picture and, considered *separately*, are in fact of a *rather dark, greyish tone*.

Father and Mother will write you soon and thank you for your letter.

But to revert to that question of painting an evening sky, or a blonde woman with a drab colour like the grey of the pavement, if one considers it well, that question has a *double* meaning.

In the first place:

A dark colour may seem *light*, or rather give that *effect*; this is in fact more a question of *tone*. But then, as regards the real *colour*, a reddish-grey, hardly red at all, will appear more or less red according to the colours next to it.

And it is the same with blue and yellow.

One has to put but a very little yellow into a colour to make it seem very yellow if one puts that colour in or next to a violet or a lilac tone.

I remember how somebody tried to paint a red roof, on which the light was falling, by means of vermilion and chrome, etc.! That didn't work.

Jaap Maris did it in many a watercolour, by putting a very little highlight of red-ochre on a colour that was reddish. And it expressed the sunlight on the red roofs perfectly.

As soon as I have time, I shall copy another part of that article on Delacroix, about the laws which always remain true for colours. I sometimes think that when people speak about *colour*, they really mean *tone*.

And perhaps at present there are more *ton*ists than *colour*ists.

This is not the same, though they may easily go together.

I quite agree with you that nowadays it is often very hard to satisfy the need to talk with people who *know* how to give advice and from whom one *learns* and gets *light* without their playing the schoolmaster, or without their using nothing but big empty words, which are, after all, banalities or platitudes.

Well, but *nature* is a thing about which one can learn a great deal. Goodbye, please don't forget the *rabbet* measure of your frames. Believe me,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early July 1884

Dear Theo,
My hearty thanks for your letter, and the 200 francs enclosed. Thanks for giving the size of the frame, in which I intend to make a little woman spinning, after the large study.

I was glad to hear some good news about Breitner. The last impressions I had of him were, as you know, rather unfavourable, because of three large canvases which I saw at his studio, and in which I literally did not distinguish anything that might be located either in reality or in an imaginary world. But a few watercolours which he then had on hand, horses in the dunes, though very sketchy, were much better. And I saw things in it which make me understand quite well that the picture of which you speak must be good. As to the Society of Draughtsmen, firstly, I quite forgot it because I was busy painting those figures; secondly, now that your letter reminds me of it, I am not very keen on it, for, as I told you already last summer, I can only expect a refusal of my petition for membership, which refusal one can, however, consider as a kind of necessary evil that can be redressed next year and as such the request perhaps has its raison d'être.

Besides, as I quite forgot it, I have not one watercolour on hand, and should have to start new ones in a hurry, if it were not already too late for this year.

And when I tell you that I am just now quite absorbed again in two new large studies of interiors of weavers, you will understand I am in no mood for it. Especially as it might cause new disagreements if I applied again to the gentlemen at The Hague.

As to these two treatments of weavers, one shows a part of the loom, with the figure and a small window.

The other is an interior, with three small windows, looking out on the yellowish verdure, contrasting with the blue of the cloth that is being woven on the loom, and the blouse of the weaver, which is again of another blue.

But what struck me most in nature of late I have not started on yet, for want of a good model. The half-ripe cornfields are at present of a dark golden tone, ruddy or gold bronze. This is raised to a maximum of effect by opposition to the broken cobalt tone of the sky.

Imagine in such a background women's figures, very rough, very energetic, with sun-bronzed faces and arms and feet, with dusty, coarse indigo clothes and a black bonnet in the form of a barrette on their short-cut hair; while on the way to their work they pass between the corn along a dusty path of ruddy violet, with some green weeds, carrying hoes on their shoulders, or a loaf of black bread under the arm - a pitcher or brass coffee kettle. I have seen that same subject repeatedly of late, with all kinds of variations. And I assure you that it was really impressive.

Very rich, and at the same time very sober, delicately artistic. And I am quite absorbed in it.

But my colour bill has run up so high that I must be wary of starting new things in a big size, the more so because it will cost me much in models; if I could only get suitable models, just of the type I want (rough, flat faces with low foreheads and thick lips, not sharp, but full and Millet-like) and with those very same clothes.

For it demands great exactness, and one is not at liberty to deviate from the colours of the costume, as the effect lies in the analogy of the broken indigo tone with the broken cobalt tone, intensified by the secret elements of orange in the reddish bronze of the corn.

It would be a thing that gave a good impression of summer. I think summer is not easy to express; generally, at least often, a summer effect is either impossible or ugly, at least I think so, but then, as opposition, there is the twilight.

But I mean to say that it is not easy to find a summer sun effect which is as rich and as simple, and as pleasant to look at as the characteristic effects of the other seasons.

Spring is tender, green young corn and pink apple blossoms.

Autumn is the contrast of the yellow leaves against violet tones.

Winter is the snow with black silhouettes.

But now, if summer is the opposition of blues against an element of orange, in the gold bronze of the corn, one could paint a picture which expressed the mood of the seasons in each of the contrasts of the complementary colours (red and green, blue and orange, yellow and violet, white and black.

Well, I am longing to hear about your journey to London, *etc.*

Mother is making but little progress in walking. Goodbye, and once more thanks for your letter and the enclosed. Believe me,

Yours, Vincent

The best thing I know - for the frame - is to take a few stretchers of that size, then we can see which turns out best.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early August 1884

Dear Theo,
I just wanted to drop you a line while you are in London. Thanks for your last letter, and the enclosed 150 francs.

How I should love to walk with you in London, particularly in real London weather when the City, especially in certain old parts near the river, has aspects that are very melancholy but at the same time have a remarkably striking character, which some present-day English artists have begun to make after they learned to observe and paint from the French. But unfortunately it is very difficult to get to see that English art which is really the most interesting to you and me. Generally *most* of the pictures in the exhibitions are *not* sympathetic.

I hope, however, that you will come across things here and there which will make you understand. Now I for my part have always remembered some English pictures such as “Chill October” by Millais and, for instance, the drawings by Fred. Walker and Pinwell. Just notice the Hobbema in the National Gallery; you must not forget a few very beautiful Constables there, including “Cornfield,” nor that other one in South Kensington called “Valley Farm.”

I am very curious to hear what struck you most, and what you have seen there.

Last week I was in the fields every day during the harvest, of which I made a composition.

I made this for somebody in Eindhoven who wants to decorate a dining room [Hermans]. He intended to do this with compositions of various *saints*. I begged him to consider whether the appetite of the worthy people who would have to sit down at that table would not be more stimulated by six illustrations from peasant life in the Meierij [Manor District], at the same time symbolizing the four seasons, than by these mystical personages. And now, after a visit to my studio, the man became quite enthusiastic about it.

But he wants to paint those panels himself, and will he be able to do it? (But I should design and paint the compositions on a reduced scale.)

He is a man with whom I want to remain on good terms - a former goldsmith who has three times amassed a very important collection of antiques and sold it again. He is rich now, and has built himself a house that is again full of antiques, and furnished with some very beautiful oaken chests, *etc.* He is decorating the ceilings and walls himself, and really does it well sometimes. But he positively wants “painting” in the dining room, and has begun to paint twelve panels of flowers.

There are six panels left on the longest wall, and for these I gave him preliminary sketches of a sower, ploughman, shepherd, harvest, potato digging, ox wagon in the snow.

But I don't know whether it will come to anything, for I have no definite arrangement with him.

But he is pleased with this first panel, as well as with my sketches for the other subjects.

I long very much for your coming.

I am still pleased to be here; at times I do not miss some things, but my work absorbs me sufficiently.

Well, remember me to Mr. O. [Obach] if you bump into him.

When you come here, you will find all the farmers ploughing and sowing spurry, or they will have just finished doing it.

I have seen splendid sunsets over the fields of stubble.

Goodbye for now.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early August 1884

Dear Theo,
I was glad to hear from your letter to Father and Mother that you intend to go to London on August 4, and from there will come here. I am again longing very much for your coming, and to know what you will think of the work that I have done since.

The last things I have done are two rather large studies of ox wagons, a black ox and a red one.

I have also been working again on the old church steeple in the fields, in the evening, of which I made a larger study than the previous one, with the cornfields around it.

Rappard sent me back the book by Vosmaer which belongs to you; I started reading it, and perhaps it is my fault, but I think it awfully dull, and written in a regular academic, sermonizing tone. Perhaps you will think so too when you read it again.

Have you read Sapho by Daudet?

It is very beautiful, and so full of vigour, so “la nature serré de près” [nature pressed closely (to his heart)], that the heroine lives, breathes, and one *hears* her voice, literally *hears* it, and forgets one is *reading*.

When you come, you will also see some new weavers.

Nature is certainly very striking here; I am still much pleased with the studio.

When you come, we must visit some farms and weaver's houses.

In October Rappard intends to come back here, probably he is now in Drenthe again.

Well, I am writing in rather a hurry, for I am up to my ears in my work. I work a good deal early in the morning or in the evening, and sometimes everything is so unutterably beautiful then.

Goodbye, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, August 1884

Amice Rappard,
I haven't written you for quite a long time; first of all I waited for an answer to my last letter, but when it was not forthcoming I supposed this was because you had gone to Drenthe. Then I got a lot of work to do, as a result of which couldn't find the time to write these last weeks. But now please try to find a little time to let me know what you have been doing, and especially to tell me how your large picture of the “Fish Market” is progressing.

Now I'll go on writing about myself. This summer I saw a house at Eindhoven which belongs to a retired goldsmith, who is rich now, and who has several times got together a collection of antiques which he resold. Now this man paints a little, and in his house (crowded again with beautiful and ugly antiques) he has a room whose walls he wants to paint himself. He has a plan for it. When I went to see him there were six panels, each one and a half meters long and sixty centimeters high [approx. 5' by 2'], which he wants to fill with something, and on which he intended to paint a Last Supper, among other things, according to a cartoon which was done, so to speak, in a modern Gothic style.

Then I told him that - as it was a dining room - the appetites of those sitting at the table there would be considerably more stimulated, in my opinion, if they saw scenes from the rural life of the district on the walls instead of mystical Last Suppers. The good man did not deny this. And, after he had visited my studio, I made six preliminary sketches for him of subjects from country life - “Sower,” “Plougher,” “Wheat Harvest,” “Potato Planting,” “Shepherd,” “Winter Scene with Ox Wagon.” And now I am working on them. But on condition that I paint the six canvases *for myself* but that I bear his dining room in mind, for instance with regard to their size; he will pay the expenses of models and paint, whereas the canvases remain my property, and will be returned to me after he has copied them. This enables me to do things that would get too expensive if I had to pay for everything. And it's a job I enjoy doing and which I'm working hard at. But on the other hand I must exert myself quite a bit to explain things to him while he is doing the copying. I have already finished painted sketches in the ultimate size of about five by two feet of the “Plougher” [F 1142, JH 512] and the “Sower” [F 1143, JH 509] and the “Shepherd.” [F 0042, JH 517]. I have smaller ones of the “Wheat Harvest” [JH 508] and the “Ox Wagon in Winter.” [F 1144, JH 511]. So I suppose you can imagine that I am not exactly sitting idle these days.

Have I told you that I have done another “Woman Spinning” and also another “Weaver”?

I have received an excellent book on J. F. Millet by Sensier, and I have bought myself a book by Blanc, Grammaire des Arts du Dessin, on the strength of a passage quoted from it in Artistes de mon Temps. This book treats of pretty much the same problems as the little book by Vosmaer, but I myself greatly prefer reading Blanc. You can read the book by Blanc, and the one about Millet too, if you like.

Regards - from my parents too - and believe me.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884
Amice Rappard,

Just a few words in haste. My parents asked me whether I have had any further news about your visit. I told them that I supposed you would come in *October* in all probability, but that I did not know an exact date. Let me tell you quite privately that, *though you will always be welcome, and* are *expected* at *any time*, it would be more convenient for those at home if you came in *October* instead of in *November*, for instance, because of the fact that I believe they are expecting other guests *later on*, for which reason I myself may go and stay somewhere else in *November*.

You will see from what I say that not only I but my parents especially are counting on your coming, and that it would greatly disappoint us if your visit did not come off - so much so that I should regret having written you this if it shortened your visit by a single hour.

That my parents spoke about it was meant rather as a hint to *me* that certain people were expected to come in November, people who like my room better than my company; so I repeat, a hint to *me* that they would not be sorry if I were not at home, say, in November or perhaps the first half of December.

But most positively *they* as well as *I* are expecting *you* and we should all be disappointed if you did not come.

But as I have already told them that I intend to go on a trip in November, so as not to be in anybody's way, my parents are counting on *that* too.

So do come in *October* and stay as *long as possible* - just as you wrote in your last letter, for that matter. But I shall have to be away during *November*. It is *very beautiful* here. Only don't postpone your visit too long.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

It is really damned inconvenient for me not to be here in November, and I suppose I shall stay in the neighborhood, somewhere in Brabant, after all. But as I *think* they are expecting guests, who are in the habit of coming in the beginning of the winter until, say, Christmas, I myself immediately told them of my intended trip, *which in reality I had not planned at all*, and should not have thought of without a special reason.

Something else - if you come, let me know what train you're taking and please come by way of Eindhoven, so that I can meet you at the station there. Then we'll go together to that fellow I'm making those decorations for - the six canvases I wrote you about. That art lover is now copying them, and all six of them are at his house. He is a very pleasant fellow, by profession a goldsmith and a chaser of brass and other metals for church decorations, *etc.* if you leave Utrecht early in the morning, I think you will be in Eindhoven a little before or after twelve o'clock. That would be exactly the best time for us to go there together, and we can either take the train or walk to Nuenen toward evening.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884
Dear Theo,
I must write you again to tell you that I have fair hopes the patient will recover, though I expect the consequences, in the form of nervous trouble, will prove serious and of long duration.
Much, much depends here on her surroundings and her family, who, in fact, cannot do her a better turn than to treat her kindly, as if nothing had happened, or if they cannot do that, just keep silent. Today I have had a long letter from herself, and her brother tells me he had also heard from her.

Dangers are threatening from two sides, Theo - on the one hand there may be the formation of a critical nerve disease, which may burst out in the form of multiple neuritis or encephalitis for instance. On the other hand there is the danger of melancholia or religious mania. But now, considering that the patient was treated immediately after the first symptoms, and that she is in an environment that is on ne peut plus suited to bringing a person in her condition around - she is the guest, private, of a doctor whom she has known for a long time, and his wife - for all these reasons there is reason to hope that a crisis in one form or another may be cut short or diverted or neutralized by timely intervention - in short, that the affair will fizzle out - which fizzling out would take the form of her remaining under the present treatment for a certain time and then returning, after having calmed down, to the usual way of life.

You will understand that the whole thing upsets me greatly when I tell you how, in that very letter I received today, she says that “not one of her family understands her real anguish of mind, that she tries to find distraction, but that she hardly succeeds in this, and that most of the time sits quietly in her room with a book or something or other that she has got from me.”

I am blessed if I know what to do about the B. family - at first they were extremely unkind to her - and even on the day of her departure they did not act lovingly or even good-naturedly, although in point of fact they did not know what it was all about. Through her brother I have let her sisters know that I was forced to advise them urgently *to apologize to their sister for their groundless and malicious distrust and certain equally unfounded suspicions, which in the first place it was untimely for them to express and in the second place utterly* *erroneous and in the third place meant so many nails in the patient's coffin*. This has been efficacious in that first her sister-in-law, Louis's wife, and second her sisters sent the patient a letter, the tone of which was a great deal more sympathetic and considerably gentler and kinder than their first communication. Louis B. himself - the only member of the family who knows all the ins and outs of that poisoning - although the others have their suspicions, but are regularly contradicted by me and Louis, who should know more about it - Louis B. on his part has from the first behaved practically, manfully and sympathetically toward her.

And as for you, if it should happen that one of the suspicious ones should try to pump you about the suicide attempt, well, don't let on that you have the slightest idea of it. But for that matter, I don't think anybody will - except *perhaps* Father and Mother.

You do understand, don't you, that, although I wrote you it reminded me of a passage in Madame Bovary, there is nothing here that had anything to do with the *second Mme.* Bovary, who is really the heroine of the book, but only of the *first Mme.* Bovary, of whom there is little more than how and why she died on hearing bad news about her fortune.

Here the cause of the desperation was not bad news concerning her fortune, but the way in which they reproached her, telling her that she was *too old* and that sort of thing. Well, within a short time, probably in a fortnight or three weeks, it will be decided whether or not a dangerous nerve disease will break out.

Goodbye, I am still quite upset by it. Don't speak about it to Father and Mother.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884
Dear Theo,

You are perfectly right in asking me why I haven't answered you yet. I certainly did receive your letter with the enclosed 150 francs.

I began writing to you, especially to thank you for evidently having understood my letter, and then to say that I only count on 100 francs, though I can hardly manage on it as long as I do not sell, but nevertheless if it is 150 francs, there are 50 francs more than I counted on, as our first arrangement for The Hague was only for 100 francs, and if we are only partly good friends, I should not want to accept more.

I could not finish that letter, however, and since then I have wanted to write you, but simply couldn't. Something terrible has happened, Theo, which hardly anybody here knows, or suspects, or may ever know, so for heaven's sake keep it to yourself. To tell you everything, I should have to write a book - I can't do it. Margot Begemann took poison in a moment of despair after she had had a discussion with her family and they slandered her and me; she became so upset that she did it (in a moment of decided *mania*, I think).

Theo, I had already consulted with a doctor once about certain symptoms of hers; three days before I had secretly warned her brother that I was afraid she would get brain fever, and that I was sorry to state that, in my eyes, the Begemann family acted extremely imprudently in speaking to her the way they did. This had no effect, at least no other than that they told me to wait two years, which I decidedly refused to do, saying that if there was a question of marriage, it had to be very soon or not at all.

Well, Theo, you have read *Mme.* Bovary - do you remember the *first Mme.* Bovary who died in a nervous attack? Here it was something like that, but complicated by her having taken poison.

When we were quietly walking together, she had often said, “I wish I could die now” - I had never paid any attention to it.

One morning, however, she slipped to the ground. At first I thought it was just a weakness. But it got worse and worse. Spasms, she lost her power of speech, and mumbled all kinds of things that were only half-intelligible. She collapsed completely with many jerks and convulsions, and so on. It was different from an epileptic fit, though there was a great similarity, and suddenly I grew suspicious, and said, “Did you happen to swallow something?” She screamed “Yes!” Well, then I took matters in hand - she insisted on my swearing that I should never tell anybody - I said, “That's all right, I'll swear anything you like, but only on condition that you throw that stuff up immediately - so put your finger down your throat until you vomit, or else I'll call the others.” Well, you understand the rest.

That vomiting succeeded only partially, so I went to her brother Louis and told him what the matter was, and got her an emetic, and I went immediately to Eindhoven, to Dr. Van der Loo.

It was strychnine she took, but the dose must have been too small, or perhaps she took chloroform or laudanum with it as a narcotic, which would be very counter-poison against strychnine. But in short, she took the counter-poison which the doctor prescribed in time. She was at once sent off to a doctor in Utrecht, and is said to have gone abroad. I think it *probable* that she will get entirely well again, but I am afraid a long period of nervous suffering will follow - in what form - more or less serious - that is the question. But she is well taken care of now. You will understand how low I have felt since this accident. It was such a terrible fright, my boy, we were alone in the fields when it happened. But fortunately the poison has at least lost its effect by now.

But for heaven's sake, what should we think of that standing and of that religion which the respectable people believe in - oh, they are perfectly absurd, making society a kind of lunatic asylum, a perfectly topsy-turvy world - oh, that mysticism! You will understand how everything, everything passed through my mind these last few days, and how absorbed I was in this sad story.

Now that she has tried this and failed, I think it has given her such a fright that she will not readily try it a second time; the failure of a suicide is the best remedy against a future suicide. But if she gets brain fever or nervous fever, then…

But she has been doing rather well these first days; I am just afraid of bad consequences. Theo, my boy, I am so upset by it.

Goodbye, write soon, for I speak to *nobody* here,

Adieu, Vincent

Do you remember that first *Mme.* Bovary?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884
Amice Rappard,
I wrote you today and your letter from Terschelling crossed mine.

I am greatly pleased to hear that you are going to bring back rather a lot of things from your trip, and from what you say about your studies I am confident that you will bring along *useful* things. I still regret that I have not seen that picture “Fish Market,” even in its first stage.

As I told you already, what I said about it may be wrong in so far as my words - “*If* you keep the division of the space substantially as it is now, it is my opinion that it can be saved only by a division of light and brown, a vigorous effect of chiaroscuro” - may apply to something quite different, may flatly contradict your intention - if you wanted to make a grey picture, for instance. And yet - I suppose your sketch conforms to the picture with regard to the amount of *canvas space* taken up by your figures as compared to the canvas space taken up by the houses, street, sky. And then it struck me at once that the figures would be crushed by the rest, and that there would be too much of a *struggle* between the figures and the surroundings.

Well, I'm damned sorry I didn't see the picture itself in its first stage.

All the same I did not lose sight of the fact - as you suppose - that it is *you* who are making the picture, not I - but I base my argument on something you will hardly deny, namely *that you are making a* PICTURE.

And a picture - whoever the artist may be - you or anyone else - should express preferably one thing only and that *quite clearly*.

Speaking of Van der Weele, I remember saying to him about the picture which he got a medal for in Amsterdam - and this contrary to the opinion of others - that I greatly appreciated his having succeeded so well in preserving the *unity of* STYLE despite all the different things that appeared in it, and that it really and truly *was a picture*, i.e. something quite different from a realistic study *from* nature.

But - after all - I know nothing of your original concept, except from that hasty little sketch, and I don't doubt in the least that there will be praiseworthy things in it. But all the same I stick to what I said, and I want to point out again that I am *afraid* that your *foreground*, for instance, *cannot carry* all the things standing in it - it will either become *paint* or else unfixed and woolly - what is called *mou*. This very summer the same thing happened to me with a weaver's interior that I could not go on with because the whole thing came too much to the forefront - because the picture began with what ought to have been the *second* plane - the first plane, the solid foundation, was missing. And I reproached myself in the same way that I am now speaking to you.

It is something that happens *very often* to nearly all painters, and it may happen that it can be remedied only by transferring the whole to a *larger* canvas.

By the way, do you know “Ordered off” by Frank Hol in the London News? I brought it back from Utrecht together with a “Shepherd” by Thompson.

Good-by. I hope you will come in October; if possible, write in advance the exact date when you are coming.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884
Dear Theo,

Just a word to tell you that I have been to Utrecht to visit her.

I also had an interview with the physician with whom she is staying, because I wanted to get his advice as to what I must or must not do, for the sake of the patient's health and future, *i.e.* either continue our relation or break it off.

In this matter I want no other advice except that of a physician. And I have heard that her health is greatly shaken - though she is recovering - that in fact, according to the doctor, who has known her from childhood, and who was also her mother's physician - she had *always* had a very frail constitution and will always have; that for the moment there are *two* dangerous things, that she is too weak to marry, at least for the moment, but that at the same time a separation would be dangerous too.

So some time will have to pass, and then I shall receive a definite hint of what will be best for her, separation or not.

Of course I shall always remain her friend, *mutually* we are perhaps *too much* attached to each other.

I spent almost the whole day with her then.

I went to see Rappard for a moment, but he wasn't in town.

Last week I made the sketch for the last of the six pictures for Hermans.

Wood-gatherers in the snow, so he has all six of them to copy; when he has finished this one and they are thoroughly dry, I shall work them up into pictures. I wish you could see all six of them together in the panels for which they are destined. His copies are very correct as to the drawing, but I think his colour is bad; and as for mine, the warm grey, often bituminous, tone in which I kept the whole thing harmonizes with the woodwork and the style of the room. Goodbye.

You should not have the impression that what you write, “that it is evident she is like an angel of patience,” is correct.

This is decidedly not the case; it is the very thing I asked the doctor about - “She has always had a highly irritable temper,” he said.

I do not think it impossible or improbable that you - sooner or later when you put your theory on marriage into practice *yourself* - that is to say, after you have gained a nice secure position for yourself and ask a girl in marriage - you will think of me once in a while.

It is true that I myself have twice met with great sorrow, sorrow of a totally divergent nature. So be it - but you will live to see that your own theory on this subject is not always sure to yield the results that one would be inclined to expect. When you have gained a secure position, then you will find a wife and children and domestic happiness. This is a beautiful promise society makes, but does society keep this promise?

Generally speaking, society disappoints *everybody* in *all* kinds of behaviour.

I say this quite good-naturedly and not by way of reproach - *not at all!*

Il y a du bon en tout mouvement énergetique, I often think.

Theo, now that I know more than at first what made her so desperate - do you want to know what it was? That night *her family* spoke to *her* approximately in the same tone - as *you* did to *me*. Well, *then* I decidedly *lost my temper* with you - this is over now - and she would have taken it in extremely bad part if she had *my* temperament. Well, the things that were said - naturally *not* the things *you* said, but what *her sisters* said - made her so *desperate* and so excessively melancholy that she did what I wrote you about.

Looking at it from *your* point of view, I , who am more of a philosopher, can say - at least on reflection, *He* now thinks *that way*, let him.

But she, *when they expostulated with her, believed she had done something frightful. And this without having done anything she ought not to have done*. She took it so much to heart that she felt deserted by everyone and everything.

[Written in the margin] She is still greatly incensed by her sister's conduct, though it is subsiding - and, for that matter, the sisters have withdrawn a good deal of what they said. One of them, however, goes on being sulky, and this one also tried to speak to me, but I gave her as good as I got.

All yours, Vincent

[Enclosed herewith] I think it deeply pathetic that this woman (while she was so *weak* and defeated by five or six other women that *she took poison*) says kind of triumphantly, as if she had gained a victory and as if she had found *rest*, “I too have loved at last.”

She had never really loved before.

As for me, these days are sometimes full of an anguish which makes me *sick*, which can neither be diverted nor stilled, as with much forethought *I have always respected her* on a certain point that would have dishonoured her socially (though if I had wanted it, I had her in my power), so that socially she can maintain her position perfectly, and *if* she *understood it well*, she would have a splendid opportunity to take her revenge and get satisfaction from those very women who defeated her. And I will lend her a helping hand in this, but she does not always understand, or else she understands *too late*. Well.

It is a pity that I didn't meet her *before*, for instance, ten years ago. Now she gives me the impression of a Cremona violin which has been spoiled by bad, bungling repairers.

And the condition she was in when I met her proved to be rather too damaged.

But originally, it was a rare specimen of great value, and *even now* she has, in spite of drawbacks, great value.

The only thing I ever saw again of Kee was a picture taken a year later; was she changed for the worse? On the contrary, *more interesting*.

That disturbing the tranquillity of a woman, as theological people call it (sometimes theologians *sans le savoir*), is sometimes *the breaking of stagnation or melancholy*, which steals over many people and is *worse than death itself*. Some people think it terrible to hurl them back into life, into love, and one must consider very carefully how far one may go. But if one does it with motives other than egoism, well, then the women themselves will sometimes get *angry*, and may even hate instead of love, que soit.

But they will not easily despise the man who did it, while they do despise the men who have extinguished the manliness in themselves. Well, those are the deep things of life. But as for anyone who does not think about them or laughs at them, Mouret justly calls him a “dupe,” and in his anger, even “bête.”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884
Amice Rappard,

With many thanks for letting me read them I am returning the book by Blanc and the one by Fromentin today. As I told you, in consequence of reading Artistes de mon Temps, I ordered the Grammaire des Arts du Dessin - you may read it if you like.

I happened to be in Utrecht last week for a day with some others from the village. I called at your house, but I could not call again as I had to go back the same day. I found nobody home at your house, and I was very sorry that I could not take a look at any of your work as a result; I should have liked so much to see your large picture of the “Fish Market.” And they could not even tell me where you were, which is why I suppose you are still in Drenthe.

I should have liked at the same time to talk to you about staying with us, to find out whether you feel like coming or not. I already wrote you about it, but the two letters have not been answered.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

I very much enjoyed working on the six canvases I wrote you about, and now the painted sketches are finished, all six of them, and are already at my art lover's house; after he has copied them they will remain my property, and I am going to put some final touches on them. The subjects are “Potato Planting,” “Ox Plough,” “Wheat Harvest,” “Sower,” “Shepherd” (storm effect), “Gatherers of Dead Wood” (snow effect).

I have felt a bit cramped, as I had to stick to certain fixed measurements, and also because my art lover preferred compositions with five or six figures, for instance, whereas I myself would rather have done two or three. But despite that I have worked on them with real pleasure, and I shall carry them still further.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884

Nuenen, 2nd half September 1884
Dear Theo,
I could not phrase my last letter differently than I did. But I want you to know that it always strikes me as being a difference between you and me imposed by fate, rather than one for which we ourselves are to blame.

You tell me that within a short time there will be an exhibition of the work of Delacroix. All right. You will certainly see there a picture “La Barricade,” which I know only from biographies of Delacroix. I believe it was painted in 1848. [The reference is to Delacroix's *Liberty at the Barricades,* which in fact commemorated the rising of July 28th, 1830 and was shown at the Salon of 1831.] You also know a lithograph by De Lemud, I believe; if it is not by him, then by Daumier, also representing the barricade of 1848. I wish you could just imagine that you and I had lived in that year 1848, or some such period, for at the time of the coup d'etat by Napoleon there was again something of the kind. I will not make any insinuations - that has never been my object - I try to make it clear to you to what degree the difference that has sprung up between us is connected with the general drift of society, and, as such, is something quite different from premeditated reproaches. So take that period of 1848.

Who were opposed to each other then, that can be taken as types of all the rest? Guizot, minister of Louis Philippe, on one side, Michelet and Quinet with the students on the other.

I begin with Guizot and Louis Philippe, were they bad or tyrannical? Not exactly; in my opinion, they were people, like for instance Father and Grandfather, like old Goupil. In short, people with a very venerable appearance, deep - serious - but if one looks at them a little more closely and sharply, they have something gloomy, dull, stale, so much that it makes one sick. Is this saying too much???

Except for a difference of position, they have the same mind, the same character. Am I mistaken in this?

Now Quinet or Michelet, for instance, or Victor Hugo (later), was the difference between them and their opponents very great? Yes, but seen superficially one would not have said so. I myself have formerly admired at one and the same time a book by Guizot and a book by Michelet. But in my case, as I got deeper into it, *I* found difference and *contrast*, which is stronger still.

In short, that the one comes to a dead end and disappears vaguely, and the other, on the contrary, has something infinite. Since then much has happened. But my opinion is, if you and I had lived *then*, you would have been on the Guizot side, and I on the side of Michelet. And both of us remaining set in our outlooks, with a certain melancholy, we might have stood as direct enemies opposite each other, for instance on such a barricade, you before it as a soldier of the government, I behind it, as revolutionist or rebel.

Now, in 1884, *the digits happen to be the same only just reversed*, we are standing *again* opposite each other, though there are no barricades now. But minds that cannot agree are certainly still to be found.

“Le moulin n'y est plus, mais le vent y est encore.” [The mill is no more, but the wind remains.]

And in my opinion we are in different camps opposite each other, that cannot be helped. And whether we like it or not, *you* must go on, *I* must go on. But as we are brothers, let us avoid killing each other for instance (in the figurative sense). But we cannot help each other as much as two people who are standing side by side in the same camp. No, if we come in each other's vicinity, we would be within each other's range. *My* sneers are bullets, not aimed at you who are my brother, but in general at the party to which you once and for all belong. Neither do I consider *your* sneers expressly aimed at me, but *you fire* at the barricade and think to gain merit by it, and I happen to be there.

Think this over if you like, for I do not believe you can say much against it; I can only say that I believe things are so…

I hope you will understand that I am speaking figuratively. Neither you nor I meddle with politics, but we live in the world, in society, and involuntarily ranks of people group themselves. Can the clouds help whether they belong to one thundershower or to another? whether they carry positive or negative electricity? Now it is also true that men are not clouds. As an individual, one is a part of all humanity. That humanity is divided into parties. How far is it one's own free will, how far is it the fatality of circumstances, that makes one belong to one party or to its opposite?

Well, then it was “ '48, now it is '84,” “le moulin n'y est plus, mais le vent y est encore.” But try to know for yourself where you really belong, as I try to know that for myself. Goodbye,

Vincent

It was mere chance that recently I happened to be asked to do a drawing or a painted study for 20 guilders. I acceded to this request, but seeing that I suspected (a suspicion which, on investigation, proved to be well founded) that

Margot Begemann was behind it all, and that indirectly she wanted to make me a present of the money, I most resolutely refused to accept *payment*, but *not* to do the drawing, which I sent. It is no easy matter, when one is sorely pressed for money, to refuse it. But it would have been a pons asinorum, and underhand expedient - so - instead of such underhand expedients - is there nothing better to do? I am convinced of it. For your sake as well as mine, and for the sake of many others, I wish that we had *Mourets* in the art trade, who would know how to create a *new* and *larger* buying public.

Perhaps you will say: Isn't Tersteeg, for instance, a Mouret? Maybe he is after all. But however this may be, there are still other careers to be built up, simply because the public which is buying now can be multiplied by ten, and that every day this is becoming more necessary.

If only a number of Mourets would come forward, who would buy and sell in a way different from the old routine, it would be excellent - then there would be more and more work to do. But if no Mourets came forward, then the trade may undergo a complete change because the painters themselves might put it on a new basis by starting permanent exhibitions without the old intermediary. I so much wish you knew and felt how young you are still, if only *you would act and be daring like a young man*.

If you are no artist in painting then try to be an artist as a *dealer* like Mouret. As for myself - though at present I am on ne peut plus hard up - yet I feel that within a few years I shall blithely dare to undertake running up much bigger bills for colours and other things. I want to have a lot of work to do - believe me - and I don't intend to be bored - *do a great deal* or *drop dead*.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late September 1884

Dear Theo,
Enclosed I am sending you two photographs, later on you will get two more of weavers.
I intended to have twelve photographs taken - a series of Brabant scenes, including the six I am making for Hermans.

I intended to send them to some illustrated papers, to try to get some work, or at least to become known.

But I have given up the idea, as the photographer only produces copies that do not render the real chiaroscuro, or hardly do; besides, he retouches much and badly, and yet very often leaves dark what is light in the picture, and vice versa.

However, I will have another photo taken of the weavers in carte-de-visite size only, because being so far away from the illustrated papers here, I must find a means to get connections in another way than by words.

This winter I hope to make several drawings, particularly of the same compositions, and to send them, for instance, to the London News, which you may have noticed is now often better than the Graphic, and among other things, has just reproduced a very beautiful Frank Holl, and a beautiful landscape with sheep.

Recently I have been working very hard; I believe, what with other emotions, I have even overworked myself. For I am in a melancholy mood, and all these things have combined to upset me in such a way that there are many days when I am almost paralyzed.

I cannot eat, and I cannot sleep - that is to say, not enough, and that makes one weak.

But I shall get over it again, especially as I have fairly good news from Utrecht.

But I am still very anxious because I am afraid it will be a long time before she has entirely recovered.

Perhaps it will be a long time before I get over it too. I always regret, Theo, that I am standing on one side of a certain barricade, you on the other, which barricade is not actually visible any more as a *structure of paving stones*, but which certainly does exist socially, and will continue to do so.

In that lithograph by Daumier or Lemud, whichever it may be, the principal subject is a person whose story I remember.

There were two brothers, and they were standing on *the same side*, and both were killed one after the other, *for the same cause*.

That might have occurred in our case, but now I am almost sure it will never happen. I, for my part, know well enough that the future will always remain very difficult for me, and I am almost sure that in the future I shall never be what people call *prosperous*.

I think that Father also feels it is fatality rather than downright intention when there is sometimes such a decided difference of opinion between us. But I wish that I didn't *hit* other people, that Father had not been standing *right* in front of me at times. Well, sometimes I think that at all events painting can prevent worse things, and that otherwise it would be even worse. For the future, I have no other plans now than to continue my Brabant subjects till I am far enough along to sell them in Belgium, for instance, or elsewhere.

Then, when I have some firm footing, I should like to go back to the miners once again.

I ask you, not to sympathize with my work, but whenever you know of some resources, tell me so. Rappard has been both in Drenthe and in Terschelling again, and seems to have got a good crop of studies. Probably he will come here again in October for some time. Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

The picture of the sower is as large as that of the woman spinning; the colour of the soil is neutral but just a little pink, light green farther on. The blouse of the man is blue, and his trousers, brown. The gaiters are dirty linen, I think in the picture the head stands out better against the sky than in the photograph.

Just listen, Theo, as to that barricade, you know there was a time in my life when I also stood with the Guizots, *etc.*

But as soon as I had enough of it, you know how I turned away with energy and persistence.

The younger people *now do not want me*, however ; all right, *I don't care*; as men, and as painters, I like the generation of about '48 better than those of '84; but from those of '48, *not* the Guizots, but the revolutionaries, Michelet - and also *the peasant painters* of Barbizon.

You must decide for yourself what you are going to do about it, but I myself cannot swallow everything. Your apparent indication in your letter that Goupil & Co. are specialists in Millet and Daumier is really too outrageous. Do you really think I am such a dullard as to believe such enormities? In most cases G. & Co. lagged behind with the original artists; well, I know just as well as you what kind of fellows their protégés have been. One of Goupil's best strokes of business is that in recent years they have pushed various Dutchmen such as Maris, Mauve, and that was particularly on N. G.'s initiative. Their having Breton is to all intents and purposes a separate question. But at the time when Millet, Dupré, Corot, Daubigny were *young*, tell me - did Messrs. Goupil & Co. concern themselves very much with them??

Breton, this you know, is personally rather different from Millet and Corot and I can well understand that Goupil & Co. consider him “less disagreeable as a man.” Daumier - especially the way Daumier was in his earlier days - when I recall this and set against it the Guizotlike character of father Goupil as *he* was then ... believe me, it amuses me to think of this contrast.

Goupil & Co. has always been a bit orthodox, and has been rather in the habit of looking down on other houses, as if they were something better than the other dealers - well, it was and is tweedledum and tweedledee.

I believe that Millet and Daumier were ignored by practically *all* art dealers. Once an *art lover* said of the way the dealers acted with Corot's studies the excellent always escapes them, *l'excellent leur échappe toujours*. And this remark is shrewd. Usually their opinions are commonplace generalities - like those of Joseph Prudhomme in Monnier's book.

But speculating on this is tedious, for you as well as for me.

Goodbye.

I have just read Mother's note. I am glad you can see from it that I speak less and less to them about what is going on between us. I tell them that everything is all right, and I shall go on telling them so until I say just as succinctly that we have concluded that our affairs were diverging too much. This is true. You belong to Goupil & Co. And Goupil & Co. will certainly not do anything with my work for years to come. In the meantime, I ask you, is it possible for me to reconcile myself to making absolutely no progress, which is what you lead me to expect?

There is something I want to ask you: Why doesn't Cor go to Goupil's just as you and I started life there when we were his age? I hear of a plan to leave him at the Secondary School for a year or two longer - I hear of a luminous idea, suggested in sober earnest by Father, of making a consul of him. And this although nobody in this house, nor any of those with whom preliminary correspondence has been carried on about this matter, has the faintest idea what a consul actually does.

I am not in the least interested in this business, but I think that this consulate is somewhat similar to the conception of the old lady here in the village, who thinks the mounted constabulary such fine fellows to look at. But I am quite surprised I never hear Goupil's mentioned with reference to Cor. Why is this?

Especially as you stick to them, methinks it would be the obvious thing for Cor to enter the firm too. Later on you will be company and a help to each other - and at any rate he would be in a better position, learn more, see more, than as a “consul” or in a “notary's office,” and so on, or in the “Post Office,” all highly genteel occupations, and much of a muchness. As for Cor himself, as far as I know he has no distinct idea whether he would like to take up this job or that, seeing that probably he has not looked at anything at close quarters, except books, the country road, *etc.* At present I think him a nice boy, but it is certainly time for him to do something practical, as I see it, for otherwise such fellows are apt to go to seed, particularly if they get into too dull an office - go to seed, I mean, with respect to self-sufficiency and becoming a nonentity.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, October 1884

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, thanks for the enclosure.

Now look here. What you say is all very well and good, but as for scandal, I am now somewhat better prepared to meet it than I used to be to nip it in the bud. No fear of Father or Mother leaving, for example. *Although they have only just received a new call*. (Father and Mother could, if anything, consolidate their position here, if they managed things properly.)

Now, there are people who say to me “Why did you have anything to do with *her*,” [Margot] - that's *one* fact. And there are people who say to her, “Why did you have anything to do with *him*,” - that's another fact.

Apart from that, both she and I have grief enough and trouble enough, but as for regrets - neither of us have any. Look here - I believe without question, or have the certain knowledge, that she loves me. I believe without question, or have the certain knowledge, that I love her. It has been sincerely meant. But has it also been foolish, etc?

Perhaps, if you like - but aren't *the wise ones*, those who never do anything foolish, even more foolish in my eyes than I am in theirs? *That's* my reply to your argument and to other people's arguments. I say all this simply by way of *explanation*, not out of ill-will or spite.

You say that you like *Octave Mouret*, you say that you are like him. I've read the second volume too, since last year, and like him much better in that than I did in the first. The other day I heard it said that `Au Bonheur des dames' would not add greatly to Zola's reputation. I consider it contains some of his *greatest* and *best* things. I have just looked it up and am copying out a few of Octave Mouret's words for you.

Don't you think you've been moving in *Bourdoncles'* direction *during the last* 1½ years or so? You would have done better to stick to `Mouret', that was and still is my opinion. Save for the enormous difference in circumstances, indeed, the diametrically opposed circumstances, I actually lean more in the direction of Mouret *than you* might think - when it comes to *belief in* women and the realization that one needs them, must love them. Mouret says, “Chez nous *on aime* la clientèle.” [At our place *we love* the clientele.] Do give this some thought - and remember my regret when you said that you had “cooled off.”

I now repeat more emphatically than ever everything I said by way of bitter warning against the influence of what I called Cuizot-esqueness. Why? Because it leads to mediocrity. And I do not want to see you among the mediocrities, because I have loved you too much, indeed still do, to bear watching you petrify. I know things are difficult, I know that I know too little about you, I know that I may be mistaken. But anyway, do read your Mouret again.

I mentioned the difference and *yet* the parallels between Mouret and what I should like. Now look. Mouret worships the modern Parisian woman - fine. *But Millet and Breton* [worship] *the peasant woman with the same passion*. The two passions are *one and the same*.

Read Zola's description of women in a room in the twilight - most of the women aged between 30 and 50 - such a sombre, mysterious place. I find it *splendid*, indeed *sublime*.

But to me, Millet's Angélus is just as sublime, with that same twilight, that same infinite emotion - or that single figure of Breton's in the Luxembourg, or his “Source.”

You will say that I am not a success - vaincre or être vaincu, [to conquer [or] to be conquered], it doesn't matter to me, one has feeling and movement in any event, and they are more akin than they may seem to be or than can be put into words.

As for *this* particular woman, it remains a mystery how it will turn out, but neither she nor I will do anything *stupid*. I am afraid that the old religion will *once again* benumb her and freeze her with that damnable icy coldness that broke her *once before*, many years ago, *to the point of death*.

Oh, I am no friend of present-day Christianity, though its *Founder* was sublime - I have seen through present-day Christianity only too well. That icy coldness hypnotized even me, in my youth - but I have taken my revenge since then. How? By worshipping the love which *they*, the theologians, call *sin*, by respecting a whore, etc., and *not* too many *would-be* respectable, pious ladies. To some, *woman* is *heresy* and diabolical. To me she is just the *opposite*.

Regards,

Ever yours, Vincent

Here you are, from Octave Mouret:

Mouret dit: “Si tu te crois fort, parce que tu refuses d'être bête et de souffrir! Eh bien - alors tu n'es qu'une dupe, pas davantage.”

“Tu t'amuses?”

Mouret ne parut pas comprendre tout de suite, mais lorsqu'il se fut rappelé leurs conversations anciennes sur la bêtise vide et l'inutile torture de la vie, il répondit: “Sans doute - jamais je n'ai tant vécu... Ah! mon vieux - ne te moques pas! Ce sont les heures les plus courtes où l'on meurt de souffrance.”

Je la veux, je l'aurai... et, s'il [*sic*] elle m'échappe tu verras les choses que je ferai pour m'en guérir - Tu n'entends pas cette langue, mon vieux; autrement tu saurais que l'action contient en elle sa récompense - agir, créer. Se battre contre les faits, *les vaincre ou être vaincu par eux,* toute la joie et toute la santé humaines sont *là*!”

Simple façon de s'etourdir, - murmura l'autre. “Eh bien, j'aime mieux m'étourdir - crever pour crever - je *préfère crever de passion, que de crever d'ennni*.”

[Mourier says: “If you think yourself strong because you refuse to be stupid and to suffer, well, then you are just a fool, that's all.”

“Are you enjoying yourself?”

Mouret did not seem to understand immediately, but when he remembered their earlier conversation about the empty stupidity and the pointless torture of life, he replied, “Of course - I have never lived so intensely... Ah! old fellow, don't scoff! The hours when one dies of suffering are shortest.”

“I want her, I will have her... and - if she escapes me then you'll see what I do to be cured of it all. You don't understand this language, old fellow; other-wise you would know that action is its own reward - to act, to create. To fight against the facts, *to conquer them or be conquered by them, therein* lies all human health and happiness!”

“That's just acting in order to forget” - muttered the other, “Well, I prefer such action - if perish we must - *I would sooner perish of passion than die of boredom*.” (Emile Zola, Au bonheur des dames)]

It is not only I who say this quand même, but *she,* too, and instinctively so, quand même. That's why I saw something grand in her from the very beginning. Only it's a confounded pity that she allowed herself to be *overwhelmed* by disappointments *in her youth*, overwhelmed in the sense that her old-fashioned religious family *felt they had to* suppress the *active*, indeed, *highly gifted* element in her and so rendered her *passive* for evermore. If only they hadn't broken her *in her youth*! Or if they had left it at that instead of once again driving her to distraction, and this time with *5 or 6 or even more women fighting against her alone. Just read Daudet's L'Evangeliste about those women's intrigues* - those here were different, yet *of the same sort.*

Oh, Theo, why should I change - I *used* to be very passive and very gentle and quiet - I'm that no longer, but then I'm no longer a child either now - sometimes I feel my own man.

Take Mauve, why is he quick-tempered and *difficult to get on with at times*? I haven't come as far as he has, but I, too shall go further than I am now.

I tell you, if one wants to be active, one must not be afraid of going wrong, one must not be afraid of making mistakes now and then. Many people think that they will become good just by doing *no harm* - but that's a lie, and you yourself used to call it that. That way lies stagnation, mediocrity.

Just slap anything on when you see a blank canvas staring you in the face like some imbecile. You don't know how *paralyzing* that is, that *stare* of a blank canvas is, which says to the painter, *You can't do a thing*. The canvas has an idiotic stare and mesmerises some painters so much that they turn into idiots themselves. Many painters *are afraid* in front of the blank *canvas*, but the blank canvas *is* afraid of the real, passionate painter who dares and who has broken the spell of `you can't' once and for all.

Life itself, too, is forever turning an infinitely vacant, dispiriting blank side towards man on which *nothing* appears, any more than it does on a blank canvas. But no matter *how* vacant and vain, how *dead* life may appear to be, the man of faith, of energy, of warmth, who knows something, will not be put off so easily. He wades in and *does something* and stays with it, in short, he *violates*, *"defiles"* - they say. Let them talk, those cold theologians.

Theo, I feel so much confounded pity for this woman, just because her age and just *possibly* a liver and gallbladder complaint hang so threateningly over her head. And this is aggravated by emotions. For all that, we shall find out what can or what, fatally, cannot be done. However I shall not do anything without a *very good* doctor, so *I* shall do her no *harm*.

Just because I anticipate that, *if* our roads should lead us to one and the same place, we might have rather strong differences of opinion - for that very reason I don't want you to be able to hold my dependence on you against me.

I am still in two minds about what I should try to do, but in all probability I shall not be staying on here - and the question will then be, where to?

I don't think you'll be pleased about my coming to Paris - but what am I meant to do about that, since you refuse point blank to look after my interests - all right, but for my part I can't possibly leave things as they are. Had you written less peremptorily that it was beneath you, I should never have given it a thought, but now - well, now, I must go my own way.

In short, I have no wish to barter the *chance* (be it no more than a *chance*) of making my own way for the certainty of a patronage that is, apres tout, somewhat confining. Since I can see that I am forfeiting my chance of selling by continuing to take money from you, we shall just have to go our separate ways.

Don't you think it eminently reasonable that, hearing you say that you won't be able to do anything with my work for the next few years, I get the feeling that there is a marked contrast here, that while you stand on your dignity, I -

precisely because I don't sell, no matter how hard I work - am forced to say, “Theo, I am 25 guilders short, couldn't you see your way to letting me have a little bit extra?” Which then proves to be impossible.

What is so very contrary about you is that when one sends you something or one asks, please try to find me an opening with the illustrated papers so that I can earn something - one hears nothing in reply and *you do not lift a finger* - but one is not allowed to say, I can't manage on the money. Up to now, at any rate - but things can't go on like this.

And I should like to add that I shan't be asking you whether you approve or disapprove of anything I do or don't do - I shall have no scruples, and if I should feel like going to Paris, for example, I shan't ask whether or not you have any objection.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, October 1884

Dear Theo,

Here are two photographs of the weavers - next week I hope to send you two more sketches for Hermans' decorations.

You know well enough that your criticism of this past year and a half only seems like some kind of vitriol to me. But never suppose I don't know it is possible to protect oneself from such vitriol by a sort of leather which it cannot pierce so easily, and that as soon as one's hide is tanned so as to keep it out, it does not matter so much - so - what do I care?

Apart from this I believe you mean well. So what more do you want?

But I declare that it is not in the least *my* fault if the money you give me yields such a poor interest, not only to you, but also a poor interest to me. The former - that it yields a poor interest to you - grieves me more than the latter, it's yielding a poor interest to me too.

Things may improve, you will say - yes, but in that case not only I but you too would have to change a good deal. I just want to tell you that this winter, perhaps next month, I intend to leave here for a time; I have thought of Antwerp - I have thought of The Hague.

But during the last few days I have thought of something that is perhaps even better. In the first place I now want at all events some city life, some change of surroundings, having been either in Drenthe or in Nuenen for a full year or more. And I believe this will be a good distraction for me, for my spirits in general, which have not been and could not be as cheerful as I should like, especially recently.

Look here now, the sculptor Stracké lives in Bois-le-Duc; at the same time he is director of the drawing academy there. I saw a terre cuite by a pupil of his, and heard on that occasion that Stracké is not at all unkind or indifferent to anyone who practices art in this vicinity. That at Bois-le-Duc he has several models for the academy, and that there are people to whom he affords the opportunity to draw from the nude or to model in clay.

Probably, however, one would have to pay *the model* oneself, but that is not so very expensive, and then one has a spacious room for which one doesn't pay *anything.* I am going to see for myself how things are, and then it is not impossible that, just as Breitner, for instance, went to Cormon, I shall go to

Stracké. It is in the neighbourhood, and would be the cheapest thing too.

I have bought a very beautiful book on anatomy, Anatomy for Artists; by John Marshall. It was in fact very expensive, but it will be of use to me all my life, for it is very good. I have also what they use at l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and what they use in Antwerp.

But such things make great holes in my pocket. I tell you this only to make you understand that my not paying Father and Mother for my board while I stay here is not because I do not want to pay, but because I have had many expenses which I for my part don't consider superfluous.

The key to many things is the thorough knowledge of the human body, but it costs money to learn it. Besides, I am quite sure that *colour*, that *chiaroscuro*, that *perspective*, that *tone* and that *drawing*, in short, everything has fixed laws which one must and can study, like chemistry or algebra. This *is far from being* the easiest view of things, and one who says, "Oh, one must know it all instinctively," takes it very easy indeed. If that were enough! But it isn't enough, for even if one knows ever so much by *instinct*, that is just the reason to try ever so hard to pass from *instinct* to *reason*. That's what I think.

You must not imagine that I have earned anything by doing that work for Hermans; the first day I got two bills for the stretchers, canvases and a number of tubes, amounting to *more* than I had received from him to pay for them. I told him that I did not want these bills to remain unpaid, and asked him if he wanted to have them put in his name or if he would pay me something in advance. Oh no, he said, *let it wait, they need not be paid at once*.

I said, Yes, *they must be paid at once*. Then he gave me 25 guilders.

Then came all my other expenses for models, not counting my time, work, etc.; but since then I have not seen any of his money, *nor have I asked for it*. On the contrary, because my work pleased him from first to last, I consider myself already sufficiently paid, if need be. Besides, the pictures remain my property, and I must judge for myself what I am willing to lay out for them. But enough of this, since those stretchers, canvases, etc., I have had at least 20 guilders' worth of expenses, perhaps even more, and have not even got them back. But the man is satisfied and pleased with me. Is it then good policy to ask for money? One must be very careful in this, in my opinion, *just when people are satisfied, one must lower the price rather than raise* it. Especially when, after all, the sum is not so considerable that receiving it or not makes that much difference. If I succeed, it will perhaps be for the very reason that I work more cheaply than others, and make it easy for the art lovers.

As to Hermans, *he is very good*, and a man to remain on good terms with, and he is certainly rich, but - has always been stingy rather than generous. Quite different from a real miser, but *after all, I am earning* less, *much less than nothing*.

But notwithstanding this, I for my part have been very kind and obliging to him. I find in him a very pleasant, jovial *friend*, and it is really touching to see how a man of sixty tries hard to learn to paint with the same youthful enthusiasm as if he were twenty.

What he makes is not beautiful, but he works hard, and has already copied four of my six compositions, in quite a different sentiment, and it has something medieval, something like Peasant Breughel.

You once told me that I should always be isolated; I don't believe it, you are decidedly mistaken in my character there.

And I do not at all intend to think and live less passionately than I do. By no means - I may meet with rebuffs, I may often be mistaken - often be wrong - but that only as far as it goes - basically I am not wrong.

Neither the best pictures nor the best people have no faults or partis pris.

And I repeat, though these times may seem tame, they aren't really. I also positively deny that my assertion of certain parties still being as strongly opposed to each other in '84 as in '48 should be *exaggerated*. It is *something quite different* from that ditch of yours, I assure you - I am speaking of the parties now, rather than of you and me in particular, but you and I also belong *somewhere*, don't we? - standing either on the right or on the left, whether we are *conscious* of it or not.

I for my part have at all events a parti pris if you like, and if you think you, for your part can manage to stand neither on the right nor on the left, I take the liberty of doubting most strongly its feasibility. And especially the practical use.

I have had a fairly good letter from Utrecht, she has recovered enough to go to The Hague for a time. But I am still far from easy about her. The tone of her letters is much more self-confident, much more correct, and less prejudiced than when I first knew her. At the same time, something like the wail of a bird whose nest has been robbed; she is feeling perhaps less indignant than I toward society, but she too sees in it “the boys that rob the nests,” who do it for fun and laugh about it.

But now there is a piece of news, that the pastor at Helvoirt has died, so that there is now a vacancy in that parish. I think it probable that they want to get Father back there, at least that the family at Helvoirt is going to sound Father out on the subject. But seeing that it was only the day before yesterday that the dear reverend gentleman over yonder dropped dead, I do not know in the least whether they are going to call Father or not. However I think it highly probable.

Father is not going to accept the call, this much is certain.

As to what I call barricade and you call ditch, it can't be helped, but there is an old civilization that, in my opinion, is declining through its own fault - there is a new civilization that has been born, and is growing, and will grow more.

In short, there are *revolutionary* and *anti-revolutionary* principles.

Now I ask you whether you yourself have not often noticed that the policy of wavering between the old and the new isn't tenable? Just think this over. Sooner or later it ends with one's standing frankly either on the right or on the left.

It is no ditch. And I repeat, then it was '48, now it is '84; then there was a barricade of paving stones - now it is not of stones, but all the same a barricade as to the incompatibility of old and new - oh, it certainly is there in '84 as well as in '48. Goodbye,

Yours sincerely,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 22? October 1884

Dear Theo,

Here are two more cartes-de-visite, to give you an idea of that decoration for Hermans, of which these two paintings are part.

Right now Rappard is here and sends his regards. He has made a very beautiful study of a girl's head, and one of a farmyard, and two small ones of ox wagons. And he intends to make several more that will follow.

I am working on the figure of a shepherd with a wide cloak, which is of the same size as the woman spinning.

And in addition, a study of two pollard willows, with the yellow leaves of poplars behind, and a glimpse of the fields.

It is extraordinarily beautiful here at present, with the autumn effects. In a fortnight's time we shall have the real *chûte des feuilles* [fall of leaves] when all the leaves on the trees fall off in a few days.

If I have some luck with that shepherd, it will become a figure in which there will be something of the *very old Brabant*. In short, it is not ready yet, and we shall see how it turns out.

I think you might have just replied in a few words to what I wrote the other day, if only to clear up your own ideas perhaps. For my part, in spite of much old and new sorrow, I feel less and less doubt about my own future, both as to my work and as to myself.

But I know that in both respects I shall have a hard fight, that both my work and myself will meet with much opposition, will make a bad impression in *many* cases, though *not in all*.

And as to my work, every day I become keener on it, and I get back my high spirits, as if *I were twenty*.

By all means I must manage to go to Antwerp sometime; often enough in the past I sold things that the experts had declared unsaleable. If I *wanted* to sell a thing then, it did not always fall through, if I really wanted someone to take a certain thing. And perhaps you are right, that I had better find my own way for my work, and in short, become my own dealer. Goodbye,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late October 1884

Dear Theo,
Enclosed you will find a few smaller photos of the studies which you already have larger ones of.
I am sending them so that you may have something to show of my work if the opportunity arises.

Rappard is still here, and will stay another week, as he is up to his ears in his work.

He is painting spinners and several studies of heads; he has already made about 10 studies, all of which I like.

We have been talking a good deal about impressionism. I think that you would include his work under that heading. But here in Holland it is rather difficult to find out what impressionism really means. But both he and I are very interested in the present-day trends. And it is a fact that unexpected, new conceptions are beginning to arise. That pictures are being painted in quite a different tone than some years ago.

The last thing I made is a rather large study of an avenue of poplars, with yellow autumn leaves, the sun casting, here and there, sparkling spots on the fallen leaves on the ground, alternating with the long shadows of the stems. At the end of the road is a small cottage, and over it all the blue sky through the autumn leaves.

I think that in a year, if I again spend that year painting much and constantly, my method of painting and my colour will change a great deal, and that I shall become darker rather than lighter.

Rappard's work has also changed to a much lower gamut. The effect of the heads he paints at present remind one of certain studies of heads by Courbet, for instance. But it is damned well done, I can assure you.

As a result of things I talked over with him, it may be that I shall stay here and work on here rather than go elsewhere. His visit has given me new ideas for my own work again, and there are so many things in my mind which I should like to make that, after all, I can hardly put off starting work on them. Besides, I want to settle my bills for colours before New Year's Day, and I can't afford any extra expenses.

For if I went to Antwerp, of course I should want to work hard there, and should need models, which I am afraid would be too expensive at the moment.

But in general Rappard too advises me to do it, not right away, but after having painted here for a few more months, then to get a pied-à-terre there to paint some studies from the nude. But, if I paint some thirty studies of heads here first I shall be able to get more out of Antwerp, and I am starting on those thirty heads now, or rather I have already done so by painting a large bust of a shepherd.

Rappard did the same this summer in Drenthe and in Terschelling, and it has greatly helped him.

I just saw a reproduction after Lhermitte's “Le Cabaret,” two workmen and a woman, do you know it?

Recently Rappard and I have made long excursions, and visited house after house; we have seen the most beautiful things, just because of the splendid autumn effects. And we have discovered new models.

Perhaps some more painters will come to this neighbourhood next year. I should be glad of it, for one must not go on without seeing any other painters for too long a time. Well - as to that - I am sure to get some new acquaintances ere long. Best regards, also from Rappard.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 1 November 1884

Dear Theo,

I received your letter and thank you for it, and for the enclosure. When you write that you are again faced with your bad half-year - for I think it lasts half a year - that is not exactly pleasant news for you to write, nor for me to receive.

But we must try to remedy it, try to make it better for both of us.

Before I received your letter and its enclosure, I had already done a thing which I don't think you will approve of, but I am sorry to say that I do not care much what you opinion of it is. I have once more tried to renew the relations with Mauve and, if possible, also with Tersteeg. I do not know if I shall succeed, but I must have a freer scope, for having been without any intercourse with the world of art for a *full year and longer*, as I have, notwithstanding all good will, one comes to a dead end and must renew oneself.

This is a thing you *never* feel or understand. You say “go on painting,” but for the rest you know nothing. I do not take this *in bad part*, but on the other hand I do not think it intelligent of you, which please note.

It is perfectly true what you say: “that it is more likely that I shall achieve something by making good pictures than by discussing revolutionary questions.” I find this so true that, while you were writing it, I was just taking steps to promote the direct progress of my work by asking to be allowed to paint some studies in Mauve's studio again.

You are always contradicting yourself. In your letter the sentence quoted above is immediately followed by the question: can I perhaps point out to you some new ideas on the problem of reforming the art trade?

Shall I point one out to you, which is in your personal interest as well as in mine? - don't bother about the thing in general, back my application to Mauve and Tersteeg.

Help me to get afloat and to earn money, not only by sending your money but also by your influence, and more sympathy, and a more unalloyed friendship. I say again, back the step I have taken, for instance; it should have been taken long ago, with the necessary support from you.

Do it unreservedly and energetically, not hesitating and hedging when it comes to the point.

I have strength enough to accomplish something, and to earn money too. And then - as you say - if I make progress in my painting, and gain a good independent position, I shall be worth more than I am now.

Then later on, when I am somewhat better off, I shall be glad to try to give you new hints about that problem of reforming the art trade, about which I certainly have my own ideas, arising from my own experience with what hinders a painter's progress and with the kind of things that sometimes make a painter's life unbearable.

I don't think this the right moment to write much about it. I only say, If *you* or *I* need money to make progress, and if for financial reasons we can only work at half speed at the moment, we must try to get that money and plod on till we have it. *Not argue,* “We are confronting a half-year that will be financially bad, so make the best of it.” What one *must* have, *can* be found.

I have written to Mauve and Tersteeg. If you back me, so much the better.

Ever yours, Vincent

Don't misunderstand me, however, I have not written to Mauve or Tersteeg in a complaining tone. On the contrary, but I said as forcibly as I could, Give me another opportunity to make a few studies at Mauve's!

That's what I asked, nothing more, and that's the only thing I need. They must not be involved in financial matters in any way. If I can't spare it myself, you must do your very utmost to send me an extra 100 francs, for I am not going for long. If you absolutely cannot spare it, Father must try to advance the money. I will harp on it till Mauve gives in.

If I fail alone, we must ask Mauve together until he gives in. Then, after that, I shall have gained some hints for correcting my work here and improving it, and I shall again have a pied-à-terre with a solid, serious painter, and then I warrant you, something will happen before long - either I shall exhibit or I shall sell.

If I wrote you “Agir,” [Act] then this is not a word, you see, Theo! But it is only a way to ask: Are we going to progress *together*, or would you rather lag behind?

I prefer progressing together, but there mustn't be any bother.

If the financial part should be a difficulty, for Father *as well as* for you, I might get the money from Rappard.

And so, courage! But let us progress together and toil on perseveringly until we have achieved it.

If you *do not want* to join me, then I shall have to go on by myself.

Now do give me an answer to this.

It is quite possible, of course, that I shall not hear anything, either from Mauve or from Tersteeg.

If I hear anything I'll let you know at once. And if they take their time answering, it must be repeated, either by me alone or by both of us, just as you like.

Rappard is doing very well, and many others too, but you can swear by it that they have not been patient and long-suffering and nothing else. We *must* make progress. Get used to the idea that we must *get a move on*.

Since my first meeting with Mauve, I have not been grinding in vain on the elements of drawing, as well as of colour and of the technique of painting. I have learned new things, but I need Mauve or somebody else who is very clever, not to make me think a great deal of myself, but to give me some courage, which oozes away if things *drag* too long. Forward - and what the devil do I care if I fail - if I fail, then I'll try again.

It is necessary to carry on vigorously - with renewed energy - and then matters will be settled between us to our *mutual* satisfaction.

It is very true that primarily I have spent this year on my work, secondarily on myself, more than I did last year. I am not sorry for it however; I have also made progress, just in the things which will help to redress matters in painting - I only regret that I couldn't spend a few hundred guilders *more*. What I have gained by it is, that I can now easily brush a head from the model in one morning, for instance, and that at last my colour is becoming more solid, and more correct, and my technique is getting more character.

Now I can very well understand that my saying I needed money for it - and need it still - is criticized. But it cannot be denied that one needs a working capital for a painter's profession just as for the simple trade of a shoemaker, for instance. A working capital which, after a couple of years, can yield very good interest, at least to begin with say 20%, and can be fully amortized later on.

So that for instance the money I get from you - let's put it at 5000 francs - might be looked upon as my working capital if necessary. The interest from this - if through our combined energy we could raise it to 20% - would be proof of the correctness of your judgement as well as mine, and of taking a sound view of business matters. As to this result - getting 20% interest from 5000 francs - I want your co-operation in order to reach it. These are facts and figures, and you must try to recover your confidence and energy to realize them.

I must work hard to attain this result, but in my opinion you for your part might do what you said you would do before: side with me - not in a neutral way, but in an energetic, positive way.

Out of the fullness of my conviction I tell you once again *from the business point of view* - speaking as a dealer, if you like:

That the system of doing business solely if one is assured of success is not the best one, and is in reality no more than a commonplace way of looking at things.

Doing business *quand même*, *doing* something, moving for the sake of moving, hating stagnation and sterility, this, as I see it, is a more broad-minded and profitable way.

So it is always the same - *not* beating about the bush - *not* taking things too much to heart - but having a certain confidence in certain things - I spoke to you about it in the past, and about what your character had become a few years later; certainly gaining the ever-stronger conviction that carrying on a fight and concentrating oneself on a few well-defined points, but all the same risking one's all, is the best thing to do. But the cooler characters doubt this - the Bourdoncles - I am quite willing to appreciate these fellows too, and they decidedly have their good qualities, but in the matter of *carrying* something *out*, of persevering in it and winning through…if this is required of them, they relapse into their doubts and hesitations. And then it is only natural that the flow of business slows down and comes to a standstill. Well…

Look here now - I must paint 50 heads just for experience, because right now I am hitting my stride. As soon as possible, and one after the other. I have calculated, but *without* a little extra money, it is not possible to work with that vigour which, as far as taking pains and exertion go, I would willingly spend on it. I had to buy an overcoat because I am more particular about my clothes than before, and some other things; the bills for colours also take *much* out of what I get, so that in order to carry out my plans in a short time, working at full speed (instead of half speed for economy's sake, which never can be real economy), I must manage to get an extra 100 francs. In order to win Tersteeg and Mauve over, I *must* do something decidedly energetic, having now broached the matter. Is it absolutely impossible for you to let me have it now? I *must* strike while the iron is *hot*; but dear brother and friend, *stir up the fire*.

Adieu.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. mid November 1884

Dear Theo,

Yesterday I brought home that study of the water mill at Gennep, which I painted with pleasure, and which has procured me a new friend in Eindhoven [Anton Kerssemakers], who passionately wants to learn to paint, and to whom I paid a visit, after which we set to work at once. So that very evening he had already brushed a still life, and he has promised me he will try to paint about thirty of them this winter, which I will come and look at now and then, and help him to make. He is a tanner who has time and money, and is about 40 years old, so he has more chances than Hermans, who wonderfully keeps up his ardour for all that, however, and works just as hard as he did the first days, *i.e.* gives almost *all* his time to it. I think this new fellow will soon get an eye for colour.

I intend to make these people gradually pay, not in money, but by telling them, You must give me *tubes of paint*. For I want to paint a lot - continually, and I want to manage so that I no longer need work at *half speed*, but can paint from morning till night.

You must not suppose that I am so eager for people to approve of my work and my actions in general. On the contrary, for the moment, for instance, I am almost more glad that Mauve and Tersteeg have refused me than if it had been the reverse. Understand me well! It is because I feel within me the power to win them over in the end, notwithstanding everything.

I should not have applied to them again if I didn't feel that I had gained a fixed point by drudging these last years on the ABC of drawing and painting - drudging harder than they can imagine - and I should not have started a new fight if I didn't feel sure of the *possibility* of winning it.

I am not sure of the certainty of winning it, however, but I dare speculate on its chance, so I am none the worse for it now that I have begun to appeal to the public. In the very fight I shall feel my strength grow, and I shall learn more by criticism, by ill will, even by opposition, than by resignation.

But those things I mentioned to you - I must insist, decidedly insist on. I have set myself the task of making a certain number of studies, for which I lack the money, no matter how I calculate, and yet I cannot put them off for any reason on earth. New Year's is at hand; I have to pay a few things about that time, and I have already paid some off this month. But in this way I run short of money for my work, and if I don't find something extra, I shall lose a month's work, and under the circumstances that *must* not be; do try your very utmost to obtain an extra 100 francs for me.

I, for my part, will also try to get a contribution of colours from the people whom I give lessons to.

I hope you will feel that just because of my appeal to Mauve and Tersteeg and their refusing, directly or indirectly I must show very shortly that I have again accomplished something - and that all energy must now be concentrated, and that work must be done at full speed, though it might turn out a little more expensive. That will be amortized, and I stick to what I said, in the future we must manage to get at least a good interest from the capital invested.

A change has come into my colour since you were here; I already had a presentiment of it when you were here, and you will see that - *with some more studies, those which I am writing about now, which must be finished within a couple of months* - it will be proved beyond a doubt that, exactly in the matter of colour, I have achieved something. It is not my fault, but at the moment I am short of money, just because I have painted more than I could really afford, and there *can* be no economizing now, for we can gain important points by striking while the iron is hot. I remember having said in my last letter: “that I no longer care what your opinion is”; I don't mean that as rudely as it sounds, I only mean that in some respects I have decided to push on with passion rather than prudence, because this is more in character, and, after all, I cannot put up with those cool calculations. And yet I *calculate too*. The extra I ask - I don't ask it at once, but look at what I mean. Try to send 20 francs extra about November 20, then the ordinary amount on December 1, another 20 francs extra about December 20, and the same in January. Then I shall be able to make both ends meet during those months, and need not stop for days when the work requires my not losing a moment.

If it can be a little more, so much the better, but try at least to do what I just asked.

And I for my part can perhaps get something in the form of tubes of colour from that new acquaintance.

I don't think I am mistaken in regard to Tersteeg and Mauve when I venture to say there is certainly a chance of getting at them and winning them over. They may be won over by colour, and by working hard. I see a chance of giving them convincing proof that I have a notion of, and sentiment for, colour. And then portraits are more and more in demand, and there are not so very many who can do them, and I want to try to learn to paint a head with character; I have just recently become enthusiastic about it, because my idea of colour has become firmer. You need not meddle at once in that affair of Tersteeg and Mauve, *rather spare yourself*, but when for instance I have those projected 50 heads ready by the end of January, then it might be well if *you unexpectedly* said a few words to them.

Hermans has, after all, positively promised to give me the money for a trip somewhere, but with a return ticket. If I want to go to Antwerp, I can take him at his word, and this winter I will manage to try to get some connections there, though that may not succeed all at once either.

Goodbye, be sure to send me 20 francs by November 20, to keep me going till the end of the month. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, November 1884

Dear Theo,
I am sure you will be interested to hear particulars about the call to Helvoirt that Father has received. Father told the people at Helvoirt that he would *not even* consider it unless the salary at Helvoirt were brought on a level with the salary at Nuenen. And Father wrote today that they do not seem to object to making up the difference in salary - I think they will have to add 150 guilders. So - although nothing has been settled yet - considering the willingness of the worthy natives, there is definitely a chance that as the result of his own words, Father will have to consider it seriously. This is important to me, as I should *certainly not* like to go with them to Helvoirt. So I wanted to state precisely how matters stand.

Though it has been freezing pretty hard here for the last few days, I am still at work out-of-doors, on a rather large study (more than 40 inches) of an old water mill at Gennep, on the other side of Eindhoven.

I want to do it entirely out-of-doors, but it will certainly be the last I shall paint out-of-doors this year.

Since I wrote you, I have also been working on other studies, including two heads of poldermen.

I now have three people in Eindhoven who want to learn to paint, and whom I am teaching to paint still-lifes.

I can safely say that since your visit I have made progress in the technique of painting and in colour. And that I shall continue to do so, “il y a les premiers pas qui coûtent” in painting; it is easier later, and I have a number of trumps in my hand. And I think tricks can be made with them.

You know that I took steps to make it up with Mauve and Tersteeg after what happened in the past.

I am not sorry I did so.

But they have refused to have anything to do with me, very “definitely” refused. This does not discourage me.

I consider it like sending a picture to an exhibition and having it refused.

At first one must meet with opposition a few times.

So I repeat, I am not sorry for the advances I made, and shall probably repeat them, not at once, but before long.

Now I must tell you that I should be very glad if you did not stay entirely neutral in this, but, on the contrary, if you helped me get what I want. I have owned myself to be in the wrong, not only to Mauve, but also to Tersteeg. I did it the more readily because I believe that later they will see for themselves that, on their part, they have absolutely misunderstood some things. Which they don't see yet.

So on my part this time I went so far as to acknowledge unreservedly and unmistakably that I had been in the wrong as to the past, and *for the rest* I proposed to show them my *work* as it gets better - which means that at any rate I am absolved from having to make further apologies in the future. *Once is enough*, and really it was not *necessary* for me to go as far as that - namely *unconditionally*. Getting them to be *open-minded* on *their* part is another question - come to my aid in this matter *if you feel inclined to do so*. If not - don't worry - but then I shall return to the attack after a while.

I do not know how you have taken my last letter, which was not meant unkindly. My affairs can *prosper*, and in both our interests, I wish we could concentrate all the power a our disposal.

I sent both Tersteeg and Mauve a few words in answer to their refusal, to tell them that "*I perhaps agreed with Tersteeg, it was better for me to look for new friends than to try to renew old relations, that this was exactly my own idea too, but that except and besides that, I had enough confidence in the future not even to give up the renewal of old relations, perhaps even better than before*."

This was my answer to Tersteeg, and it is also my answer to you. I believe it possible to be on *better* terms with you too than we are at present.

But speaking frankly - I think you have been too neutral toward me this past one and a half or two years, and above all things I desire more *cordiality*, our friendship having been too cool and too inactive for my taste. You may find this conceited if you like, but it isn't; I pointed this out to you before, and again now, for serious, practical reasons.

[Written separately] Margot Begemann will be returning to Nuenen one of these days; I have always remained good friends with her, and it is on my advice that she has not given way to the pressure exerted by her sisters, who showed clearly that they preferred for her to stay away, and who are still annoying her by suggesting that she has made a mess of things. On the contrary, her family is under an obligation to her, for at the time her brother went bankrupt, she put her own money into the business.

The simple fact is that if she and I choose to love each other, if we are attached to each other, which we have been for a long time for that matter, we are doing no *harm* which people have a right to reproach either one of us with. And in my eyes it is absurd that people should feel obliged to bother their heads about it - with the idea that it is in my interest or hers.

This meant doing a bad turn.

It may be that they all did this with the best of intentions, but…There was Louis Begemann; he too had objections, but he behaved and went on behaving in such a way that she as well as I could talk things over with him, and its not turning out *worse* was due to his being humane and calm, so that he could *help* when the thing I knew about happened, whereas the others *only hindered*. And we were quite of one mind as to the measures that had to be taken then.

As a matter of fact, I had already warned him three days before, and told him: I am uneasy about your sister.

It cannot be denied that at various times she did good turns for almost *all* the people in the surroundings, either in case of sickness or when they were in some trouble or other. And it is a fact that she and I became attached to each other during Mother's illness. Only the other day she wrote me: If there should be sick people at Nuenen, do go and look them up, and see if they can be given help. In short - there are a thousand things like that in her character. And the *very mildest* thing one can say of it is that in this case a most deplorable misunderstanding has arisen.

As for you, on looking back I feel sure *that now you would not speak the way you did that evening any more*.

But that concerned only *me*, and I could stand it, so on my part there is no question of reproaching you in this matter.

However, only by way of *explanation* to you alone, I tell you that *her sisters* spoke to *her in the same way you spoke to me, who can stand it*; in her case it made her desperate. *You were not the least bit at fault in this*, for you spoke to *me*, and I do not take such things lying down, and you did *not* speak to *her*. But the *real fault* lies with her sisters, or rather *one of the sisters* in particular, who appears to be more hard-hearted, as in fact she is still *sulking* and bearing a grudge.

You…you would have *to tell me yourself* that you are bearing a grudge - before I should suspect you of it.

No more than I bear a grudge against you.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. mid November 1884

Dear Theo,

I suppose you already know that Father has refused the living at Helvoirt.

I was not indifferent to the decision, as in no case would I have gone with them to Helvoirt, and would either have stayed here in my studio or gone to Antwerp. Now, as far as I can see, it is, and will be, best for me simply to go on as I am, and to stay here.

Recently I really haven't been doing so badly. It is true that I can't have any financial success with my work here, but I am making really good friends here, who I believe will become even better.

Last week I painted still life day after day with the people who paint at Eindhoven.

That new acquaintance, the tanner whom I told you about, applies himself wonderfully. But I, for my part, must do something in return to keep up the friendship. But I don't see that I am the loser by it, as I work with more animation when I have some conversation.

Hermans has so many beautiful things, old jars and other antiques, that I want to ask you if I could oblige you by painting for your room a still life of some of these objects, for instance of Gothic things - those I have done with Hermans up to now are simpler in character. But just today he told me that if I wanted to paint for myself a picture of things that were still too difficult for him, I could take them with me to the studio. Please give me an answer to this, and if you like, I shall make one for you, and will pick out the best things. I have finished a little one already. As to my asking you to send me another 20 francs before the end of this month, I hope you will do so.

I am getting on pretty well, but my expenses are not getting smaller; but by working very hard now, I am making progress.

Do help me by sending what I ask if it is at all possible. Otherwise these last days of the month will be very hard for me and the work will suffer more than is necessary.

And I will give it back to you in my work. That's all I can say about it.

At all events, I will ask for those things of Hermans' and make something for you; you will see for yourself what I told you about the colour, that it is improving. I have also started another watercolour of the water mill [F 1144a, JH 523]

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I know that it is a hard time for you, but we must push on, and sure enough there will be a change for the better.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late November 1884

Dear brother,
Thank you for your letter and the money.
Assuming what you say is true, namely that you have repeatedly started to write to me, but that you did not succeed in finishing the letter - well, I find myself in the same situation, for twice already I have thrown away what I had written into the fire, because *I thought it either too bitter or too sad*. What shall I say to you? Your letter sounds very correct, and has the tone of a *good* ministre des Beaux Arts.

But this does not alter the fact that it is not much use to me, and that I am not satisfied with it - and especially in your "later on, when you have expressed yourself more clearly, we shall *perhaps* find something in your present work, and then we shall not act as we do now…" I see only a fair promise - but in reality a ministerial fata morgana in the eyes of a fellow like me, who would rather find an outlet for his work in a more *pedestrian* way, provided that it is *at the present moment*.

There you are - *if need be* an outlet at the present moment, but preferably not with third-class dealers - and this is something I cannot demand of you, considering your position - que soit - but on the other hand you cannot demand of me that I resign myself to a ministerial fata morgana. After all, I am too practical for that!

Kindly appreciate that I call you a *good minister* - and you know well enough how damned bad the fellows elevated above solid ground are as a rule, so that I am only too happy to value a few bright spots even in the ministerial sphere. Which is not being intransigent, and which is really why I piss on the sanctuary of the intransigent fellows - which I do once in a while - on sanctuaries in general.

But to business - do you realise that at present my expenses amount to two guilders a day; take one guilder for models and one for canvas, colours, *etc.* - I cannot do it cheaper - I still have some bills to pay and - I have to go to Antwerp.

My situation here is a bit too tense, right now my life is not pleasant, and I do not find it easy to possess my soul in patience, as they say.

At home - even though there are no rows - they do not think the prospect of my staying here *too* long very cheerful. Which I can well understand.

And yet I cannot go away - either leaving completely or partly (by “partly” I mean keeping on my studio, which is my intention) - unless I go on making a lot of studies and find something new by way of security in Antwerp.

Be so kind as to take this into consideration. And if you should be willing to do your best on the financial side, so that things will be somewhat easier for me, I believe there will be a chance of keeping the peace in the future, though it will be far from real *harmony*.

Which I wish for myself as well as for others, this composure I mean. With regard to my work you say what is not there may turn up yet - and I say the same about the fata morgana in your saying “later on…we shall perhaps, etc.” - (see above).

At present - it is a fata morgana to me, and at all events I want to try Antwerp.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 7 December 1884

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and the enclosure, and also for what I still received specially for St. Nicholas.

I will begin by telling you that your letter greatly amazed me - seeing that there have been no differences of any importance between Father, Mother and myself, and as to the Begemann ladies, they looked in on Father and Mother only the other day in considerable numbers - and they have done so not just once but many times. Whether they drop in quite as frequently as formerly or less frequently is something I cannot see has anything to do with me, nor am I interested in it.

That I decidedly disapproved of their attitude, and that I shall go on decidedly disapproving of it, is something I told them *once* - and I did not mince words - *without returning to the subject.*

But this has nothing to do with their visiting our house or not, which is something that concerns Father and Mother and themselves - and not *me*. *I* have always behaved courteously towards all the members of the family, and I did not start the trouble, but *they started attacking me* and, which I took more to heart, *Margot* - which is the reason why I have strictly refrained from coming into contact with them - simply because I do not feel capable of changing my attitude of disapproval, or of hiding it. Something which you know yourself - I say this to clarify things, and not to cause you grief - I repeat, something which you know yourself; as, expressly to show you that I said what I said in all tranquillity, I sent you a short note in which I told you that I *thought* your opinions *vicious* (you will have to decide for yourself whether it *is* vicious, but *I thought and think it vicious*).

This is my subjective conviction - in such matters I have my own views - as to the whys and wherefores - there are things I can feel rather than explain clearly to you or anybody else - especially if they receive neither your attention nor your sympathy.

[Written in the margin] However, my most hearty thanks for the remittance, and know that if I urgently request you to send something extra, it is only because I want to push on until we separate - but in peace - and without harm to you or myself.

I let people say and think what they like of me, more than you perhaps suppose, but be sure of this, when a thing turns out wrong, that's no reason for me to admit that I ought not to have begun it; on the contrary, if it fails many a time, it is a reason for me to try again if the very same thing is not possible yet, and always in the same direction, as my views are well considered and calculated, and in my opinion have their raison d'être.

To me personally, an important difference between *before* and *after* the revolution - is the change in social position of women and the collaboration that is desired between men and women, with equal rights, equal freedom.

But I can find neither words nor the time, nor the inclination, to go into this more deeply. Enough, the conventional morals are in my opinion quite *wrong*, and I hope they will be *changed* and *renewed* in time.

Now, as to what you say, probably for my special information, namely that you “are suspicious” - well, I won't influence this. Most certainly you have shown me this - and it is *one* of the “symptoms” that I told you I don't think particularly fine, nor can I complement you on it.

But this too is a subjective opinion, if you like. So by all means suit yourself - be suspicious or not suspicious however the spirit moves you, in any case I shall try to make the best of the consequences for me, and for the rest I can only refer to what I said about being on opposite sides of the barricade. Do what you like according to your principles - but I shall do the same according to *mine* - however, let's avoid taking aim at each other if possible, as we are brothers. I am older than you, and probably I have gone through certain things differently, and have looked upon them differently from you. And of course this is my own responsibility. My being unable to approve of everything I see you do or hear you say is something quite different from wanting to induce you to accept my views. But the fact is, I like to play a straightforward game.

And bearing in mind that it is our duty to try to avoid putting a spoke in each other's wheel, I shall, as I told you already, try more and more to find other connections, in Eindhoven, in Antwerp, in short wherever there is a possibility.

But this cannot be done all at once - and as for me, I am trying to do it for the one and only reason that you have shown me far too clearly and unmistakably that I should not presume to suppose that you are going to take notice of me personally or of my work, except by way of protection. Well, this I utterly refuse to put up with. And seeing that you have sent me the money every month without a word and without any sign of sympathy, I have toiled on - but - but seeing more and more clearly that a moment might come when we should have to go our separate ways, instead of going the same way both together. I don't imagine in the least that I shall gain by it financially - but as soon as some dealer, however much of an inferior jobber he may be, is willing to give me board and lodging, even if it should be in the meanest garret, and a few colours, I shall be happy to sell - if you choose to call this selling. Rather than protection. Here are my cards on the table. Whether I shall succeed in this and when, I cannot tell precisely; however, I work too hard to be *very far* away from it.

The drawback to painting is the colour bill. And it worries me a good deal at the moment. I paid some at once out of the 40 guilders you sent me. Besides that, I paid the carpenter, *etc.* So that, if there remained just 100 francs for you after deducting what you had to pay, for me there remains not quite 25 francs; now for the moment it is true that I don't have *to live* on it as you do, but I must paint with it a whole month, which - what with models, what with colours - is in fact impossible.

And I have the same pleasant prospect for January too, when I shall have to pay for all kinds of things again. So the reason why I complain, and why I said that I really needed something extra now, not later, was that I want so dreadfully to go on working; if I cannot do so for financial reasons, it makes me very unhappy. And I haven't only myself to blame for it, for the very reason that my expenses are caused not by extravagance but by working.

If you cannot accept this point of view or sympathize with my feelings, and choose to remain suspicious - well, old fellow, I am willing to believe you mean excellently well, and so - I am not very worried by your suspicions. Unless the fact is that you purposely act this way in order to get rid of me, and by heaven, you are well on the way to reaching this goal.

You know that in the past I often positively begged you to see to it that our relations should be kept up - now I should not be able to urge the matter any longer in the same way. Once again, I work too hard to be obliged to remain in a dependent position for too long a time if this should degenerate too much into protection, whereas, when I write about it in a businesslike way, I don't even get an answer. No, old fellow - I cannot reconcile my sense of honour, my sense of justice, to seeing anything in it that might induce me to consider it permanent. Listen - Father has felt *suspicious* of me *very often* and *to a high degree*. For that matter, you know something about it, and I for my part know perhaps even more about it. But - for all that - he always called himself “my friend” - *for all that* - the man really thought he was in the right, and he was unable to take any other view of things, and - after all is said and done - he meant well, that is to say, if you want to take it that way - but one fine day I told him flatly: Don't call yourself my friend as long as you think such and such things of me. People who think that way about me *are not my friends but my enemies*, and as sure as 2 X 2 = 4, they are my worst enemies. And the same applies to you, in reply to what you say about being suspicious. With this difference (which I am willing to appreciate and take into account), Father did not mention that “he was suspicious,” you do mention it - which neutralizes a lot. But for all that, I consider it basically pretty much the same thing.

However, I don't want to influence you - and therefore I tell you straight out that on my part I don't in the least pledge myself to agree with Father or you. Please understand this thoroughly - it is quite possible that there is more than one “ditch” between the two of us. And because this is quite possible, also understand thoroughly that I'm not giving you the slightest encouragement to think all kinds of nice and good things of me *according to your views or Father's*. It might well be that mine were opposed to them in quite a revolutionary way!

Under the circumstances I cannot do crazy things at a short notice and stand in my own light by giving up things at a moment that is not propitious just because you find yourself in a suspicious mood. But please understand thoroughly that, if this suspicious mood should be lasting and prove to take root in your mind - even if I should not do crazy things at a short notice - I am strongly inclined to see to it that we can separate in peace, and without harm to either you or me.

Separate - but in peace - and without forcing things too much.

I cannot bother about what people think of me, what I have to think of is *getting on*.

So I go my own way with a certain obstinacy, believing in some things and not believing in others.

You are, and rightly so, anxious about your position, aren't you? - about the progress or non-success, the prospering or the failure of your business. Bear in mind that the reasons why I stand by my profession are certainly no less important than the ones for which you stand by yours. And without exactly proceeding very delicately, I must and will push on.

I certainly intend to hold on to my studio here, as for instance Stenglin does; he has one on the moors of Drenthe, though at times he lives somewhere else. I have rented it as a kind of refuge, and it will remain useful to me as such. Taking rooms in Eindhoven would be downright nonsense, I cannot even think of it. Later on, taking a room in Antwerp, all right, that's my intention, but in the first place I have no money for it now, and in the second, I want to paint a rather large number of heads first, which will go more smoothly the better I can pay the models.

But, as you say, things are not exactly favourable for this.

I wish you could understand that I am not actuated by a desire to quarrel in wanting to separate - on the contrary, I want to separate in order to be able to keep the peace. I should not be able to bear it if I had no prospect of different circumstances. Not primarily with regard to financial matters, but because I want to live more pleasantly than in the house itself - but I don't feel at home in it, and from your own words it is evident that you cannot understand me, nor can I understand you. Therefore - with steady courage and serenity and without rancour: *I must plod on in order to separate in peace*, and without *harming* anybody.

But never think I desire to quarrel with you or with the people at home - for this is not in character - although you suppose it is, and so do others, for that matter.

Quite the opposite is true of my character - the fact is that I cannot endure life without more peace and cordiality.

I can only shrug my shoulders at such an opinion - however, I most decidedly *do not* consider the persons who think of me this way as my friends. Though they were a thousand times my father or my brother - if they think that way it grieves me, but, fortunately for myself, I have my wits about me sufficiently not to be crushed by it.

As to this the road is pretty clearly indicated, I should say.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 9 December 1884

Dear Theo,

One cannot always find the right words to speak absolutely straightforwardly - but I am so firmly resolved to speak my mind to *you* without reserve - I don't give a damn whether you are suspicious or not - that after some consideration I have now perhaps found clearer words for the feelings I want to express.

I believe that it is in *our mutual interest* that we separate.

Your position - isn't this true? - does not admit of our associating with each other intimately, frequently, cordially. Your position - to mention only one thing by way of example - would not admit of my going to live at your house in Paris, let's say, either with the intention of studying or for financial reasons however necessary and useful it might be, and might become more and more, if circumstances permitted. For - against my person, my manners, clothes, words, you, like so many others, seem to think it necessary to raise so many objections - weighty enough and at the same time obviously without redress - that they have caused our personal, brotherly intercourse to wither and die off gradually in the course of the years. To this must be added my past, and that at Goupil & Co.'s you are quite the plush gentleman, and I am a black sheep and an ill-natured fellow. Enough - this is how things are - aren't they? - and as here it is a question of analyzing, of manfully facing a situation, I suppose you are not going to contradict me in this matter.

Only - but I do not mention this by way of reproach - the moment is not opportune for this - it is past - I just mention it for clarity's sake - only I had thought that you had attached some value to our not drifting *too far* apart - that by your being on the qui vive in this field, by executing some adroit maneuvers, you might have been able to find a more satisfactory solution for this ticklish problem. For instance, in such a way that I could have got I don't say on friendly terms, but at least into touch with Tersteeg and Mauve again, and so on. But - a struggle is going on in your mind about this, which you prefer not to be reminded of. So as to the point in question, you don't even dream of doing it, and you don't think it nice of me to take the liberty of referring to it. In any case you think me foolish in these things, and you won't touch them with a bargepole.

This is the dark side of your character - I think you are mean in this respect - but the bright side of your character is your reliability in money matters.

Ergo conclusion - I acknowledge being under an obligation to you with the greatest pleasure. Only - lacking relations with you, with Tersteeg, or with whomever I knew in the past - I want *something else* by way of compensation.

For - personally I have to think of my future - I want to get on. If a hussy won't have me, it's all right with me; I can hardly take it ill of her - but nothing is more certain than that I shall try to find compensation elsewhere. And the same is true of other relations. I shall not obtrude myself upon *you*, neither shall I *force* you to be affectionate toward me - but - as a friend - let alone as a brother - you are too cool for my taste. Not as to money, old fellow; I am not speaking of that. But personally you aren't of the slightest use to me, nor am I to you. And it is possible, and it ought to be, that we should mean more to each other personally.

Well, we won't quarrel over it - things have their periods - the period of quarreling is over - the period of parting follows, I think. But remember that there are fellows who most certainly love you, and whom you *ought not* to be suspicions of, whose sympathy becomes *powerless* because of your distrusting them too much, whereas you would do better if you strengthened a man's self-confidence. So much for that.

I do not think it impossible that Marie - you know whom I mean, the one you helped when she was sick - notwithstanding full appreciation of your character and assistance, must have felt something of what I feel. Instinctively I dare suppose it.

Now I will take the liberty to say *one* thing - we *shall separate* - for me this is a precarious transition - and one coupled with financial difficulties that will certainly be a great worry to me. However, I shall try to see things through - but I most decidedly demand of you that at this moment, which is critical for me, you on your part will be very frank. *I know that you will agree to our separation* - for the very reason that it will be settled peacefully.

Tell me without reserve whether you approve of Antwerp - including my retaining my studio here in the country, which is too cheap to let go, and which for that matter I cannot do without as a storeroom and a refuge if necessary.

And, if it is not asking too much, help me to see things through - financial embarrassment in this period, toward the end of the year, is always worse for me. I should wish the period of the transition to be short if possible, because it is torture to feel that one thing is disappearing and you haven't got the other. I cannot help thinking of the reason for Marie and you parting company. I don't know any details, do I? - but you did not think she was a good woman. Maybe you are right, but it may also be that you did *not understand her*. And as for me, it is quite possible that similarly I am not a good man - this may well be - but in my case too, are you sure that you understand and feel the right way? I neither can nor will be the judge of this.

In Proudhon you may read “la femme est la désolation du juste” - but isn't it possible to answer this with, *The just is the desolation of woman*? Quite possible.

And ditto ditto one might say, “*The artist is the desolation of the financier*,” and conversely, “*The financier is the desolation of the artist*.”

You see - I do not know the final solution myself - but I see two sides to one and the same problem.

So you know my irrevocable intentions - for both our sakes I hope the time of transition will be short, and - because I know you agree to a separation - how can we act most quickly and satisfactorily?

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, mid December 1884

Dear Theo,

Enclosed you will find a few scratches of the heads I am working on; I scratched them in a hurry, and from memory.

I told you how little money was left for this month; you know how last month it was about the same.

The fact is that now more than ever, I paint as long as I have money for models.

Those last days of the month when I sometimes *must stop* working on things I want to finish - I can't tell you how impatient and wretched it makes me.

I must make about 50 of those heads while I am still here, and while I can get, relatively easily, all kinds of models during the winter months. But now - if I don't take care, the winter months will pass without my making as many as I want and as are necessary.

That's the reason why I am harping on it so much, and must urge you most strongly to try, if only half possible, to cover my expenses of the end of this month.

I do not need much, 20 or 30 francs will pretty well see me through.

At the moment they are worth more to me than 50 francs *later on*.

By working on steadily, those fifty heads will be finished this winter. But they require so much work and drudgery that I can't spare a day.

And I hope it will be a means to making an arrangement between you and me which is better for both parties than the present one.

Goodbye, if you have borrowed or can borrow, help me with it. As I didn't want to have all my colour bills at the end of the year, I have already paid part of them this month, as I told you. But I cannot bear to have the work suffer for it.

I received from Rappard a series of drawings by Renouard, “Le Monde Judiciare,” types of lawyers, criminals, *etc.*

I do not know if you have noticed them, I like them very much. And I think he is one of the genuine race of the Daumiers and the Gavarnis.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 15-17 December 1884

Dear Theo,

I am working very hard on the series of heads from the people, which I have set myself to make; I just enclose a little scratch of the last one; in the evening I generally scratch them from memory on a little scrap of paper, this is one of them.

Perhaps I will make them later on in watercolour too. But first I must paint them. Now just listen - do you remember how in the very beginning I always spoke to you about my great respect and sympathy for the work of Father de Groux? Of late I think of him *more than ever*. One must not confront him only in his historical pictures, though these are also very good, nor in the first instance in a few pictures with the sentiment of, for instance, the author Conscience. But one must see his “Grace before Meat,” “The Pilgrimage,” “The Paupers' Bench” and above all, the simple Brabant types. De Groux is appreciated as little as, for instance, Thijs Mans. He is different though, but this they have in common, that they met with violent opposition.

In these days - whether the public is wiser now I can't tell, but this much I know, that it is not at all superfluous to weigh seriously one's thoughts and one's actions.

And at this very moment I could tell you some new names of people that hammer again on the same old anvil on which de Groux hammered. If it had pleased de Groux at that time to dress his Brabant characters in medieval costumes, he would have run parallel with Leys in genius, and also in fortune.

However, he did not do so, and *now*, years afterwards, there is a considerable reaction against that medievalism, though Leys always remains Leys and Thijs Maris, Thijs Maris, and Victor Hugo's Notre Dame, Notre Dame.

But the realism *not wanted* then is *in demand* now, and there is more need of it than ever.

The realism that has character and a serious sentiment.

I can tell you that for my part I will try to keep a straight course, and will paint the most simple, the most common things.

For pity's sake, how is it possible that you do not seem able or willing to understand that by having fixed my studio here, and by keeping it here for the present, I have made it possible to have money enough for painting, and if I had done otherwise it would have been a failure for myself as well as for others. If I had not done so I would have had to drudge at least three years more, before I had definitely overcome the difficulties of colour and tone, just because of the expenses. It is now just a year ago since I came here, driven by necessity. It is certainly not for my *pleasure* that I live here at home, but for my painting, and this being so I think it a great mistake of yours if you were to rob me of an opportunity, if I had to leave here *now*, before I had found something else. For my painting I must stay here somewhat longer still, then as soon as I have made more definite progress, I am willing to go anywhere where I shall earn the same money that I have here.

To be put back is not what I need or deserve, nor do I feel the least inclination for it, you see.

And attempt to get rid of you, that I never did, but where you showed me too clearly how little chance there was of our doing real business together, I do accept it for the future, that is true.

Recognize this once and for all, when I ask you for money, do not ask it for *nothing*; the work which I carry out with it is at your disposal, and if *now* I am in arrears, I am on the right road even to achieving some leeway.

I write this once more, for the same reason as I did the earlier letters; I shall be quite at bay at the end of the month, for I have only enough for two or three days to pay my model.

And I am wretched that I shall again be handicapped for ten or twelve days this month.

And most seriously I repeat, can you not find a way to help me to 20 francs, for instance, to cover those last days? What I mind most, is the time I should otherwise forfeit. Goodbye.

Yours,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late December 1884

Dear Theo,

Thanks for what you sent me. I appreciate your having done so, because so much depends on my working hard during those winter months when it is easier to get models.

In two or three days you will receive twelve little pen-and-ink drawings after studies of heads.

After all I feel most in my element when I am working on the figure, and there also seems to me to be more character in, for instance, those heads I already did in The Hague, and in some other figures, than in the other things I did. And perhaps it will be wise to concentrate more exclusively on the figure.

But the figure always stands in some surroundings, and one can't help doing those surroundings too, because one can't dispense with them.

Mother wants to add something to this letter, so I will be brief, as I shall send you those pen drawings one of these days.

I don't yet know what I shall do with those heads, but I want to extract the motif from the characters themselves.

But I know quite well why I made them, and what in general I have in mind. I am longing to see, sooner or later, that picture which you received. [A painting by the Swedish painter Josephson - a study for his later famous painting “The Waternix”.]

I don't understand exactly what the legend itself means.

I don't understand it because you say the figure is Dante-esque, but it is the symbol of an evil spirit luring people into the abyss.

Surely these two things can hardly go together, for the sober, severe figure of Dante, full of indignation and protest against what he had seen happening, protesting against the terrible medieval abuses and prejudices, is certainly one of the most sincere, honest, noble ones imaginable. It was said of Dante, “Voilà celui qui va à l'enfer et qui en revient”; *entering it and coming back again* is quite different from the devilish *luring others into it*.

Consequently, a Dante-esque figure cannot be made to act a satanic part without the greatest misconstruction of character.

And the silhouette of a Mephisto is mighty different from that of Dante.

Contemporaries wrote of Giotto, “Le premier il mit `la bonté' dans l'expression des têtes humains.” [Primarily he put `goodness' into the expression of human heads.] Giotto painted Dante, and with much sentiment, as you know, for you remember the old portrait. From which I conclude that Dante's expression, however sad and melancholy it may be, is essentially an expression of something infinitely good and tender. So I cannot imagine Satan or Mephisto having anything Dante-esque about them. All the more reason why I am curious to see, someday what the picture is really like.

My best wishes for the New Year.

Ever yours, Vincent

1885

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early January 1885

Theo,

Although I appreciate your proposal to add to the monthly sum of 100 francs, requested by me, 50 francs monthly by way of compensation to Father for my living expenses at home, I most decidedly *decline* this (the 50 francs, I mean).

You may look upon my having been at home so long without paying for my board as arrogance or indiscretion on my part. I did this for the sake of my progress in painting, and have not profited from it personally, inasmuch as I still have to pay a rather heavy bill for colours, an extra expense. *For the rest, I acknowledge that after all it has been advantageous to me*. The reason why I cannot regard the present moment as propitious for making a kind of contract with Father is that under the circumstances it *cannot* be my intention to stay here much longer. Which I should very much like to do, but I am afraid it will prove impossible. If, however, you should want to make an arrangement with Father of the kind indicated in your letter, *then leave me out of it* - in other words, let it be purely a matter between you and Father, in which I am not involved.

So that *I* for my part may go on considering it an *indiscretion in any case*, I mean the fact that I live here, also if you should make a payment.

As soon as I am well again, I shall probably go and live in the studio, at least in the daytime.

It is too much for me to lose you to a certain extent, and to have to pay for my board besides. Gradually I shall try to find other resources of my own. If it gives you any satisfaction to know that what you call “my plans for the future” have practically fallen through, thrive on the thought. But this is no reason for me to approve of your views, so that I am forced to repeat that *I continue to think them bad*. I cannot give up the studio, I must have some fixed place to work in, and in no event can they demand that I leave the village. However, my having to expect this, and my having to be prepared for it, is the cause of *my regretting the fact that I did not already see last year that our arrangement was untenable for both of us*.

Goodbye.

Vincent

I must protest against the underlined expression in your letter, which I copy: “and I therefore request you to accept the 150 francs, which I shall go on sending you, *according to our agreement when we were good friends*, and to give 50 francs to Father, *which we both approved of.*"

I *protest against this*: it is not true that "*when we were good friends*" it was agreed upon between us that I should pay 50 francs. I clearly remember the conversation - *in the garden* - about this matter, and far from agreeing to anything, I *did not want* to make any agreement in this direction on that occasion, and the upshot was that I pointed out rather emphatically that I wanted money in order to undertake a number of larger canvases I had in mind, and that I had expenses enough besides. If anything was agreed upon, it was meant for later, when I should be in a more favourable position.

This letter is meant to tell you explicitly that I utterly refuse to have anything to do with any agreement you might make with Father on the possible payment of board.

In order to obviate any misunderstanding as to the payment of 50 francs for board, I let Father read your today's letter and this one. I do not want to hear anything further about this affair; settle it with Father. I say once again that *it is not true that I agreed to pay 50 francs for board* - if I had agreed to, I should have kept my promise, but I remember the whole conversation about it, and it's simply the opposite of what I told you - namely that for the time being I had to pay for so many other things that I *could not* do it yet.

If I should drop dead - *which I should not try to evade if it happened, but which I should not seek expressly* - you would be standing on a skeleton, and this would be a damned insecure standpoint. As long, however, as I am alive and painting, well, you may expect a feeling of gratitude and of obligation from me - but - seeing that I feel that I must carry on my work vigorously, and that otherwise I shall not be able to stick it out, I dare speak to you about what is wrong. If you did not listen to this at the time, and after that began to think ill of me - it may well be that this feeling was not analyzed incorrectly by you - and might really have been a presentiment of something that - *not through any fault of mine, but in consequence of your own act and state of mind* - might come to pass, and that we should do well to avoid, very much so. Let's separate, old fellow, for a time, as friends, that will do no harm, neither to you nor to me. Staying together would end badly if things went on like this.

I dare say, if you were to make a more correct analysis of your own feelings, what you call "suspicion" may really have been something quite different. I mean a kind of presentiment that something was going to happen between you and me - and that otherwise things would not go well. You are in an elevated position, but this is no reason for being suspicious of those who are standing on low ground --where I stand - and where I intend to say.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 20 January 1885

Dear Theo,

Enclosed are some more scratches of studies of heads. At home I heard you have had a good year, and had an offer of 1000 francs a month, which you refused. I can understand that once at G. & Co., you want to stay there; it was one of the first great houses, perhaps it might still be able to outlive many rivals.

I think, however, that every year it will become more difficult to follow the routine which has hitherto been maintained in the art trade, and will it be possible to find a new method of doing business now? Perhaps not.

And yet - unless new tactics are going to be employed - doesn't the danger threaten more every day that, because of the fall of some big firm or other, for instance, some things will drop in price, which drop will cause a panic all round? I really think this is not merely an imaginary danger. Prices have risen to their present height within a relatively short time - let's say, within forty years at the most. And would more time than that be necessary for them to tumble down the mountain? As a rule it is easier to go downhill than up. But for all that - there is something in art which will always make at least a chance of extending the buying public possible. Only, I repeat, will they create this new public? If not, I personally am afraid it will go down as fast as it has risen.

I've hardly ever begun a year with a gloomier aspect, in a gloomier mood, and I do not expect any future of success, but a future of strife.

It is dreary outside, the fields a mass of lumps of black earth and some snow, with mostly days of mist and mire in between, the red sun in the evening and in the morning, crows, withered grass, and faded, rotting green, black shrubs, and the branches of the poplars and willows rigid, like wire, against the dismal sky. This is what I see in passing, and it is quite in harmony with the interiors, very gloomy, these dark winter days.

It is also in harmony with the physiognomy of the peasants and weavers. I don't hear the latter complain, but they have a hard time of it. A weaver who works steadily, weaves, say, a piece of sixty yards a week. While he weaves, a woman must spool for him, that is, supply the shuttles with yarn, so there are two who work and have to live on it.

On that piece of cloth he makes a net profit, for instance, of 4.50 guilders a week, and nowadays when he takes it to the manufacturer, he is often told that he cannot come with another piece for two weeks. So not only are wages low, but work is pretty scarce too.

Consequently, there is often something agitated and restless about these people.

It is a different spirit from that of the miners, among whom I lived during the year of strikes and many accidents. That was even worse, yet it is often pathetic here too; the people are quiet, and literally *nowhere* have I heard anything resembling rebellious speeches.

But they look as little cheerful as the old cab horses or the sheep transported by steamer to England.

Goodbye, I hope you will be able to send money, I have not quite a guilder left, and must have a model for a few hours more today, so tomorrow I shall be at a dead end, but maybe your letter will come.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 24 January 1885

Dear Theo,

You would greatly oblige me by trying to get for me:

Illustration No.2174, 24th October 1884.

It is already an old number, but at the office you will probably be able to get it. In it there is a drawing by Paul Renouard, a strike of the weavers at Lyons. Also one from a series of Opera sketches (of which he has also published etchings) - called “The Harpist,” which I like very much.

Then he has also done just recently, “The World of the Law Courts,” which I got from Rappard, you know it probably from the “Paris Illustré” by Damas.

But I think the drawing of the weavers the most beautiful of all, there is so much life and depth in it that I think this drawing might hold its own beside Millet, Daumier, Lepage.

When I think how he rose to such a height by working from the very beginning from nature, without imitating others, and how he is none the less in harmony with the very clever people, even in technique, though from the very first he had his own style, I find him again a proof that by truly following nature one's work improves every year.

And I am daily more convinced that people who do not in the first place wrestle with nature *never* succeed.

I think that if one has tried to follow attentively the great masters, one finds them all back at certain moments, deep in reality - I mean that their so-called *creations* will be seen by one in reality, if one has the same eyes, the same sentiment as they had. And I do believe that if the critics and connoisseurs were better acquainted with nature their judgment would be more correct than now, when it is the routine to live only among pictures, and to compare them mutually. Which of course, as one side of the question, is good in itself, but it lacks a solid basis if one begins to forget nature and looks only superficially. Can't you understand that I am perhaps not wrong in this, and to say more clearly still what I mean, is it not a pity that you, for instance, seldom or hardly ever enter those cottages, or associate with those people, or see that sentiment in landscape, which is painted in the pictures you like best. I do not say that you *can* do this in your position, just because one must look much and long at nature before one comes to the conviction that the most touching things the great masters have painted still find their origin in life and reality itself. A basis of sound poetry, which exists eternally as a fact, and can be found if one digs and seeks deeply enough.

“Ce qui ne passe pas dans ce qui passe,” it exists. [“ The durable within the transitory”]

And what Michelangelo said in a splendid metaphor, I think Millet has said without metaphor, and Millet can perhaps best teach us to see, and get “a faith.” If I do better work later on, I certainly shall not work *differently* than now, I mean it will be the same apple, though riper; I shall not change my mind about what I have thought from the beginning. And that is the reason why I say for my part: if I am no good now, I shall be no good later on either, but if later on, then now too. For corn is corn, though people from the city may take it for grass at first, and also the other way round.

In any case, whether people approve or do not approve of what I do and how I do it, I for my part know no other way than to wrestle so long with nature that she tells me her secret.

All the time I am working at various heads and hands.

I have also drawn some again, perhaps you would find something in them, perhaps not, I can't help it. I repeat, I know no other way.

But I can't understand that you say: perhaps later on we shall admire even the things done now.

If I were you, I should have so much self-confidence and independent opinion that I should know whether I could see *now* what there was or was not in a thing.

Well, you must know those things for yourself.

Though the month is not quite over, my purse is quite empty. I work on as hard as I can, and I for my part think that by constantly studying the model, I shall keep a straight course.

I wish you could send me the money a few days before the 1st for that same reason, that the ends of the month are always hard, because the work brings such heavy expenses, and I don't sell any of it. But this will not go on so for ever, for I work too hard and too much not to arrive eventually at the point of being able to defray my expenses, without being in a dependent position. For the rest, nature outside and the interiors of the cottages, they are splendid in their tone and sentiment just at present; I try hard not to lose time.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 31 January 1885

Dear Theo,

I am anxiously awaiting the money; I had hoped you would have seen your way to sending it a few days earlier.

I have explained to you at great length that the painting of the 50 studies of heads which I intend to do leads to my incurring more expense than usual. And as, by your writing that you are suspicious of me, you yourself are the cause of this, I feel vexed when I think that my being embarrassed every now and then is to be attributed more to this than to anything else. My not selling anything would not worry me so much if only my work could be pushed forward with all possible vigour.

Well, I am doing all I can, and I am making progress after all. You will also have to take back what you said about your suspiciousness. When this will be, you will have to decide for yourself - but I only want to say by way of caution that the ugliest misunderstandings are caused by suspicion.

As for me, at times I feel wretched because it seems that your character has congealed in this mould, which I believe will cause you trouble later on. But what's the use of talking? What I mean is a family failing, as far as I can see.

I always have the impression that at Zundert, and a few years earlier than that, there was a generally better atmosphere in the house. Since then, I feel it has not changed for the better. At present…

But what I don't know is whether the former - the feeling that things were better in Zundert - is only my imagination; this may easily be the case.

But at any rate, now it is not *it*.

So much for that. Goodbye.

Ever yours, Vincent

Since last summer I cannot help seeing you in my mind's eye wearing a pince-nez with black glasses.

This does not change a man so much, you will say.

Maybe not - but my impression is that, in a sense other than the literal one, in your actions and thoughts, you have procured such black eyeglasses. Suspiciousness for instance.

But on the other hand I think it a good thing to know one's Paris well - if, once there, you become a Parisian through and through - analytical, steely, “knowing,” as they call it - I am not narrow-minded enough to condemn it. That's not my way. Be and remain a Parisian if you like, it's all right with me.

There are various things in the world that are *great* - the sea with the fishermen - the furrows and the peasants - the mines and the miners.

And in the same way I also think great the sidewalks of Paris and the people that know their Paris.

Now, however, you commit an error if on your part you are unable to understand that your being suspicious of me is positively improper. Most certainly I think differently, I feel differently, I act differently. But it is quite consistent when viewed in its proper relation.

And considering that when I was in Drenthe and I advised you to become a painter, you wrote me that I was speaking about your affairs from afar and I conceded this point, the reverse is most certainly true too, namely that you can only make a wild guess about my doings here. So give up your suspicions, for they are simply improper. And the means must be found in the good progress my work is making - leaving the matter of more or less mutual sympathy out of the question - to be *at least inoffensive* to each other, however much our ways may run in opposite directions.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early February 1885

Dear Theo,
I've a good deal to say about your calling my last letter “particularly unpleasant.” In the first place this - some time ago you wrote me quite a number of unpleasant things which I have been hearing from you and others for over fifteen years now - and that's a long time - about domestic relations here.

And especially added to this “that you are suspicious.” If it had only been the former, it is probable that I should have paid no more attention to it.

But your additional remark about your suspiciousness was a bit too much me, and I have repeatedly begged you to withdraw the word or to explain it, for I will not tolerate such a thing being said to me without my asking for an explanation.

In my last letter I compared suspiciousness in general to looking through black glasses.

And I said the ugliest misunderstandings were caused by it.

And this is true.

If you on your part *turn this inside out* now, and write me, “You make me think of old people who are always saying that in their young days everything was better, meanwhile forgetting that they themselves have changed,” this does not stagger me in the least.

The thing we were discussing was suspiciousness, *which was not mentioned by me but by yourself, i.e.* on your part with regard to *me*; first apply what you say about old people to this, and after that see whether it may apply to me. If it *does* apply to me after that - then I shall have to reform.

As to what I wrote about a certain atmosphere at home, which I have more opportunity to observe than I care for, I am much afraid it is only too true.

As in your letter you ask me how it is that you no longer hear me say, “I should like to be like this or like that” *the fact is* that in my opinion those who proclaim most loudly that they “want to be like this or like that” are the ones who try least to improve themselves.

As a rule those who say it don't do it.

If I should want to utter some such wish, I should hardly do it in the atmosphere of our present relations.

So *this* is the cause - and seeing that I strenuously exert myself to improve my work there is no need for me to be forever lapsing into wishful exclamations.

I am sorry you did not send L'Illustration, for I have followed Renouard's work pretty regularly, and for many years I have saved up what he did for L'Illustration. And this is one of the most splendid, which I think would delight you too.

When one orders the old Illustrations in the bookshops, at least here, one does not get them. I do wish you could get it for me. If it is too much trouble for you, then forget it, but heaven knows it is not so much trouble after all.

And - apres tout - please note that with regard to that suspiciousness, and what I wrote you by way of rejoinder, this was not done so much because I won't suffer you and others to think whatever they like of me, but I cautioned you that it would give you little satisfaction if your character congealed in that mold.

Considering that you say repeatedly that you know me better than others do, and that it still all ends in suspicion, then it is serious enough for me to protest against it, to protest firstly against that “knowing me so well,” and secondly against “being suspicious.” I went through such an affair with Father - I decline to start all over again with Father No. II.

If I had resisted Father from the start instead of remaining silent, nothing much would have happened.

So don't resent me telling you unreservedly what I think of it. That is better for both of us. And for the rest, old fellow, I think I am working a bit too hard to doubt that it will not be long before I shall be able somewhat to lighten the financial burden I am imposing on you. Maybe it will take longer than I think agreeable, to you as well as to me, but plodding on is a way that will not lead to complete failure.

And if I insist on taking vigorous measures, it is to obviate the possibility of quarreling. For the *possibility* of a quarrel is gone at the very moment I find the means to cover my financial needs. Then my work will no longer be at issue, and now it is.

Therefore don't despair. But now it's wretched for both of us. *

Thanks for the remittance.

Goodbye.

Ever yours, Vincent

* And to me my work is valuable; I must paint a lot - and therefore I am continually in want of models, which - at a time when my work is difficult and exhausting - is an additional reason for thinking it rather dismal to get suspicions in exchange. Never mind, it is a period I have to go through, and one does not paint in order to have an easy time of it.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early February 1885

Dear Theo,

Coming home, you may have found another note I wrote you. But whereas in this I asked you to take back some things you said, now I ask you not to.

For even if you should say you had come to think differently about things, I should not be able to believe you, as I am of the opinion that you are definitely like that - and that *it is not to be expected* that you will actually change your mind in the near future. When years have gone by, we shall *perhaps* speak about these matters in quite a different way, but *probably* not even then.

For the time being I believe we certainly need not revert to the subject.

What you might send next month over and above the 100 francs, you would get back, so please send 100 francs, which for the time being I shall continue to count on according to our agreement, but nothing more.

And it will be my endeavour to find something to replace that, and in the long run I suppose I shall succeed.

Goodbye.

Vincent

[Postscript]

Please do not think *I do not want* to be good friends - but in this case it is not in the nature of things; even if one should try, it would be no good - in short, it is a case nobody would be able to do much about.

I believe that your character is now cast in a definite mould - mine is too - and the shapes are *not* identical. I cannot say I really take ill of you - neither perhaps do you of me - but to go on as if we were of one mind, we should have to be like Monsieur Joseph Prudhomme in Monnier's book, *and I at least utterly refuse to be like that*, and for your sake I hope you will do the same. So I'm not going to take it to heart any longer.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, February 1885

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for the Illustrations you sent, I am much obliged to you. I think the various drawings by Renouard beautiful and I did not know one of them.

However - this is not to give you extra trouble, but because I wrote things about them which perhaps cannot quite be applied to other drawings of his - the real Renouard composition I meant is not among them, perhaps that issue is sold out. The breadth of the figure in it was superb, it was an old man and some women and a child, 1 believe, sitting idle in a weaver's cottage where the looms stood still.

I had not yet seen *anything* in reproduction from the Salon of '84, and now I at least got some idea of a few interesting pictures from the Salon number. For instance of that composition by Puvis de Chavannes.

I imagine that the Harpignies with the setting sun must have been splendid. And the pictures by Feyen-Perrin which they give sketches of.

I was also struck by the figure of a girl by Emile Levy, “Japonaise,” and the picture by Beyle, “Brûleuses de Varech” [Women burning seaweed], and the one by Collin, “L'Ete,” three figures of nude women.

I am very busy painting those heads. I paint in the daytime and draw in the evening. In this way I have already painted at least some thirty and drawn as many.

With the result that I see a chance of doing it even better before long, I hope.

I think that *it will help me for the figure in general*. Today I had one white and black against the flesh colour.

And I am also looking for blue all the time. Here the peasant's figures are as a rule blue. That blue in the ripe corn or against the withered leaves of a beech hedge - so that the faded shades of darker and lighter blue are emphasized and made to speak by contrast with the golden tones of reddish-brown - is very beautiful and has struck me here from the very first. The people here instinctively wear the most beautiful blue that I have ever seen.

It is coarse linen which they weave themselves, warp black, woof blue, the result of which is a black and blue striped pattern. When this fades and becomes somewhat discoloured by wind and weather, it is an infinitely quiet, delicate tone that particularly brings out the flesh colours.

Well, blue enough to react to all colours in which hidden orange elements are to be found, and discoloured enough not to jar.

But this is a question of colour, and what matters more to me at the point I'm at now is the question of form. I think the best way to express form is with an almost monochrome colouring, the tones of which differ principally in intensity and in value. For instance, “La Source” by Jules Breton was painted almost in one colour. But one really ought to study each colour separately in connection with its contrast before one can be positively sure of being harmonious.

When there was snow, I also painted a few studies of our garden. The landscape has changed much since then; now we have splendid evening skies of lilac with gold over dark silhouettes of cottages between the masses of ruddy-coloured brushwood - above which rise the spare black poplars, while the foregrounds are of a faded and bleached green, varied by strips of black earth and pale withered rushes along the ditch edges.

I certainly see all this too - I think it just as superb as anybody else, but I am even more interested in the proportion of a figure, the division of the oval of the head, and I cannot master the rest before I have a better grip on the figure.

Well - first comes the figure; I personally cannot understand the rest without it, and it is the figure that creates the atmosphere. I can understand, however, that there are people, like Daubigny and Harpignies and Ruysdael and so many others, who are absolutely and irresistibly carried away by the landscape itself; their work satisfies us fully because they themselves were satisfied with sky and earth and a pool of water and a shrub.

But I think it a mighty clever saying of Israëls, when he remarked of a Dupré, It is just like “a picture of the figure.”

Goodbye and many thanks again for the Illustrations.

Ever yours,

Vincent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 1 March 1885

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the early remittance of this month's money, which, coming early, in fact helps me more. Thanks also for the splendid wood engraving, after Lhermitte, one of the few things of his I know, for I have only seen the following: a group of girls in a cornfield, an old woman in a church, a miner or some such type in a little bar and “La Moisson” [The Harvest], and that's all, and none of these giving an idea of his real technique the way these woodcutters do. If Le Monde Illustré gives a composition of his every month - this one forms part of a series “Les Mois Rustiques” - I should like very much to have the whole series, and I shall be very glad if you will send them. For of course I never see anything here, and after all I need to see some beautiful things now and then; so just deduct 20 francs someday, but send me such things whenever they appear in the magazines.

As to what you write, that if I had anything ready which I thought suitable, you would try and send it in for the Salon, I appreciate your being willing to do so.

This in the first place, and further, that had I known it six weeks ago, I should have tried to send you something for this purpose.

Now I have nothing that I should care to send in; lately I have, as you know, painted heads almost exclusively, and they are studies in the real sense of the word - that is to say, they are meant for the studio.

However, today I at once started to make some, which I will send you. Because I think it might be useful if, when you meet a good many people on the occasion of the Salon, you have something to show - even if it's only *studies*.

So you will receive an old model, and a young woman's head, and probably more than one of these two models.

As to what you write of your feelings about various conceptions of heads, I believe that these which come straight out of a cottage with a moss-covered thatched roof will not seem absolutely inappropriate to you, though they are nothing but studies.

Had I known it six weeks ago, I should have made of it a woman spinning or a woman spooling yarn - a whole figure.

To return for a moment to the subject of the women's heads, genre Jacquet, not the earlier ones, but those of the present. Take the reaction against it, which certainly has a motive. Or consider the people who paint heads of girls such as our sister, for instance; I can perfectly well understand there are painters who do so. Whistler did it well several times; Millais, Boughton - only to mention people of whom I saw something of the kind at one time; I know but little of Fantin Latour, but what I saw I thought excellent, Chardin-like. And that's saying a lot.

I, for my part, however, am not the personality to have had much chance of getting on a sufficiently intimate footing with girls of that sort for them to be willing to pose for me. Especially not with my own sisters.

And perhaps I am also prejudiced against women who wear dresses. And my territory is more those who wear jackets and skirts. But I think what you say true - namely, that they *can* very well be painted, and that it has its raison d'être as a reaction against the present-day Jacquets, and Van Beers, *etc.* but - Chardin (let's summarize the aim of that reaction in his name, Fantin Latour at least would approve of this) was a Frenchman, and painted “Françaises.” And in my opinion the *respectable Dutch* woman very, very often lacks the charm that French women frequently have. Consequently the so-called respectable class of Dutch women is not so very particularly attractive to paint, or to think of. But on the contrary, certain ordinary servant girls are again very Chardin-like.

Just now I paint not only as long as there is daylight, but even in the evening by the lamp in the cottages, when I can hardly distinguish anything on my palette, so as to catch, if possible, something of the curious effects of lamplight in the evening, with, for instance, a large shadow cast on the wall.

It is a fact that in the last few years I certainly have not seen anything as beautiful as those woodcutters by Lhermitte. How completely according to intention and full of feeling his figures are in that composition. Again, many thanks for it.

Ever yours, Vincent

The Chardin-esque is in my opinion a peculiar expression of *simplicity* and *goodness* - both *through and through* - and I have some doubts about whether something like either quality might be found, for instance, in one of our sisters. But if Wil were a Frenchwoman instead of being a clergyman's daughter, she *might* have it. But one is *nearly always* driven from one's course to the opposite side of the world.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, mid March 1885

Dear Theo,

Some of the heads I promised you are finished, but they are not quite dry yet. As I wrote you already, they were painted in a dark cottage, and they are studies in the real sense of the word. I already began to send you studies of drawings long ago.

I did not intend to stop doing so.

I work hard, and suppose that only one out of ten or twenty studies I make is worth seeing; though those few, either more or less in number, may be of *no* value *now*, they may be later on, perhaps.

Not so much taken separately as in connection with other studies.

However it may be - I will try it once more, so as soon as they are quite dry, and I can varnish them, I'll send you some heads and also a little sketch of a woman spooling yarn.

And that needn't be all - seeing that I have applied myself almost exclusively to painting for more than a full year, I dare claim these to be somewhat different from the first painted studies I sent you.

When I see, as I did recently, something like those splendid woodcuts by Lhermitte, I know very well that I am still far from doing such a thing myself. But seeing his work encourages me as to my views and working method, namely always directly from nature or in the squalid, smoke-blackened cottage. For I see (for instance, from details in heads, in hands) how artists like Lhermitte must have studied the peasant figure, not only from a fairly great distance, but from very close by, not now when they create and compose with ease and assurance, but before they could do so.

“On croit que j'imagine - ce n'est pas vrai - je me souviens,” said one who could compose with a master hand.

Now as for me, I cannot yet show a single *picture*, hardly a single *drawing* yet. But I *do* make studies, and that's just why I can very well imagine that the time might come when I shall also be able to compose easily. And, moreover, it is hard to say where the study ends and the picture begins.

I am brooding over a couple of larger, more elaborate things, and if I should happen to get a clear idea of how to reproduce the effects I have in mind, in that case I should keep the studies in question here for the time being, because then I should certainly need them - it would be, for instance, something like this:

namely figures against the light of a window.

I have studies of heads for it, against the light as well as turned toward the light, and I have worked several times already on the complete figure; spooling yarn, sewing, or peeling potatoes. Full face and in profile, it is a difficult effect.

But I think I have learned a few things from it.

Goodbye, I couldn't put off writing to you again.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 1 April 1885

[First letter after the sudden death of their Father.]

Dear Theo,

I felt the same as you did when you wrote that you could not work as usual the first days; it was the same with me.

Indeed, those were days we shall not easily forget. And yet the total impression was not terrible, only solemn. Life is not long for anybody, and the problem is only to make something of it.

Today I painted better again; the first two heads turned out badly, today's is a young girl's, almost a child's head. As to colour, it is a contrast of bright red with pale green against the flesh colour of the little face, there is already a head like it among those you took with you.

I should like to hear whether those rolled-up things arrived safely. If I thought that C. M. was in earnest when he asked for children's heads, I might send him the one I did today, but…I can't say I feel much inclination to enter into correspondence with him unless he asks for something more definitely. But the fact he was in the studio can do no harm.

I should not mind beginning another still life of those honesties and dry leaves against blue, because he also said something about that.

Of course I intend to go on working hard, but it is absolutely necessary for me to settle my colour bill as soon as possible. Every year about this time I have been able to pay off the bill and buy some new painting materials. And this year I have painted so much during the last months that I really need them more than ever.

I did not want to talk much about it or contradict you much when you were here, but when you said that I should change someday and that I should not always stay here, any more than Mauve had always stayed in Bloemendaal, it may be true, but I personally see no good in moving, because I have a good studio here and the scenery is very beautiful.

Don't forget I am positively convinced that a painter of rural life can do no better than take Barbizon as an example.

To dwell and to live in the very midst of what one paints, for in the country nature has a new and different aspect every day.

In short, the two reasons for living in the country are: that one can work more there and that one has less expenses.

There are, let's say, some three months between now and the time you come again this summer.

If I work hard every day, by that time I can have another twenty studies for you, besides twenty more to take with you to Antwerp one day if you like.

But it is absolutely necessary that I pay my colour bill as soon as possible. You know that I didn't say a single word to you about it either in February or in March. But they have not been easy months for me, I can tell you.

The weather has gotten colder here again. As soon as we have a few fine days, I shall try to make a sketch of the churchyard. The head I painted today is, I think, as good as the one with the big white cap you have; it is somewhat like this sketch, and might serve as a pendant to it.

[Here Vincent sketched two heads.]

If you mounted these two on gilt Bristol, they would perhaps look well in gold, better than without it.

Goodbye, with a handshake, and still thinking often of your visit,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 5 April 1885

Dear Theo,

I am still greatly under the impression of what has just happened - so I have worked on quietly these two Sundays.

Enclosed you will find a scratch of a man's head and of a still life with honesty, in the same style as the one you took with you; in the foreground are Father's tobacco pouch and his pipe. If you care to have it, you may of course, and welcome.

Mother is looking well, and for the present the many letters she has to write distract her somewhat. But of course she feels her loss heavily.

I do not know whether you remember how in January, when the fields were covered with snow, and the sun rose fiery red out of the mist, I wrote you that I had hardly ever begun a new year in a more despondent mood.

The fact is that there will be much trouble in store for us all. Of course you will understand that it isn't for my own pleasure that I shall go and live in the studio. It makes things more complicated for me again, but I am quite sure that it is better for the others if I leave. Especially in view of Mother's intention to take in as a boarder somebody who wants to stay in the country for his or her health, if it can be done - or, if this should not prove so easy, they will at all events be freer in the matter of receiving guests, *etc.* However, I still very much deplore the incident with Anna which decided me on this. What she told you does not alter anything of what she reproached me with, however absurd these reproaches were, as well as her unfounded suspicions with regard to certain things of the future. She has not told me she took them back. Well, you understand that I simply shrug my shoulders at such things, and for that matter, more and more I let everybody think of me what they like, and say of me, and do, under certain circumstances, too.

But consequently I have no choice. After such a beginning one is forced to take measures in order to avoid such occurrences in the future. So I am firmly resolved.

Probably Mother will go to Leyden next year. Then I shall be the only one of us left in Brabant.

And it doesn't seem at all improbable that I shall stay there for the rest of my days. In fact, I have no other wish than to live deep, deep in the heart of the country, and to paint rural life. I feel that my work lies there, so I shall keep my hand to the plough, and cut my furrow steadily.

I believe that you think differently about it, and that perhaps you prefer my taking another course, and settling elsewhere. But I sometimes think that you have more feeling for what can be done in the city, whereas I, on the contrary, feel more at home in the country.

But I shall still have a hard time of it before I can make people accept my pictures.

Meanwhile, I am not going to let myself be discouraged.

I remember what I once read of how seventeen pictures of Delacroix's were refused, “dix-sept refusés,” as he told his friends straight out.

I was thinking today what damned brave fellows they were, those pioneers. But the battle must be carried on even at present, and I will carry on my own fight for all the little I may be worth.

And so, Theo, I hope we shall continue on both sides what we started anew; while waiting for, or rather, toiling on more important compositions, I shall send you the studies fresh from the cottages.

Of course, people will speak of unfinished, or ugly, etc., etc., but - my idea is *to show them by all means*.

I personally have the firm conviction that there are a few people who, having been drawn into the city and kept bound there, yet retaining unfaded impressions of the country, and remain all their lives homesick for the fields and the peasants. Such art lovers are sometimes struck by the sincerity in a picture, and what repulses others does not trouble them.

I myself remember how I used to walk for hours in the city, looking at the show windows, to get a glimpse of some bit of the country, never mind what.

We are now in the very beginning of showing the work; I feel sure that by and by we shall find some friends for it. Circumstances impel us and gradually we shall be able to show better things. For the moment I am strongly preoccupied with settling my colour bill; besides, I need canvas, paint and brushes.

As Father's death has caused you many extra expenses, I have thought of the following arrangement; in case you should not be able to give me the extra allowance which I used to receive every spring and summer and which I cannot possibly do without, don't you think it would be fair if I reserved for myself a sum of, for instance, 200 guilders as my share of the inheritance, which for the rest I gladly leave to the younger ones, and shall be able to do if you continue to help me?

In fact, I do not consider it as if *I* left them my share, but that it is you who make it possible for them to get my portion.

If I go to live in the studio, it is absolutely necessary to have the closet made, for instance, for now I haven't the smallest place to put my things away, and some improvements must be made as to the light. To have to move now would be as bad for me as if the house were burned down; I think with patience and perseverance we can stay on our feet.

As soon as I am settled in the studio I think I shall take up doing watercolours regularly every evening, it is not possible at home in the living room.

As to Anna, you must not think that I shall go on resenting a thing like this or bearing a grudge - but it is a pity that they think they are doing Mother a service by such a thing - this is to be regretted - it is foolish and unwise. As long as Mother and Wil are here, nothing of an odious nature will happen between them and me, this I firmly believe. Only it is an established fact that Mother is unable to grasp the fact that painting is *a faith*, and that it imposes *the duty* to disregard public opinion - and that in painting one conquers by *perseverance* and not by making *concessions* - and that “I cannot give thee the faith” - this is exactly what is the matter between her and me - as it was to Father, and remained so. Oh dear.

Till then, I shall continue to work from the model in the evening also.

This week I intend to start that composition of those peasants around a dish of potatoes in the evening, or - perhaps I shall make daylight of it, or both, or “neither of the two” you will say. But whether it may succeed or not, I am going to begin the studies for the various figures. Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anton Kerssemakers

Nuenen, 9 April 1885

[Postcard to Anton Kerssemakers]
Dear Sir,
I am not sure whether I shall be able to come and paint next Saturday. Because I am making some studies of the planting of potatoes here, on which I shall perhaps be obliged to go on working on the day in question.

But if not on Saturday, I shall certainly come next Monday - unless I hear from you to the contrary.

Sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 11 April 1885

Dear Theo,

I have wondered a little at not having heard from you yet. You will say that you have been too busy to think of it, and of course I understand this.

It is late in the evening, but I want to tell you once more how sincerely I hope that in the future our correspondence will become somewhat more animated than it has been of late.

Enclosed you will find two scratches of a few studies I made, while at the same time I am again working on those peasants around the dish of potatoes. I have just come home from this cottage and have been working at it by lamplight, though I began it by daylight this time.

This is what the composition looks like.

I painted it on a rather large canvas, and as the sketch is now, I think there is some life in it.

Yet I am sure C. M., for instance would find fault with the drawing, *etc.* Do know what a positive argument against that is? That the beautiful effects of in nature demand a very quick hand in drawing.

Now I know quite well that the great masters, especially in the period of their ripest experience, knew both how to be elaborate in the finishing and at the same time to keep a thing full of life. But certainly that will be beyond my power for the present At the point I am now, however, I see a chance of giving a true impression of what I see.

Not always literally exact or rather never exact, for one sees nature through one's own temperament

The advice I want to give, you know, is the following: Don't let the time slip by; help me to work as much as possible, and from now on keep all the studies together.

I do not like to sign any of them yet, for I do not want them to circulate as pictures, which one would have to buy up again later when one had some reputation. But it will be a good thing if you show them, for you will see that someday we shall find somebody who wants to do the same thing I propose to you now, namely make a collection of studies.

I intend to go out regularly every morning and to attack the very first thing I see people do, either in the field or at home, which in fact I am already doing now.

You are looking for new ideas for the art trade; the idea of being *kind* to the art lovers is not new, but it is one that *never gets old*.

Like that of guaranteeing a purchase. And I ask you, isn't it better for an art lover to possess from one painter, for instance, twenty quite different sketches at the same price which he in all fairness would have to pay for *one* finished picture which, as a saleable article, had its value on the market? If I were in your place, as you know so many young painters who haven't a reputation yet, I would try to bring *painted studies* on the market, not as pictures, but mounted in some way on gilt Bristol, for instance, or black, or deep red.

Just now I mentioned giving a guarantee.

Not *all* painters make a lot of studies - but many do, and especially the young ones must do so as much as possible, mustn't they? He who possesses a painter's studies may always be sure (at least it seems that way to me) that there is a bond between the painter and himself which cannot easily be broken at a whim.

There are people, as you know, who support painters during the time when they do not yet earn anything, very well!

But how often doesn't it happen that it ends miserably, wretchedly, for both parties, partly because the protector is annoyed about the money, which is or at least seems quite thrown away, whereas, on the other hand, the painter feels entitled to more confidence, more patience and interest than is given him? But in most cases the misunderstandings arise from carelessness on both sides.

I hope this will not be the case between us.

And I hope that by and by my studies will give you some new courage. Neither you nor I are contemporaries of that race which Gigoux, in that book you sent me, rightly calls “Les vaillants.”

But it seems to me right after all to keep the enthusiasm of those days in the present time, for it is often true that fortune favours the bold, and whatever may be true about fortune or “la joie (?) de vivre,” as it is called, one must work and dare if one really wants to live.

I repeat, let us paint as much as we can and be productive, *and, with all our faults and qualities, be ourselves*; I say *us*, because the money from you, which I know costs you trouble enough to get for me, gives you the right, if there is some good in my work, to consider half of it your own creation.

Try to speak to somebody at Le Chat Noir and ask them if they want a sketch of those potato eaters, and if so, of what size, for it's all the same to me. Good-by, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 13 April 1885

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your registered letter of yesterday and the enclosure. I am writing at once in reply and enclose a small scratch, based more closely than the one before on my last study. I haven't been able to get as far with it as I would have liked. I worked on it continually for three days from morning till night, and by Saturday night the paint had begun to get into a state which prevented further work until it had dried out completely.

I went to Eindhoven today to order a small lithographic stone, as this is to become the first of a series of lithographs, on which I intend to start again. When you were here I asked you about the costs of reproduction by the G. & Co. process. I think you said it would be 100 francs. Well, the old-fashioned, almost neglected, ordinary lithographic process is quite a lot cheaper - especially in Eindhoven, perhaps. I get the use of the stone, graining, paper and the printing of 50 copies for *3 guilders*.

Anyway, I intend to do a series of subjects from peasant life - *les paysans chez eux* [peasants at home].

Today I went for a splendid walk for a few hours with an acquaintance of mine whose first watercolour of a figure I showed you.

I don't say that the scenery isn't even more stirring and more dramatic, say in Brittany, in Katwijk or in the Borinage - yes indeed, but even so, the heath and the villages here are very beautiful as well, and once there, I find an inexhaustible source of subjects from peasant life - and the only thing that matters is to get down to it, to work.

I've a great mind to do some watercolours and drawings again as well - and when I'm in my studio, I'll be able to make time for that in the evenings.

I was tremendously pleased that you sent me the 100 francs. As I said, it was absolutely essential that I pay several things off - and that was on my mind. Not that people were bothering me for it, but I knew they needed the money. And that is why I wrote that I might have to keep something back when the estate is settled. But that won't be necessary now - although I can tell you that this year is bound to be very grim. But I keep thinking of what Millet said, “Je ne veux point supprimer la souffrance, car souvent c'est elle, qui fait s'exprimer le plus énergiquement les artistes.” [I would never do away with suffering, for it is often what makes artists express themselves most forcefully.]

I think I'll be moving by the first of May - although I'm getting on well of course with Mother and our sisters, I can still see and sense it is pour le mieux [for the best] this way - since in the long run it would hardly be feasible to live together. Which I can put down neither to them personally nor to myself personally so much as to the incompatibility of the ideas of people who seek to maintain a certain social standing and a painter of peasant life who gives the matter no thought.

When I say that I am a painter of peasant life, that is a fact, and it will become increasingly apparent to you in the future that I feel at ease as one. It was not for nothing that I spent so many evenings musing by the fire in their homes with the miners and the peat cutters and the weavers and the peasants - unless I was working too hard for that.

By continually observing peasant life, at all hours of the day, I have become so involved in it that I rarely think of anything else.

You write that the public attitude - that is, indifference to Millet's work, as you have just had occasion to observe at the exhibition - is not encouraging, either for artists or for those who have to sell paintings. I quite agree - but Millet himself felt and knew this - and on reading Sensier I was very struck by something he said at the beginning of his career, which I don't remember *word for word*, only the purport of it, namely, “that (i.e. that indifference) would be bad enough if I had need of fine shoes and the life of a gentleman, but - puisque j'y vais en sabots - je m'en tirerai.” [As I go about in clogs, I'll manage]. And so it turned out.

What I hope never to forget is that “il s'agit d'y aller en sabots” [what matters is going about in clogs], that is, being content with the kind of food, drink, clothes and sleeping arrangements with which the peasants are content.

That is what Millet did and indeed *he wanted nothing else* - and to my mind this means that he set an example to painters *as a human being*, which Israëls and Mauve, for instance, who live rather luxurious lives, have *not*, and I repeat Millet is *father Millet*, that is, counsellor and mentor *in everything* to the younger painters. Most of *those whom I know*, but then I don't know all that many, would not subscribe to this view. For my part, I do, and fully believe in what he says.

I'm talking at some length about this dictum of Millet's because you write that when *city-dwellers* paint peasants, their figures, *splendidly* done though they may be, cannot but remind one of the faubourgs [suburbs] of Paris. I used to have the same impression too (although in my opinion B. Lepage's woman digging potatoes is certainly no exception), but isn't this because the painters have so often failed to immerse themselves *personally* in peasant life? Millet said on another occasion, Dans l'art il faut y mettre sa peau [one has to put one's all into art].

De Groux - that is one of his qualities - painted *peasants* properly. (And they, the State, demanded historical pictures from him! Which he also did well, but how much better he was when he was allowed to be *himself*.) It will always be a shame and disgrace that De Groux is not yet as fully appreciated by the Belgians as he deserves. De Groux is one of the *best Millet-like masters*. But although he neither was nor is acknowledged by the public at large, and although, like Daumier and Tassaert, he remains in obscurity, there are people, *Mellery*, for example, to name but one, who are working along his lines again today.

I saw something recently by Mellery in an illustrated paper, a *bargee's* family in the little cabin of their boat - husband, wife, children - round a table.

As far as *popular* support is concerned - years ago I read something on the subject in Renan which I have always remembered and which I shall always continue to believe - that anyone who wishes to accomplish something good or useful must not count on or seek the approval or appreciation of the general public, but, on the contrary, must expect only a very few warm hearts to sympathize and go along with him - and then only *perhaps*.

If you come across the “Chat noir” people, you might show them this small sketch *to be going on with, but I can do a better one if they like, for this one was done in a great rush* and is simply meant to give you a clearer idea of the effect and the composition than the first one. Regards and thanks, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

You needn't tell the “Chat noir” that I also intend to make a lithograph of this subject for myself. That lithograph won't be for publication, anyway, but is entirely a private affair. For that matter, I *don't* much care if they don't want to have it - because I shall certainly make lithographs myself of whatever I want to have lithographed.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 13-17 April 1885

Dear Theo

Enclosed you will find some interesting pages about *colour*, namely the great principles which Delacroix believed in.

Add to this “les anciens ne prenaient pas par la ligne, mais par les milieux,” that means, starting with the circular or elliptical bases of the masses, instead of the contour.

I found the exact words for the latter in Gigoux's book, but the fact itself had already preoccupied me a long time. I believe the fuller of sentiment a thing one makes is, and the more true to nature, the more it is criticized and the more animosity it rouses, but after all, in the end it will rise above the criticism.

I was very glad to hear Portier's opinion, but the question is whether he will stick to it. But I know some of those rare people who have “foi de charbonnier” do exist, and don't swing back and forth with public opinion. I am very glad that he found “personality” in it. In fact, I try more and more to be myself, caring relatively little whether people approve or disapprove of it. I don't mean to say that I don't care whether Mr. Portier sticks to his good opinion; on the contrary, I will try to make things which strengthen him in it.

By the same mail you will receive a few copies of a lithograph. I should like to make, with a few alterations, a definite picture of the sketch I painted in the cottage. And that would perhaps be one which Portier could show, or which we could send to an exhibition. At least it is a subject which I have felt, and such as it is, I myself could point out, as well as other critics, its weak points and some *absolute mistakes*. But there is a certain life in it, perhaps more than in some pictures that are absolutely faultless.

I too believe that if Henri Pille had had to decide, Le Chat Noir might not have refused it.

After all I don't care much, for in order to be quite independent, I want to learn to make lithographs myself.

If I make a picture of the sketch, I shall make at the same time a new lithograph of it, and in such a way that the figures, which, I am sorry to say, are now turned the wrong way, come right again.

Not to make the letter too heavy, for Mother is writing too, I'm stopping; I shall write soon again; thanks for your letter. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

[Translation of the French pages by Delacroix]

The ancients admitted only three primary colours: yellow, red and blue, and the modern painters do not admit any others. In fact, these three colours are the only indissoluble and irreducible ones. Everybody knows that sunlight is made up of a series of seven colours, which Newton called primitive - violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red; but it is clear that the appellation “primitive” cannot be applied to three of these colours, which are composite, for orange is got by mixing red and yellow; green, by mixing yellow and blue; and violet, by mixing blue and red. As to indigo, it cannot be counted among the primitive colours, for it is only a variety of blue. So in accordance with antiquity it must be acknowledged that there are only three colours which are truly elementary in nature, and which, when they are mixed two at a time, produce three more composite colours which may be called secondary, to whit: orange, green and violet.

These rudiments, developed by modern scientists, have led to the conjecture of certain laws that form an illuminating theory of colours, a theory which Eugène Delacroix commanded scientifically and thoroughly, after grasping it instinctively. (See his Grammaire des arts de dessin, 3rd ed. Renouard.) If one combines two of the primary colours, for instance yellow and red, in order to produce a secondary colour - orange - this secondary colour will attain maximum brilliancy when it is put close to the third primary colour not used in the mixture. In the same way, if one combines red and blue in order to produce violet, this secondary colour, violet, will be intensified by the immediate proximity of yellow. And finally, if one combines yellow and blue in order to produce green, this green will be intensified by the immediate proximity of red. Each of the three primitive colours is rightly called complementary with regard to the corresponding secondary colours. Thus blue is the complementary colour of orange; yellow, the complementary colour of violet; and red, the complementary colour of green. Conversely, each of the combined colours is the complementary colour of the primitive one not used in the mixture. This mutual intensification is what is called the law of simultaneous contrast.

When the complementary colours are produced in equal strength, that is to say in the same degree of vividness and brightness, their juxtaposition will intensify them each to such a violent intensity that the human eye can hardly bear the sight of it.

And due to a singular phenomenon, *the same colours which strengthen each other by their juxtaposition will destroy each other when they are mixed.* So if one mixes blue and orange in equal quantities, the orange will be as little orange as the blue is blue, the mixture destroys the two tints, and there emerges an *absolutely colourless grey*.

But if one mixes two complementary colours in unequal proportions, they only partially destroy each other, and one gets a *broken tone*, which will be a variety of grey. This being so, new contrasts may be born of the juxtaposition of two complementary colours, one of which is pure and the other, broken. As the fight is unequal, one of the two colours gains the victory, and the intensity of the dominant colour does not preclude the harmony of the two.

Now, if one brings together similar colours in a pure state but in different degrees of intensity, one gets another effect, in which there will be a contrast through the difference in intensity and at the same time harmony through the similarity of the colours. Finally, if two similar colours are placed next to each other, the one in a pure state, the other broken, for instance pure blue and grey-blue, another kind of contrast will result, which will be toned down by the analogy. So it is clear that there are various means, divergent among themselves, but equally infallible, by which to intensify, to maintain, to weaken or to neutralize a colour's effect, and this by its reaction to the contiguous tones - by its touching what is not itself.

In order to intensify and to harmonize the effect of his colours he used the contrast of the complementary and the concord of the analogous colours at the same time; or in other terms, the repetition of a vivid tint by the same broken tone.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 21 April 1885

Dear Theo,
By the same mail you will receive a number of copies of the lithograph. Please give Mr. Portier as many as he wants. And I enclose a letter for him, which I am afraid you will think rather long, and in consequence unpractical. But I thought that what I had to say couldn't be expressed in more concise terms, and that the chief point is to give him arguments for his own instinctive feelings. And in fact what I write to him I say also to you.

There is a school - I believe - of impressionists. But I know very little about it. But I do know who are the original and most important masters, around whom - as round an axis - the landscape and peasant painters will turn. Delacroix, Corot, Millet and the rest. That is my own opinion, not formulated as it should be.

I mean there are (rather than persons) rules or principles or fundamental truths for *drawing*, as well as for *colour*, upon which *one proves to fall back* when one finds out an actual truth.

In drawing, for instance - that question of drawing the figure beginning with the circle - that is to say taking as one's basis the elliptical planes. A thing which the ancient Greeks already knew, and which will continue to apply till the end of the world. As to colour, those everlasting problems, for instance, that first question Corot addressed to Français, when Français (who already had a reputation) asked Corot (who then had nothing but a negative or rather bad reputation) when he (F) came to Corot, to get some information: “Qu'est-ce que c'est un ton rompu? Qu'est-ce que c'est un ton neutre?” [what is a broken tone? What is a neutral tone?]

Which can be better shown on the palette than expressed in words.

So what I want to tell Portier in this letter is my confirmed belief in Eugene Delacroix and the people of that time.

And at the same time, as the picture which I have in hand is different from lamplights by Dou or Van Schendel, it is perhaps not superfluous to point out how one of the most beautiful things done by the painters of this country has been the painting of *black*, which nevertheless has *light* in it. Well, just read my letter and you will see that it is not unintelligible, and that it treats a subject that just occurred to me while painting.

I hope to have some luck with that picture of the potato-eaters.

I also have on hand a red sunset.

In order to paint rural life one must be master of so many things. But on the other hand I don't know anything at which one works with so much calm, in the sense of serenity, however much of a worry one may be having as regards material things.

I am rather worried just now about the moving, that's no easy job, on the contrary. But it had to happen some time, if not now, then later, and in the long run it is better to have a place of one's own, that's a fact.

To change the subject. How typical that saying is about the figures of Millet: "*son paysan semble peint avec la terre qu'il ensemener*" [His peasant appears to be painted with the earth that he is sowing.] How exact and how true. And how important it is to know how to mix on the palette those colours which have no name, and yet are the real foundation of everything. Perhaps, I daresay *for sure*, the questions of *colour*, and more exactly, broken and neural colours, will preoccupy you anew. Art dealers speak so vaguely and arbitrarily about it, I think. So in fact do painters too. Last week I saw at an acquaintance's a decidedly clever, realistic study of an old woman's head, by somebody who is directly, or indirectly, a pupil of the school of The Hague. But in the drawing, as well as in the colour, there was a certain hesitation, a certain narrow-mindedness, much greater, in my opinion, than one sees in an old Blommers or Mauve or Maris. And this symptom threatens to become more and more general. If one takes realism in the sense of *literal* truth, namely exact drawing and local colour. There are other things than that.

Well, goodbye, with a handshake.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late April 1885

Dear Theo,
I want to tell you that I am working on the potato eaters, and I have painted new studies of the heads; the hands especially are greatly changed.
What I am trying to do most is to bring *life* into it.

I wonder what Portier will have to say about it when it is finished.

The Lhermittes are superb. I am quite enthusiastic about them.

They are full of sentiment, calculated both in general and in detail, but especially broadly conceived and treated vigorously. I do hope that you will watch for the new months of the series being published. Tell me, please, what the best way to send a picture of a somewhat larger size is and which address it must be sent to.

I will not send the potato eaters unless *I know for sure* there is *something* in it.

But I am getting on with it, and I think there are completely different things in it than you can ever have seen in my work. At least, so distinctly.

I mean from life especially. I paint this *from memory on the picture itself*. But you know yourself how many times I have painted these heads!

And then I drop in every night to correct some details on the spot.

But in the picture I give free scope to my own head in the sense of thought or imagination, which is not so much the case in *studies*, where no creative process is allowed, but where one finds food for one's imagination in reality, in order to make it exact.

But you know I wrote to Mr. Portier, “Jusqu'à présent je n'ai fait que des *études*, mais les *tableaux* vont venir” [Up to now I have only made *studies*, but the *paintings* will come]. And I will stick to that.

I intend to send soon a few more studies from nature too.

It is the *second* time that a saying of Delacroix's has meant so much to me. The first time it was his theory about colours, but later I read a conversation he had with other painters about the making, namely the *creation* of a picture.

He pretended that the best pictures are made from memory. Par coeur! He said. And about that conversation I read that, when all those worthy people were going home in the evening, Delacroix, with his usual vivacity and passion, loudly called after them in the middle of the boulevard, Par coeur! Par coeur! Probably to the great astonishment of the respectable passers-by. Just like Jacque who, after he had spent the evening with a friend, kept on sending him messages by his boy, after midnight, and all through the night, “J'ai encore par la présente l'honneur de vous assurer que votre M. Ingres n'est qu'un imaginier, et que Daumier le surpasse infinitement” [Herewith I have the honour to assure you once again that your Mr. Ingres is only an image maker, and that Daumier surpasses him infinitely], or something like that.

I will not send the picture before I have heard from you, in fact it is not quite finished yet.

But the most difficult things - the heads, the hands, and the ensemble - are finished. Perhaps you will now find in it what you wrote some time ago, that though it is personal, yet it will remind you of other painters - with a certain family resemblance. Which you did not find in my studies then, but I think if you compare my studies with the other studies, there would also be a resemblance.

Once more thanks for the Lhermittes, and the other illustrations; Le Chat Noir wasn't as good as I expected, though the title is good. I was glad to find some particulars about the life of Jules Dupré in the Vie Moderne. I sometimes think that perhaps Mistigris (le plus malin des paysagistes) in Balzac's Comèdie Humaine might have been Dupré in his youth. But I do not know whom Balzac meant, and in fact the person plays no prominent part in the book. Do you know who also often works in that way of draawing with ellipses which Gigoux mentioned? Henri Pille. “Ne pas prendre par la ligne, mais par le milieu” - is an important truth. Meunier, Mellery and Rappard also often draw in that way, and Allebé.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 30 April 1885

My dear Theo,

My warmest good wishes for good health and peace of mind on your birthday. I should have liked to send the painting of the Potato Eaters for this day, but although it's coming along well, it isn't quite finished yet.

Though the actual painting will have been completed in a comparatively short time, and largely from memory, it has taken a whole winter of painting studies of heads and hands.

And as for the few days in which I have painted it now - it's been a tremendous battle, but one for which I was filled with great enthusiasm. Even though at times I was afraid it would never come off. But painting, too, is “agir-créer.” [acting-creating.]

When weavers weave that cloth which I think they call cheviot, or those curious multicoloured Scottish tartan fabrics, then they try, as you know, to get strange broken colours and greys into the cheviot - and to get the most vivid colours to balance each other in the multicoloured chequered cloth - so that instead of the fabric being a jumble, the *effet produit* [overall effect] of the pattern looks harmonious from a distance.

A grey woven from red, blue, yellow, off-white and black threads - a blue broken by a green and an orange, red or yellow thread - are quite unlike *plain* colours, that is, they are more vibrant, and primary colours seem *hard*, cold and *lifeless* beside them.

Yet the weaver, or rather the designer, of the pattern or the colour combination does not always find it easy to make an exact estimate of the number of threads and their direction - no more than it is easy to weave brush strokes into a harmonious whole.

If you could see the first painted studies I did on my arrival here in Nuenen side by side with the canvas I am doing now, I think you would agree that things are livening up a bit as far as colour is concerned.

I feel certain that you too will get involved with the question of colour analysis one day. For as an art connoisseur and critic, it seems to me, one must also *be sure* of one's ground and have firm *convictions* - for one's own pleasure at least, and in order to *substantiate one's opinion*. And one should also be able to explain it in a few words to others who sometimes turn to someone like yourself for information when they want to know a little more about art.

But now I have something to say about Portier. Of course I am not wholly indifferent to his private opinion and I also appreciate his saying that he does not take back anything of what he has said. Nor do I mind that he apparently failed to hang these first *studies*. But - if he wants me to send him a painting intended for him, *then he can only have it on condition that he shows it*.

As for the Potato Eaters - it is a painting *that will do well in gold* - of that I am *certain*. But it would do just as well on a wall papered in a deep shade of ripe corn. However, it simply *mustn't be seen* without being *set off* in this way. It will *not* appear to full advantage against a *dark* background and especially not against a *dull* background. And that is because it is a glimpse into a very grey interior. In *real life* it is also set in a gold frame, as it were, because the hearth and the light from the fire on the white walls would be nearer the spectator - they are situated outside the painting, but in its natural state the whole thing is projected backwards.

Once again, it must be *set off* by putting something coloured a deep gold or copper round it. Please bear that in mind if you want to see it as it should be seen. Associating it with a gold tone lends brightness to *areas where you would least expect it*, and at the same time does away with the *marbled* aspect it assumes if it is unfortunately placed against a dull or black background. The shadows are painted with blue and the gold colour sets this off.

Yesterday, I took it to a friend of mine in Eindhoven who is doing some painting. In about 3 day's time I'll go back over there and give it some egg-white and finish off a few details.

This man, who is trying very hard himself to learn how to paint and to handle colour, was particularly taken with it. He had already seen the study on which I had based the lithograph and said that he would never have believed I could improve the colour and the drawing to such an extent. As he, too, paints from the model, he is well aware of what there is to a peasant's head or fist, and as for the hands, he said that he now had a quite different understanding of how to do them.

The point is that I've tried to bring out the idea that these people eating potatoes by the light of their lamp have dug the earth with the self-same hands they are now putting into the dish, and it thus suggests *manual labour* and - a meal honestly *earned*. I wanted to convey a picture of a way of life quite different from ours, from that of civilized people. So the last thing I would want is for people to admire or approve of it without knowing why.

I've held the threads of this fabric in my hands all winter long and searched for the definitive pattern - and although it is now a fabric of rough and coarse appearance, the threads have none the less been chosen with care and according to certain rules. And it might just turn out to be a *genuine peasant painting*. *I know that it is*. But anyone who prefers to have his peasants looking namby-pamby had best suit himself. Personally, I am convinced that in the long run one gets better results from painting them in all their coarseness than from introducing a conventional sweetness.

A peasant girl, in her patched and dusty blue skirt and bodice which have acquired the most delicate shades from the weather, wind and sun, is better looking - in my opinion - than a lady. But if she dons a lady's clothes, then her authenticity is gone. A peasant in his fustian clothes out in the fields [is] better looking than when he goes to church on Sunday in a kind of gentleman's coat.

And similarly, in my opinion, it would be wrong to give a painting of peasant life a conventional polish. If a peasant painting smells of bacon, smoke, potato steam, fine - that's not unhealthy - if a stable reeks of manure - all right, that's what a stable is all about - if a field has the smell of ripe corn or potatoes or of guano and manure - that's properly healthy, especially for city dwellers. Such pictures might prove *helpful to them*. But a painting of peasant life should not be perfumed.

I am eager to know whether you will find something in it to please you - I hope so.

I'm glad that just as Mr. Portier has said that he'll handle my work, I've got something more important for him than studies. As for Durand Ruel - though he didn't consider the drawings worth bothering with, do show him this painting. Let him think it ugly, I don't mind - but let him have a look at it all the same, let people see that we put some effort into our endeavours. No doubt you'll hear “quell croûte!” [what a daub!] Be prepared for that, as I am prepared myself. Yet we must go on providing something *genuine* and *honest*.

Painting peasant life is a serious business, and I for one would blame myself if I didn't try to make pictures that give rise to serious reflection in those who think seriously about art and life.

Millet, De Groux, so many others, have set an example of *character* by turning a deaf ear to such taunts as “sale, grossier, boueux, puant” [nasty, crude, filthy, stinking], etc., etc., so it would be a disgrace should one so much as waver. No, one must paint peasants as if one were one of them, as if one felt and thought as they do. Being unable to help what one actually is. I very often think that peasants are a world apart, in many respects one so much better than the civilized world. Not in all respects, for what do they know of art and many other things?

I still have a few smaller studies - but you will appreciate that I'm being kept so busy by the larger one that I've been able to do little else. As soon as it is completely finished and dry, I shall forward you the canvas in a small packing case, adding a few smaller items. I think it would be as well not to delay the dispatch too long, which is why I'll make haste with it. The second lithograph of it will probably have to be abandoned in that case, though I realize that Mr. Portier, for instance, must have his opinion endorsed if we are to count on him once and for all as a friend. It is my sincere hope that we may.

I have been so absorbed in the painting that I almost forgot that I am moving house, something that has to be attended to as well. My worries won't be any the less, but the lives of all painters in this genre have been so full of cares that I shouldn't want to have things any easier than they did. and since they managed to get their paintings done anyway, I, too, may be *held back* by material difficulties, but not *destroyed* or *undermined* by them. So there you are.

I believe that *The Potato Eaters* will turn out well - as you know, the last few days are always tricky with a painting because before it's completely dry one can't use a large brush without running a real risk of spoiling it. And changes must be made very coolly and calmly with a small brush. That's why I took it to my friend and asked him to make certain I didn't spoil it, and why I'll be going to his place to apply those finishing touches.

You'll certainly see that it has originality. Regards, I'm sorry it wasn't ready for today - best wishes once again for your health and peace of mind, believe me, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I'm still working on some smaller studies that will go off at the same time. Did you ever send that copy of the Salon issue?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 4 or 5 May 1885

Dear Theo,

I just prepared a little note for you to go with the picture in the box; I'll send it carriage-paid (to Antwerp, or all the way through if possible) to your address Rue de Laval.

If you have to pay anything more on it, it might be because they only prepay to Antwerp. But I didn't want you to have charges on it, as it will perhaps disappoint you.

If this should be the case, take your time looking at it.

Of course, I can't tell what Portier will say.

In the way of criticism, I myself could point out things which will probably escape most of the critics.

But the reason why I am sending it with a certain confidence is that, in contrast to many other pictures, there is rusticity and a certain life in it. And so, though painted in a different style, in another century than the old Dutch masters, Ostade for instance, it too comes from the heart of the peasant's life, and is original.

Though I see, for instance, in the Salon number so many pictures which, if you like, are faultlessly drawn and painted as to technique, yet many of them bore me terribly because they give me neither food for the heart nor for the mind, because they have obviously been made without a certain passion. And there is some passion in what I am sending you.

I took great delight in making it, and I have worked at it with a certain enthusiasm.

It hasn't bored me; perhaps for that reason it will not bore others. Because I believe this, I send it to you.

Be sure, however, that I greatly admire things in the Salon number like “The Lark” by Jules Breton, Roll's picture, also the Fantin Latour, also “The Coast of Cornwall,” Vernier and some others. I think they are *splendid*, though I can honestly say of many other enormous canvases that they bore me terribly.

That little woman with the spade by Lhermitte, how characteristic it is, how full of life, as if made *by a peasant who could paint*; it is a masterpiece.

If I were you, I should buy copies of the Lhermittes and keep them for ten years. For they are masterpieces one gets in this way for one's 50 centimes. How is it possible that the magazines are not better?

I heard Lançon is dead. I have followed his work for years and nothing of his has ever bored me.

There is life in every little pencil stroke.

If such a one dies - of that same race as the Régameys and Renouards, it is a loss and leaves an empty place.

Lançon's drawings were admirable, so manly and so broad.

I hear Tissot had an exhibition, did you see it?

It all depends on how much life and passion an artist is able to express in his figure; if there is real life in it, then a lady's figure by Alfred Stevens for instance or some Tissots are certainly beautiful too.

And the peasants by Lhermitte, Millet, are so splendid just because of the life there is in them.

In whatever direction one may work, be it Israëls, Herkomer, so many different styles - if there is life and feeling in it, then it is good.

I suppose there are still many beautiful pictures among those that have *not* been reproduced. But when I remember a Salon of '70 or '74, for instance, I think there used to be a higher standard, and since then it has been lowered. One has only to look over the Boetzel Albums, for instance. And the best masters are not even reproduced there, for instance Millet isn't.

I don't pretend to know it all myself. On the contrary, you see so many Daubignys, Corots, Millets, Duprés, Israëlses, Herkomers, Bretons, etc., and I never see any of them. But I think about it every day and feel that the colour scale of all those painters is lower than it *seems*, and that even those pictures which seem light, if one looks carefully and compares, are in lower colour scale than even Mauve's greys. Except perhaps the *very best* Mauves - for instance that old one in the Post Collection with that caravan of old nags and his picture at the Salon two years ago, the launching of that smack.

I hear or see so little, hardly anything at all, so I haven't the opportunity to test my opinions against the pictures themselves. But working and seeking and living with nature, as I told you before, that question gives me no rest. And there is nothing that expresses what I mean so well, there is nothing that gives me such a solid base for my theory as that saying which expresses Millet's colour and technique so perfectly: “Son paysan semble peint avec la terre meme qu'il ensemence.”

Mauve - when he paints brightly - and the other *light* Dutch painters of good quality do not use different colours than the contemporary French painters or those of the old-Dutch school - namely very simple palettes - but here in Holland they use more white than Millet or Dupré or Daubigny or Corot.

If some pictures you might see should make you want to write about them sometime, I should be very glad.

I just read an article in the Graphic on an exhibition of 25 drawings by Fred. Walker. Walker died some ten years ago, you know. Pinwell too - while I'm on this subject, I'm thinking of their work too, and how clever they were. How they did in England exactly what Maris, Israëls, Mauve, have done in Holland, namely restored nature over convention; sentiment and impression over academic platitudes and dullness. How they were the first tonists.

But I remember peasants in the field by Pinwell, “The Harbour of Refuge” by Walker, of which one might also say, *peints avec la terre*. I ought to see more pictures in order to be able to draw conclusions, and I ask you only, Do you know anything about it? *Wine*, of course, contains a quantity of moisture or water, and there will always be water in it; but when too much water is added - it becomes weak. I do not pretend to say that one can, or must, paint light tones without white, no more than I should ever assert that wine must be dry. But I do say that one must take care in our days of clarity (?) and lightness (?), not to water wine too much, not to mix too much white in the wine of colour, so that some passion remains and the effects do not become too tame and weaken the whole thing.

Do you know where one could learn something about this?

From a picture by Leys, not from the first period, but from Ley's second and third period.

I remember “The Skaters” and “The Walk on the Ramparts.”

In both pictures there are figures in the snow, and neither picture is grey; they are as light as the current Dutch painters would paint snow. That little picture by Millet which you mentioned once as the archetype of an impressionist picture, is it in the Luxembourg?

I believe that many a Dutch landscape would become white, and yet coloured compared to that tone. One thing I am sure of, namely that it is mostly painted with red, blue, and yellow, with perhaps a little, but probably not much, white.

I haven't seen it for ten or twelve years, but the more I think of it, while myself seeking certain effects in nature, the less I am inclined to believe that the best French painters use as much white as one seems to use nowadays.

I know something depends on the models too. When I think of the Scheveningen girl who sits regularly for Artz, and whom I remember quite well, she is as fair and as clean as some whores. That also is beautiful to paint, yes.

But peasants or fishermen in small villages and far from the city - they are different no matter where they are. *They remind one of the earth*, sometimes they seem modelled in it.

In the poems by Jules Breton, I remember the lines and I believe it is in the very poem he dedicated to Millet (a peasant going home through the potato fields in the evening):

Par le crépuscle et le hâle
Le paysan deux fois bruni.
[By the twilight and his suntan
The peasant is twice browned.]

But don't suppose that I don't like bright pictures for that reason - to be sure I do; I know a Bastien Lepage - a bride painted quite *blanc sur blanc* with a little brown face in the middle of the picture, splendid, and so many Dutch pictures with snow, mist and sky - splendid.

I only want to point out that one may do as one likes, for instance Jaap Maris, who is sometimes very light - next day will paint a view of the city by night in the darkest colour scale. What I want to say especially is that pictures like some old Cabats, for instance, certain Duprés, though perhaps only painted with red, blue and yellow, without much white, are *in my opinion* not at all inferior to later greyer conceptions.

I got this far yesterday. I just received your letter with the enclosure, for which hearty thanks.

What you write about the Salon is very interesting.

From what you say about the picture by Besnard, I see that you understood what I wrote about broken colours, orange broken by blue and the reverse.

However, there are many other colour scales too, but that of orange against blue is logical; so is yellow against violet, so is red against green.

The box for the picture is ready, so I am sending it flat. It is a light box, but it must dry another day or two. I'm sending ten other painted studies at the same time.

Please tell me some more about the picture by Uhde; you know Rembrandt painted the same subject in his large picture at the National Gallery.

I am in all the mess of moving. Once more, thanks for what you sent. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early May 1885

Dear Theo,
This afternoon I received your letter and will answer it at once. I am anxious to get some idea of the Salon, especially of the picture by Roll.

I'm not surprised that, for instance, Durand Ruel has not yet taken any notice of the drawings.

And I should even prefer that Portier did not exaggerate his admiration of them - at least I feel I can do better, just because I am now changing again, so much so that I think my former work but hesitantly done.

I think you will see what I mean in the picture of the potato eaters, I think Portier will understand. It is very dark, however, and in the white, for instance, hardly any white has been used, but simply the neutral colour, which is made by mixing red, blue, yellow, for instance vermilion, Paris blue and Naples yellow.

Therefore that colour is in itself a pretty dark grey, but in the picture it looks white.

I'll tell you why I do it that way. Here the subject is a grey interior, lit by a little lamp.

The dirty linen tablecloth, the smoky wall, the dirty caps in which the women have worked in the field - *when seen through the eyelashes* in the light of the lamp, all this proves to be *very* dark grey; and the lamp, though a yellow-reddish glow, is even lighter - even a great deal - than the white in question.

As to the flesh colours - I know quite well that considered superficially, that is without thinking about it, they seem *what is called* flesh colour.

But when starting the picture, I tried to paint them that way, with yellow ochre, red ochre and white, for instance.

But that was much, much *too light* and was decidedly wrong.

What was to be done? All the heads were finished, and even finished with great care, but I immediately repainted them, inexorably, and the colour they are painted in now is like *the colour of a very dusty potato, unpeeled of course*.

While doing this I thought how perfect that saying of Millet's about the peasants is: “Ses paysans semblant peints avec la terre qu'ils ensemencent.” [These peasants seem to be painted with the soil in which they have been planting.]

A saying which I can't help being constantly reminded of when I see them at work outdoors as well as indoors.

And I am quite sure that if one asked Millet, Daubigny or Corot to paint a snow landscape without using white, they would do it, *and the snow would look white in the picture*.

What you say about the lithograph, that the effect is wooly, I think too, and it is not my own fault in that the lithographer insisted that, as I had left hardly any white on the stone, it would not print well. At this suggestion I had the light spots corroded; if I had simply printed it as the drawing was, the general effect would have been darker, but not crude, and there would have been atmosphere between the planes. But what should I do with the picture? It is the same size as last year's woman spinning.

Just now I again took it to the cottage to give it some last touches from nature. But I think I shall get it finished, always in a comparative sense, for in reality I shall never think my own work ready or finished.

I can do it in a smaller size, however, or make a drawing of it if you prefer it, for the thing is so fixed in my mind that I could literally almost paint it with my eyes shut.

Can you see how splendid the thing I scratch here was?

When I went to the cottage tonight, I found the people at supper in the light of the small window instead of under the lamp - oh, it was splendid! The colour was extraordinary too; you remember those heads painted against the window - the effect was like that, but even darker.

So the two women and the interior were exactly the colour of dark soft soap. But the figure of the man to the left was just lit up by light streaming through a door farther on. So the head and hands became the colour of a 10-centime piece, namely dull brass. And where the light touched it, the blouse became of the most tender faded blue.

In your next letter tell me, please, what you want me to do with the picture. Of course we must see to it that Portier gets something new. But I can just as well copy it in half-size for him, and send this large one to Antwerp, for instance.

As to the *light* pictures at present, I have seen so little of them these last years.

But I have thought a great deal about the question itself. Corot, Millet, Daubigny, Israëls, Dupré and others *also paint light pictures*, that is to say, one can see through every corner and depth, however deep the colour scale may be.

But those painters mentioned above, none of them paint the local tone literally; they follow the colour scale in which they started, express their own ideas in colour and tone and drawing. And that their light is generally a rather dark grey in itself, which gives the impression of being light in the picture, is a truth which you have the opportunity to observe daily.

Well, goodbye. Understand me well - I do not say that Millet didn't use white when he painted snow, but I mean that he and the other tonists could have done so if they had wanted to, in the same way as Delacroix tells that Paul Veronese painted pale, fair, nude women with a colour which, considered separately, looked like street dirt.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I think you will see from the picture that I have my own way of looking at things, but that there is some conformity with others, for instance, certain Belgians. What a shame they refused Josephson's picture. But why don't the rejected painters join hands and do something for themselves? Union is strength.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 6 May 1885

Dear Theo,

Yesterday I sent you a number of painted studies by post, and today, Wednesday, a box marked V1 carriage-paid, containing the picture.

Please acknowledge receipt, and tell me at the same time if the carriage was sufficiently prepaid. If not I should like to know with a view to later parcels. If it was right, it costs me not quite 2 guilders, which I think cheaper than when the carriage is paid at Paris, and we can try it again some other time, also with rather large dimensions.

I do not know what you will think of the picture, but be careful not to order frames at once for this and for later pictures.

For the present we can use our money better making new pictures. And let us only begin to frame them when we have a small collection. At least, that's what I should like best. What with the many small studies I make, the expenses are indeed heavier than I can manage at present; I just had to pay 25 guilders for rent, too.

But I do think the picture requires a background of gold or brass. Because then the marbled aspect disappears, and the lights get relief. But that effect can easily be obtained by putting a bit of ochre-coloured paper behind it.

It was not yet completely dry when I packed it, but I thought it could hardly be damaged.

I should have liked to work on it even longer, but because of the sinking in and because I had already varnished it more than once, I felt I had to leave it alone.

And I shall start a new thing at once.

My moving is over now. Those at home are hardly what you imagine, and what they say is “that I followed my own head.”

Well, never mind, I'd rather not talk about it.

I must set to work, so goodbye for today.

I have had two other stretchers made of the same size as this canvas; I think if we have, say, three or four pictures of a certain size, then it will be worth while to have a frame in that size. But there is too much risk for a single one, and it is better to paint a great deal.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 11 May 1885

Dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and for the enclosed 50 francs, which were particularly welcome this month because of the moving. I think that in the long run I shall gain a lot of time by living in the studio, as I can set to work, for instance, immediately after getting up, whereas at home it was such that I could not do anything.

These last days I have been working hard on drawings.

They are busy pulling down the old tower in the fields. So there was an auction of lumber and slates and old iron, including the cross.

I have finished a watercolour of it, in the style of the lumber auction, but better I think; I also had another large watercolour of the churchyard, but so far it has been a failure.

Yet I have it well in my head, *i.e.* what I want to express - and perhaps I shall get what I mean onto the third sheet of paper. And if not, then not. I have just sponged out the two failures, but I am going to try again.

If you like, you can have the one of the auction.

Then I'm working on a large study of a cottage by night. And about six heads. All this was the reason for my not having answered your letter yet.

I am working as hard as I can, because I'm thinking of going to the Antwerp exhibition with that friend of mine in Eindhoven, if I can manage it. And then I should like to take some work with me to show thee if possible.

I am anxious to hear if Portier has seen the potato eaters. What you say of the figure is true, that as figure studies they are not what the heads are. That's why I've thought of trying it in quite a different way, for instance, starting with the torso instead of the head.

But then it would have become quite different. As to the way they sit, however, don't forget those people do not sit on chairs like those in Café Duval, for instance.

The finest thing I saw was when the woman was simply kneeling down, that's in the *first* sketch I sent you.

Well, now it's painted the way it is, and we will try it again someday and then certainly not in the same way.

I am also very busy these days, drawing figures.

Thanks also for the copy of Le Temps you sent, with the article about the Salon by Paul Mantz.

I haven't read such a good article in a long time.

I think it very good - the beginning - the picture of those Laplanders, who, after the long winter's night, see the sun rise from their dark hut - how in art they are also waiting for light.

Then immediately after, his pointing to Millet, who has decidedly given new light - “et qui restera.”

Then his pointing out Lhermitte as Millet's successor. I think it all manly language, and perfectly correct, and broadly observed.

But I think it a pity that he calls Roll a “commençant” [beginner], for that means slighting him, and Roll has already made so many beautiful things and is “hors ligne.”

At least his “Grève de Mineurs” [Miner's Strike] is already “hors ligne.” When Paul Mantz says that Roll's labourers do not work hard, and that it is “un rêve” [a dream], well - it is prettily said, and there is some truth in it. But, after all, Roll is right, because it is Paris and not the sober work of the field.

A workman in the city is after all exactly the way Roll paints him.

Rappard has a picture at Antwerp which I think must be very fine, at least in my opinion the sketch, which hardly anybody approved of, was very good. I think him very clever.

Have you finished Zola's Germinal? I should love to read it, and shall send it back within a fortnight. Has Lhermitte's “May” already appeared?

In Mantz's article, I also think very good and logical what he says in a very few words about colour, when he speaks of, “des bleus cenrés, que nous aimons” [the ashy blues, which we love], and “les herbes de la prarie sont très vertes, le taureau est brun roux, la jeune fille est rose, voilà l'accord de 3 tons - ” [the grass of the meadow is very green, the bull is brown-red, the young girl is pink, there you have the harmony of 3 tones -] when he discusses that same question with respect to Lhermitte.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I can imagine Besnard must be interesting.

I don't know whether you noticed that there is a very short remark about “enthusiasm” in Mantz's articles and how there is also something about “le grain de folie qui est le meilleur de l'art.” [the grain of madness that is the best of art.]

I know you wrote, “He may be more of an enthusiast than a merchant, which is better perhaps.”

Coming from you, this expression is mild enough.

I myself, however, think that enthusiasm is not at all incompatible with being a dealer. And I simply remind you of Mouret and Bourdoncle. Mantz also gives a few words to “cette maladie qu'on appelle sagesse” [that disease which they call wisdom], and hits the nail on the head.

What shall I say? - the future and experience will someday repeat what I cannot find the right words for. I mean that enthusiasm sometimes calculates even better than those cool heads which reckon themselves “above such things.” And instinct, inspiration, impulse, and conscience are better guides than many people think. And however that may be, I for one agree with the saying, “Mieux vaut crever de passion, que crever d'ennui.” [It is better to die of passion than to die of boredom.]

How singular it is that I still *cannot* look upon your present views as *final*.

This week the document bearing on the inheritance arrived. I abided by what I had said at first - Mother seems to want it transferred in her own name, but I cannot help that - I have abided by what I said. I hear a lady is going to be taken in as a boarder - you will understand that it is not pleasant for them if I come too often, nor is it pleasant for me to go there very often. An occasional visit, once in a while, is sufficient. I think them - I know, contrary to your opinion and contrary to theirs - I think those at home very, very far from sincere, and moreover, seeing that there are lots of other things I object to on what I consider sufficient grounds, I look upon Father's death and the inheritance as a matter I can withdraw from in all tranquillity, as I foresee that the character of the three sisters (all three of them) will not improve with time, but on the contrary, will get worse, and at any rate, just now it is utterly unsympathetic to me. Do you remember how sympathetically I wrote about Wil during Mother's illness? Well, it was just a short-lived freak - and it is frozen up again. Have you read L'évangeliste by Daudet? If so, you will find in it better words to express what I mean than mine.

I see quite well that you do your best to conciliate us, but, my dear fellow, after all I wish them no harm, do I? - and likewise I do them no harm. However, I don't want to exert any influence on them, as in the first place they themselves would not understand it, and in the second place they would be unwilling to understand it.

The old tower will be pulled down next week! The spire has already gone. I'm working on a picture of it. In these new drawings I have been starting the figures from the torso, and it seems to me that they become fuller and broader this way. If fifty are not enough, I shall draw a hundred, and if that is still not enough, even more, till I have exactly what I want, namely that everything is round and that thee is, so to speak, neither beginning nor end to the figure anywhere, but that it makes one harmonious lifelike whole.

You know that this was exactly the question mentioned in Gigoux's book, “ne pas prendre par la ligne, mais par le milieu.” [not tackle (it) from the contour, but from the centre.]

Mantz says, “Le modelé est la probité de l'art” [The modelling is the probity of art] and what he changes in Ingres' words is that Ingres said, “Le dessin est la probité de l'art” [The drawing is the probity of art]; and added, “je voudrais marquer le contour d'un fil de fer.” [I'd like to mark the contour with an iron wire.] Hébert had what he called “l'horreur de la ligne.” [the horror of the line.]

And then again, there are people who assert that all dogmas are practically absurd. It is a pity that this is again a dogma in itself.

The only thing to do is to go one's way, to try one's best, to make the thing live.

If they hadn't made Thijs Maris too wretched and too melancholy to work, perhaps he would have found something wonderful.

I think of that fellow so often, Theo, how marvellous his work is.

It is as if he dreams - but what an artist he is!

By God, if that fellow were now what he was when he began, what a centre he would become.

For the present-day Dutch schools need some new blood.

One must not work in “thousand fears,” and yet, that's what many do who are so anxious to get hold of the right colours and tones that their very anxiety makes them like tepid water. But the real artists, Israëls or Maris or Mauve or Neuhuys, act quite differently, for they say, “Just dash the colour on.”

Well - because they have suppressed all enthusiasm, they will “faire hurler jusqu'aux chiens de éspoir” [make people howl like dogs in despair], when nobody has any enthusiasm, and nobody has any daring left. We have not got that far, I know, but what I say is this, let's keep enthusiasm, otherwise we reach that summit of wisdom called *the time of the periwigs*. One has only to read the history of the old schools of painting to see that it often ends that way. How serious and bitter that fourth article of Mantz's was - the last one - and how exactly what is wanted.

Please look for the Lhermittes when they appear. How beautiful they are.

I just met Aunt C., who assured me that you would certainly still come this summer. About that time I shall have finished quite a few figures like those I have started now.

Goodbye.

Just another little word - I cannot advise you strongly enough to study for yourself Eugène Delacroix's different theories about colour.

Though not up-to-date - though outside the art world for so long - banished because of my clogs, etc., yet I see, for instance from that article by Mantz, that even now there are connoisseurs and art lovers - *who know* something, the very thing Thoré, Théophile Gautier knew.

And that leaving the so-called civilized world of progress for what it is, namely a *delusion*, the most important thing remains, what the reformers in the matter of taste in '48 already proclaimed in a manly and vigorous way. Just as Israëls will not be surpassed here in Holland, but, in my opinion, will remain the master.

And in Belgium, Leys and De Groux.

Please don't make the mistake of imagining that I want to insist on imitation, for that isn't at all what I mean.

You have seen much more than I have, and I wish I had seen what you have seen and are still seeing every day. But perhaps the very fact of seeing so much makes it difficult to reflect, so be it.

I only want to say that you, as well as many others, must refurbish and restudy the principles of art later in life.

I mean that in your capacity of expert, you, just as the painters themselves - *in theory even better than they*, because you have to give advice and to speak about pictures in the making - must know certain rules about colours and perspective. Excuse me, but what I say is true, that this will perhaps be of more practical use to you than you may suppose, and would raise you above the ordinary level of art dealers - which is necessary, for the ordinary level is below the mark.

From my own experience I know pretty well what art dealers do know and what they don't.

I believe they are often taken in, and put over deals which they later regret, just because they know too little of how a picture is made. Well, but I know that you are already taking pains, for instance by reading good books like Gigoux's.

Study that question of the colours, etc., carefully. I try to also, and I will gladly and thankfully read whatever you may find concerning it too. At present I am busy putting into practice, on the drawing of a hand and an arm, what Delacroix said about drawing: “Ne pas prendre par la ligne mais par le milieu.” That gives opportunity enough to start from ellipses. And what I try to acquire is not to draw a *hand* but the *gesture*, not a mathematically correct head, but the general *expression*. For instance, when a digger looks up and sniffs the wind or speaks. In short, *life*.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 15 May 1885

Nuenen, c. 15 May 1885

Dear Theo,

I just received Germinal, and started to read it at once. I have read about fifty pages, and think it splendid; I once travelled through these same parts on foot.

Enclosed is a sketch of a head, which I just brought home.

There was the same one among the last studies I sent you, namely the largest of all. But painted smoothly.

Now I have not smoothed down the brush stroke and in fact the colour is quite different too.

I haven't yet made a head so much “peint avec de la terre,” and more will follow now.

If all goes well - if I earn a little more - so that I can travel more - then I hope to go and paint the miner's heads someday.

But I shall work on till I am absolute master of my hand, so that I can work even more quickly than now, and, for instance, bring home about thirty studies within a month. I do not know if we shall earn money, but if it is only enough to let me work terribly hard, I shall be satisfied; the main thing is to do what one wants to do.

Yes, we must do the miners someday.

What did Portier say about the potato eaters? I know quite well it has its faults, but just because I see that the heads I am doing now are becoming more vigorous, I dare maintain that the potato eaters will keep its value in relation to future pictures, too.

Last year I often got desperate about the colour, but now I work with more confidence. You must tell me what you think best, to keep my latest work for Antwerp or to send it as soon as possible to you and Portier. It's all the same to me, I have now finished seven heads and one watercolour, so I could send a small batch again. Goodbye, once more thanks for Germinal, I am still reading it as I write this. It is splendid.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Anthon van Rappard to Vincent van Gogh

Nuenen, 24 May 1885

[Letter from Van Rappard to Vincent]
Amice!
I was greatly pleased to receive a sign of life from you, though the sign was not quite the one I should have liked.

The news of your father's death was so unexpected that I was very eager to get some further information - which has not been forthcoming, however. As far as I can remember, the reason I did not see the news in the first place in the Nieuws van den Dag was my careless way of reading newspapers - I always skip the ads. At all events I know that very, very shortly after receiving the formal notification I called on a friend who had already read it in the newspaper!

Did you think that I was so little interested in your father or what happens in your home that an ordinary act of politeness would be enough to announce something as poignant as this?

Then you are very much mistaken.

In connection with what you sent me this time, I want to refer to your last letter, in which you spoke of the art of expressing oneself well in words. I want to point out to you that, however badly I may do so orally, I can do it well in writing, if I take sufficient pains. What I wrote you about your manner of working expresses exactly what I mean - although I did not exactly take great pains to do *that*, the only result is a somewhat less than beautiful style! I hoped that I was mistaken in my opinion of your manner of working, and I hope so still; but for this very reason I was deeply sorry to see such a complete confirmation of my opinion in what you sent me that I myself was terrified by it.

You will agree with me that such work is not meant seriously. Fortunately you can do better than that, but why then did you see and treat everything so superficially? Why didn't you study the movements? Now they are only posing. How far from true that coquettish little hand of the woman in the background is - and what connection is there between the coffee kettle, the table and that hand that is lying on top of the handle? What on earth is that kettle doing? - it isn't standing, it isn't being lifted up - so what then? And why isn't that man to the right allowed to have a knee, a belly and lungs? Or are they located in his back? And why must his arm be a yard too short? And why must he do without one half of his nose? And why must that woman on the left have some sort of little tobacco-pipe stem with a little cube at the end for a nose?

And after that, while working in such a manner, you dare invoke the names of Millet and Breton? Come on! in my opinion art is too sublime a thing to be treated so nonchalantly.

Adieu, always believe me

Your friend, A. G. A. v. Rappard

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 25 May 1885

Amice Rappard,
I just received your letter - to my surprise. You are herewith getting it back.
Greetings.
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 1 June 1885

Dear Theo,

Thanks for this month's early remittance. I am very pleased to hear what you write about the picture, Portier's and Serret's remarks, and that they found good things in it. I myself criticize it too, and perhaps more seriously than they, especially regarding the torsos - so I don't want them to approve of it entirely. When you see them someday, just tell them that it is quite possible I shall change the present brass and soft-soap-like colours, but that I hope this change will be twofold, that is to say that I expect to paint some in a lighter colour scale, more like flesh and blood, but that at the same time I am trying to get an even stronger soft-soap and brassy effect. In reality I daily see in the gloomy huts effects against the light or in the evening twilight which are so curious that up to now my work appears too light for these effects, which I compare to soft soap and the brass colour of a worn-out 10-centime piece - faute de mieux, and paint them with those colours - faute de mieux. But I should like to succeed also with the sombre aspect I have often mentioned, “le paysan, peint avec la terre qu'il ensemence.”

I hope to send you this week a small box marked V2, containing:

1 picture la Chaumière [Hovel with thatched roof]

1 watercolour id.[Painting lost]

1 “ “ vente pour cause de démolition [Auction because of demolition]

12 etudes peintes.

Among the latter you will find a head which I had to paint after reading Germinal.

“Did I tell you how she died?”

“Whom do you mean?”

“My woman over there in Russia.”

Étienne made a vague gesture, wondering at the trembling of the voice, and at this sudden need of confidence in this habitually reticent fellow, in his stoical detachment from others and from himself. He only knew that the woman was his mistress, and that she was hanged in Moscow.

Souvarine resumed: “The last day in the square, I was there…It was raining - the clumsy fellows lost their heads, upset by the pelting rain, they had taken twenty minutes to hang four others. She stood waiting. She did not see me, she was looking for me in the crowd. I got on top of a stone pillar and she saw me, our eyes never left each other. Twice I wanted to cry out, to hurl myself over the heads to join her. But what would have been the good of it? One man less, one soldier less; and I guessed that she was saying no with her big fixed eyes, when they met mine.”

You will find a variation among them - profile - a background of “the flat plain of sugar-beet fields under the starless night, dark and thick like ink.”

Standing out against this, the head of a hercheuse or sclôneuse with an expression as of a lowing cow, a person from: “the countryside was pregnant with a race of men who grew, a black avenging army, germinating in the furrows, increasing for the harvest of future ages, and this germination would soon burst the earth.”

But that last expression is, I think, better in the study which I have signed, and which I made *before* I read it, *so without thinking of Germinal*, simply a peasant woman coming home from planting potatoes, all covered with dust from the field.

I think I shall make a second picture of the cottage. The subject is so striking, those two half-mouldered cottages under one and the same thatched roof reminded me of an old couple, worn with age, who have grown into one being and are seen leaning on each other.

For you see there are two cottages and a double chimney. In fact, what one sees here frequently.

I can't spare the time, otherwise I should have much to say about Germinal, which I think splendid. Just one passage though: “Bread! Bread! Bread! Fools, repeated Mr. Hennebeau, am *I* happy? A fit of anger rose within him against those people who did not understand. He would gladly have made them a present of his huge revenues if he could only have a tough skin like theirs and their easy indulgence without regrets. Oh, that he could not let them sit down at his table and stuff them with his pheasant, while he went out to fornicate behind the hedges, tumbling the girls without caring a rap about those who had tumbled them before him! He would have given everything, his education, his well-being, his luxury, his power as a director, if only he could have been for a single day the least of the wretches who obeyed him, master of his flesh, enough of a brute to slap his wife's face and take his pleasure with the women of the neighbourhood. He also wanted to starve, to enjoy an empty belly, his stomach twisted by cramps that staggered his brains by fits of dizziness; perhaps this would have killed the eternal pain. Ah! Live like a beast, having no possessions of his own, flattening the corn with the ugliest, dirtiest female coal trammer, and being able to find contentment in it. How stupid those hollow dreams of the revolutionaries were, they would increase the unhappiness of the earth, someday they would howl with despair when they had left behind the easy *satisfaction of their instincts* by raising them to the *unappeased* suffering of the passions.”

As to what you write about Portier, “He may be more of an enthusiast than a merchant,” and as to your doubting whether he can do anything with my work, I think that neither you nor I nor he can decide this for the moment.

But when you see him, tell him frankly that my idea is: when, after the sympathy he professed for my work, I try my utmost to send him work and thus remain consistent, I firmly count on his persevering in showing my work.

Tell him my idea is that part of the public in Paris will not always remain the dupe of convention, however attractive it may be, but, on the contrary, things which have kept the dust of the cottages or of the fields most will find there some very faithful friends, though I cannot say why or how.

So that he must not be easily discouraged, for neither you nor I would blame him if he did not succeed at once, but he must go on showing it and I shall go on sending.

If he will write me his observations, I think they may be useful to me, and he must not hold them back. I must tell you that I sometimes long very much to see the Louvre and the Luxembourg again, and that sooner or later I shall have to study the technique and colour of Millet, Delacroix, Corot and others. But it is not immediately urgent; I think the more I work, the greater use it will be to me *when* it happens someday.

But it is a fact that one needs both nature *and* pictures.

It is especially that question of the colour scale in which they are painted, and the breaking and juxtaposition of the colours, which preoccupies me daily.

Has Lhermitte's “May” appeared already?

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Andreis Bonger to His Parents

Paris, 1885

[Extracts from letters written by A. Bonger from Paris to his parents.]

31 March 1885

I never accompanied a friend to the North Station under more melancholy circumstances than a week ago last Friday.

In the morning my friend Van Gogh had heard that his father had had a stroke of apoplexy and was dead. The day before he had received a letter from him in which he told him that he was in perfect health. Van Gogh is not very strong himself. So you can well imagine in what condition he went away.

4 April 1885

Yesterday I spent the evening with my friend Van Gogh, who was still very sad on account of his father's death. He is the most sympathetic person I have had intercourse with in Paris. He is a charming fellow to know. It is impossible to imagine more entertaining company than his.

18 July 1885

If I live I hope to start for Lisle next Saturday; from there I shall go to Antwerp via Brugge and Ghent, in order to visit Van Gogh's family in Brabant, and from there I shall go on to Amsterdam, where I think I shall arrive on Thursday night or Friday morning. Reciprocally Van Gogh will probably look me up in Amsterdam. It will give me a great deal of pleasure to introduce my friend to you. He is a likeable and entertaining man…

25 August 1885

…Since our journey together Van Gogh and I have become even more intimate friends than before. He is a person who improves more and more on acquaintance, and whose qualities of the heart and the head I learn to appreciate ever more. I am very glad to hear that he made a good impression on you too. I go to him rather often in the evening to read something or to work. So far we have devoted our Sunday mornings to the Louvre…

24 December 1885

It is certain that Mrs. Van Gogh and her daughter Willy will go to Amsterdam in January. Though she may not call on you (she broke her leg, and consequently she cannot climb stairs, or only with great difficulty), you will certainly hear from her. I feel sure that Mien will like the sister. It would give Van Gogh and me a great deal of pleasure if you could get on with each other. It is a family in which the same tone prevails as in yours.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early June 1885

Dear Theo,

Today I sent off the small box in question, containing, except what I mentioned already, another picture, "*Cimitière de Paysans*."

I have omitted some details - I wanted to express how those ruins show that *for ages* the peasants have been laid to rest in the very fields which they dug up when alive - I wanted to express what a simple thing death and burial is, just as simple as the falling of an autumn leaf - just a bit of earth dug up - a wooden cross. The fields around, where the grass of the churchyard ends, beyond the little wall, form a last line against the horizon - like the horizon of the sea.

And now those ruins tell me how a faith and a religion mouldered away - strongly founded though they were - but how the life and the death of the peasants remain forever the same, budding and withering regularly, like the grass and the flowers growing there in that churchyard.

"Les religions passent, Dieu demeure" [Religions pass away, God remains], is a saying of Victor Hugo's whom they also brought to rest recently.

I do not know if either of these two pictures will please you - the cottage with the mossed roof reminded me of a wren's nest. Well, just look them over.

I must use this opportunity to explain once more, as I found new and clear words for it, why I wrote you, and write again, that I am far from sure that your present opinion is a definite conviction.

The house of Goupil & co. is not a good training school for becoming acquainted with pictures, even less so with painters.

I tell you my opinion is that one does not even learn to have an independent view. To whom did they pay great honour? To Paul Delaroche.

I need not tell you that Delaroche was one of those of whom very little remains; hardly anybody takes his part any more.

Another one who will not *last*, though he is *better* and once or twice made something very beautiful, of whom little will remain also --is Gérôme.

But his "Prisoner," his "Syrian Shepherds" are *real*, and I admire them just as much as anybody, and willingly and readily. But for the most part he is a second Delaroche, both are of equal value, considered in the framework of their time. Now what I assert and think most probable is that the whole situation will bore you more and more each year. Further, I assert that it is doing a bad turn to others, and especially to oneself, to let oneself be bored. In spite of many wise maxims I have never been able to believe that it may be of any practical use, or for one's own good, to be bored. A good many people have reformed themselves at the age of thirty and have changed considerably. Think this over in all calmness; I tell you that of all I have learned and heard at Goupil & co.'s *about* art, nothing has held true. If one reverses the commonplaces which count there as the highest wisdom in art matters, namely applauding the former and present Delaroche style and maligning the unorthodox modern painters, I repeat, if one *reverses* certain sayings - one breathes a purer air. In short, boy, in circumstances and in business such curious changes are not only possible but even usual.

It is odd that I doubt whether you will stay in business after all.

You need not pay attention to this or answer it, I just tell you it straightway to express my idea, not to open sterile discussions.

But it exists - that enchanted land - where one is not free.

Well, I hope to hear soon that you have received the box, and whether you like the pictures.

Tomorrow I am going to paint a spot in another village, also a cottage - in a smaller size. I found it last Sunday, on a long ramble made with a peasant boy to find a wren's nest.

We found six of them, it was a spot that Bodmer certainly would have loved. And they were all nests which the young birds had left, so one could take them without too many scruples. It was so full of character, I have some more beautiful nests. Goodbye, write soon, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I should like you to varnish both pictures before you show them to Portier or Serret.

The village churchyard especially has sunk in badly because at first it was a total failure - then without hesitation I began anew, taking it from another angle and painting early in the morning instead of in the evening. And the other one - that of the cottage - was originally a shepherd. Last week the sheep were shorn, I saw it, it was done on a table in the barn. I am glad I can show Portier something quite different this time.

For the rest I am very busy making drawings, in order to send you some full-size figures before long.

But while I was working on those cottages - perhaps you will call them imitations of Michel, though they aren't - and looking for subjects, I found such splendid hovels that I cannot help painting some more variations of those “peasants' nests” which remind me so much of the wren's nest.

Oh, beyond all doubt - whoever paints peasants nowadays and has his heart in this work will have part of the public on his side, and not the worst part - though it may not be the largest. But for all that, the end or second half of the month will prove very meager for me. But the same happens to the peasant boys - and yet they enjoy their lives.

I wish you had been with me last Sunday when we took that long walk. I came home quite covered with mud, for we had had to wade through a brook for half an hour. But painting becomes stimulating and exciting to me, like hunting - in fact it *is* a hunt for models and beautiful spots.

Once more goodbye, and best wishes. It is already late, and at five o'clock I must be on duty, so goodbye.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, June 1885

Amice Rappard,

Some things that have happened induce me to write you, more to make myself clear than because I enjoy it. As for the fact that I simply returned your previous letter, there were two reasons for that. In the first place, even if your remarks about the lithograph were right, even if I were unable to contradict them, you still had no right to condemn my whole work in the insulting way you did.

And in the second place, seeing that, not only on my part but also on my family's, you have received more friendship than you have given, you cannot *demand* as an *obligation* that we send you anything more than a printed notification on an occasion such as my father's death. Especially not that I should have done so, because already before that you had not replied to a previous letter of mine. Especially not that I should have done so, because on the occasion of my father's death you did give a sign of life in a letter addressed to my mother - but it was such a letter that, when it arrived, those at home wondered why you had not written to me! I did not crave a letter from you *then*, nor do I now. You know that I have not been on the best of terms with those at home for years. After my father's death I was *obliged* to correspond with the nearest relatives during the first days. But as soon as some members of the family arrived I withdrew entirely from all interference. So possible omissions are not to be imputed to me but to the family. And I can tell you besides that you are an exception, since I asked those at home whether they had sent you a notification and it appeared they had forgotten to.

Well, enough and more than enough of this. The reason I am writing you again is certainly not to answer your remarks on the subject - nor to repeat my remarks about what you said about painting. You have been able to reread your letter - if you still think it justified, if you really mean that “when you take the necessary pains you express yourself damned correctly,” well, then the best thing is simply to leave you to your delusions.

To come to the point - the reason I am writing you - though it was *you* who insulted me in the first place, and not *I* who insulted you - is simply that I have known you so long that I do not consider this a reason to break off all intercourse with you.

What I have to say to you I say as one painter to another - and this will be true as long as you and I are painting - whether we keep up our acquaintance or not....

Millet was mentioned. All right, my friend, I'll answer you.

You wrote, “And such a one dares invoke Millet and Breton.”

My answer to that is that I most seriously advise you *not* to fight with me. As for me - I go my own way - you see I don't want to pick a quarrel with anyone, so *not with you* either, even now. I should let you say whatever you liked; if you were to have more observations of the same kind, it would leave me stone cold, and that would be all. But for the moment I want to say this much, you have said more than once that I do not care for the form of the figure, it is beneath me to pay attention to it, and - my dear fellow - it is beneath you to say such an unwarranted thing. You have known me for years - just tell me, have you ever seen me work otherwise than after the model, never sparing expense, however heavy at times, though I am surely poor enough.

Not in your last letter, but repeatedly and ad nauseam in your previous letters you wrote about “*technique*,” which was the reason for the letter to which you did not reply. What I answered to that, and what I answer again is, There is the conventional meaning, which is being given more and more to the word technique, *and* the real meaning - *science*. Very well, Meissonier himself says, “La science nul ne l'a” (nobody has science).

In the first place, however, “la science” is not the same thing as “de la science,” and you can hardly deny it. But even this is not the core of the question.

For instance, they say of Haverman - and so do you - that he has so much *technique*. But not only Haverman - how many others have something that is on a level with the kind of knowledge that Haverman has of art? - among the French painters, *e.g.* Jacquet - and *he* is *better*. What I assert is simply this, that drawing a figure academically correctly - that an even, premeditated stroke of the brush - have little to do - at least less than is generally supposed - with the urgent necessities of the domain of the painting art nowadays.

If, instead of saying Haverman has much “technique,” you said H. has much “métier,” I could agree with you for once. Perhaps you will understand what I mean if I say that, when Haverman sits before a nice ladylike girl's head, he will make it more beautiful than almost anybody else, but put him before a *peasant* - and - he won't even start in, his art seeming to apply (as far as I know) principally to subjects that are just about exactly antipodean to Millet's or Lhermitte's - and that are on the contrary rather analogous to Cabanel's, who for all his, what I call, métier, has produced little that has proved lasting, or contributed to progress. And - I beseech you - don't confuse this with the style of painting of a Millet or Lhermitte.

What I said and will say again is - that all too often the word “technique” is used in a conventional sense, that all too often it is not used in good faith. People are praising the *technique* of all those Italians and Spaniards, and they are men who are more conventional, who have to a greater extent nothing but routine, than anybody else - and I am afraid that with such fellows as Haverman the métier so soon changes into a routine. And then what is it worth?

What I want to ask you now is, What is the real reason you have broken with me?

The reason I am writing you again is just my love for Millet, for Breton and for *all those* who paint *peasants* and the *common people*, and I count you among them.

I do not say this because you were very useful to me as a friend - for, amice, you were distressingly little useful to me - and don't think ill of me if for the first and last time I tell you flatly - I don't know a drier friendship than yours. But first I am not doing it for this reason, and second, this too might have improved - but having created my own opportunities to find models, etc., I am not so little-minded as to keep silent about it. On the contrary - if any painter, no matter who, should come to this district, I should be glad to invite him to my house and show him the way...For the very reason that it is not always easy to find models who are willing to pose, and that it is not a matter of indifference to all of them to have a pied à terre somewhere. And therefore I tell you, if you want to come and paint here, you need not feel embarrassed because we have had a fight. And even though I am living in my studio on my own now, you can always stay with me.

But it may be that - you will say superciliously that you don't care for it - well, it would be all the same to me. I am *so* accustomed to insults - they leave me so perfectly cold - that a man like you will probably find it difficult to understand how utterly cold such a letter as yours, for instance, leaves me. And being indifferent to it, I feel as little resentment as a pole. But on the other hand - I have enough clarity of mind and serenity to answer as I do now. If you want to break with me, it's all right by me. If you want to go on painting here, you don't have to pay attention to these little bickerings in our correspondence.

What you did the last time you were here had and has my full sympathy; and, amice Rappard, it is because you worked so damned well that last time, and because I think you might desire the opportunity you have here to remain unchanged, that I am writing to you. Make up your mind; but I tell you this unreservedly - despite all my appreciation of your painting, I feel uneasy about the future from one point of view, I mean as to whether you will be able to keep it up; I am some times afraid that, because of influences which you cannot help being exposed to on account of your social position and station in life, you will not remain in the long run as good as you are at present - *i.e.* as a painter in your painting; all the rest is none of my concern.

I tell you therefore as one painter to another, If you want to look for pictures here, *it will be quite the same as it was before*. You can come and stay with me just the same as formerly, even though I am now on my own. Do you see? I thought you might have derived advantage from it and might still derive advantage from it; but I want to add, If you can find the same advantages elsewhere, all right, there will be no reason for me to mourn over it, and then adieu.

You wrote me nothing about *your* work, nor do I about *mine*.

Believe me, don't quarrel with me about Millet. Millet is a man I will not quarrel about, although I don't refuse to talk about him.

Greetings,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half June 1885

Nuenen, 2nd half June 1885
Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. It was just what I wanted and helped me to work as hard at the end of the month as I did in the beginning.

I am very glad to hear that Serret is a painter, about whom you had already written things which I perfectly well remember, but the name had escaped me. I should like to write to you much more than I shall do in this letter, but of late, when I come home, I don't feel like writing, after sitting in the sun all day. As to what Serret says, I quite agree with him - I shall just send him a line, because I should like to become friends with him. As I told you already, I have been busy drawing figures recently; I will send them especially for the sake of Serret, to show him that I am far from indifferent to the unity and the form of a figure.

Do you ever see Wallis, is that watercolour of the auction perhaps something for him; if it were something for Wisselingh, then he would certainly be the right one to take it. To Wisselingh I once gave a few heads and recently I have sent him that lithograph. But as he did not answer with a single word, I think if I sent him something more, I should get nothing but an insult. [Wallis and Wisselingh were art dealers on friendly terms with the two brothers]

It has just happened to me that Van Rappard, with whom I have been friends for years, after keeping silent for about three months, writes me a letter, so haughty and so full of insults and so clearly written after he had been in The Hague, that I am almost sure I have lost him for ever as a friend.

Just because I tried it first at The Hague, that is in my own country, I have full right and cause to forget all those worries and to attempt something else outside my own country.

You know Wallis well, perhaps you can broach the subject apropos of that watercolour, but act according to your discretion. If I could earn something with my work, if we had some firm ground, be it ever so little, under our feet for our daily existence, and if then the desire to become an artist took for you the form of, let me say, Hennebeau in Germinal, [A famous novel by Zola] discounting all difference in age, *etc.* - what pictures you could still make then! The future is always different from what one expects, so one never can be sure. The drawback of painting is that, if one does not sell one's pictures, one still needs money for paint and models in order to make progress. And that drawback is a bad thing. But for the rest, painting and, in my opinion. especially the painting of rural life, gives serenity, though one may have all kinds of worries and miseries on the surface of life. I mean painting is a *home* and one does not experience that homesickness, that peculiar feeling Hennebeau had. That passage I copied for you lately had struck me particularly, because at the time I had almost literally the same longing to be something like a grass mower or a navvy.

And I was sick of the *boredom* of civilization. It *is* better, one *is* happier if one carries it out - literally though - one feels at least that one is really alive. And it is a good thing in winter to be deep in the snow, in the autumn deep in the yellow leaves, in summer among the ripe corn, in spring amid the grass; it is a good thing to be always with the mowers and the peasant girls, in summer with a big sky overhead, in winter by the fireside, and to feel that it always has been and always will be so.

One may sleep on straw, eat black bread, well, one will only be the healthier for it.

I should like to write more, but I repeat, I am not in a mood for writing, and I wanted to enclose a note for Serret besides, which you must read also, because I write in it about what I want to send before long, especially because I want to show Serret my complete figure studies. Goodbye,

Yours, Vincent

Serret may agree with you that to paint good pictures and to sell them are two separate things. But it is not at all true. When at last the public saw Millet, all his work together, then the public both in Paris and in London was enthusiastic.

And who were the persons that had suppressed and refused Millet? The art dealers, the so-called *experts*.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half June 1885

Nuenen, 2nd half June 1885
Amice Rappard,
I just received your letter. It is drier and prosier than ever.

However, since you say in it, “I want to answer your esteemed letter at once in order not to encourage you in your opinion that there is any idea of a rupture, at least on my part,” I feel impelled to repeat again that you should know once and for all that there is at your disposal, or at the disposal of any painter whatever who wants to come here to make studies, a spare bedroom in the house where I have my studio. And I for my part want to advise you, as well as Wenkebach, whom I shall probably see tomorrow, to come here once in a while, as there are enough beautiful things here. If you are inclined to appreciate this, very good; if not, very good just the same. But if you come, *each goes his separate way*.

Here is my explanation of the lithograph. I did it entirely from memory and in a single day; I thought a certain composition somewhat forced, and was using an altogether different process in an attempt to find a new idea to put it together. Besides, it was only an experiment and nothing more, and I used corrosives on the stone later on.

Originally - although the faulty drawing of an arm or a nose that made you fly into a rage remains - the chiaroscuro was much better, as it is in the composition that I painted later. And as for the latter, although there are faults in it too, there are still things in it that keep me from regretting that I painted it.

I cannot say that your letter of today was the least bit useful or necessary to me. Only I assure you that your saying your belief in me was shaken and all that leaves me pretty indifferent - you are no exception in this as far as certain others are concerned. I let people *say of me and think of me whatever they like and treat me just as they like* - that is their business; I am not obligated to listen to their everlasting drivel. My parents, my teachers, Messrs. Goupil & Co., and furthermore all kinds of friends and acquaintances have said so many unpleasant things to me for my own good and with the best intentions that in the end the burden has become a little too heavy for me; and since I let people talk without paying any attention to it, I have not fallen off, my friend - *this much I think I know for sure*.

In reply to your remarks, however, this. It is a fact that your work is good; but this does not mean, amice, that you are always right in thinking that there are no other ways and methods of arriving at something good and sound than yours; I should like very much to talk things over with you - but please don't gather from this that it would mean consulting you - but our discussions are becoming less and less successful. Speaking of self-knowledge - who has it? Here again it is a matter of “*la* science - *nul* ne l'a,” only *de la* science - everyone greatly needs it for himself, as regards his good or bad propensities - and I started with myself. But don't think that you never deceive yourself because of a lack of it, don't think you never hurt others horribly and undeservedly with superficial judgments…

I know, *everyone* does this, and yet we must try to put up with each other. But -for *you* to speak about self-knowledge - no, my friend, I am awfully sorry that *you* should touch upon the subject, as I am afraid it is the very weakest side of your character, from a human point of view. Oh well - but I will try to state clearly *what I think about when I think about you*.

As far as your work goes - there you are! - I think your present work is excellent - but here comes a thought exactly as it is in my mind, without concealing anything - I have known you for a pretty long time. There was a time - immediately *before* and immediately *after* your illness - when you were much *less* dry as a human being than you have been at other times - fuller, milder, broader, more generous - more straightforward and ingenuous.

Now you are speaking to me and behaving to me exactly as a certain *abominably* arrogant Rappard studying at a certain academy did at one time.

I am sorry that *this* acquaintance has come back to me, and I am still more sorry for the loss of you as a friend, which you were in the exceptional period when I found you changed and improved; and seeing that I have observed this, I can't help thinking, What about his work?? - will that too be broader, fuller, nobler *for only a short time*?? Do you know the answer to that?

I have taken only half a sheet of paper to express this thought, but you will see from it that I am afraid at times that your work too may lose the nobler quality. I think I am stating this idea clearly and simply.

Whatever my faults of character may be, it is my sincerest desire to do well in my efforts as a painter, and I also have the sincere desire to treat others well - I have too much heart to be *as* frivolous in my work as you are always reproaching me with being. I need not take what you wrote to heart, and I don't do so. And as for your saying that I am in need of someone who will tell me some home truths, that may be true, but it may also be true that I *myself* am the one to tell me some home truths, and that I can do without other people, especially if they are as prosy as you are.

Greetings. But your letter, as a whole, was unfair, even though there are details in it that are more or less accurate.

Vincent

You do not write me anything about your work, nor do I about mine.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half June 1885

Nuenen, 2nd half June 1885
Amice Rappard,

I had a talk with Wenkebach today - and as you had said a few words to him about it and he seemed to know something about the affair, I spoke about it - without going into details, however; but I said this much, that I would gladly consider it a misunderstanding, but that I should never admit the justice of your reproaches about my work. What I am quite willing to admit is that often - which will be the case with most of us - very often, if you like - I do things wrong before I manage to do them better. All right.

Details of your remarks are very accurate; all of it - *no*!

In point of fact Wenkebach thought you would reverse your judgment. I particularly pointed out to him that, if my figures have changed, I have done this in order to give them more form and fullness, and that, when I formerly put down a firmer line, the result of this very thing was that the figure remained *flat* - something I have come to hate more and more.

But perhaps it's just as well that this has happened, for I don't think there's much chance of your getting to such a point “that your belief,” as you called it, “is shaken” a second time.

I have had the very same kind of trouble for a great number of years with a great number of people. When I protested against it once in a while and said that I didn't deserve it, things got worse and worse, and they wouldn't listen to another word about it. My parents and my whole family. Tersteeg, and along with him a lot of fellows who knew me when I was with Goupil & Co., went so far in their disapproval of *all* my doings that these last years, instead of wasting any more time on attempts to convince them, I, who have no time to waste, have simply given them the cold shoulder in my turn - *and let them say, think, do whatever they like without minding it the least little bit*.

This disagreement with you is *not* exceptional, though you may think so. You have let yourself be overawed by public opinion in this. And if you now feel this a little yourself, and think it over, then I repeat, it is quite a good thing that we have quarreled.

But I am a bit obstinate in this matter, for I don't want this thing to go on rankling, and I don't want a *dragging* friendship.

Either cordial and sincere *or* finished.

So this is my last word: I want you to take back, frankly and without reservation, what you wrote in your last letters - beginning with the one I sent back to you.

This is not only to my interest, but also to yours, for by doing so you will erase an action which, though it may be understandable, was not quite manly. By doing so you will erase a misunderstanding which you cannot stick to in good faith, and your continuing to cling to it would be obdurate spitefulness; so, on the condition that you withdraw those letters unreservedly, we'll renew our friendship, which may well become firmer and better as a result of this quarrel.

Please reply to this.

As regards my family - on the occasion of my father's death, realizing that my difference of opinion with him would probably have been perpetual, I simply said - for the sake of clarity - that my views about *practical matters* and my way of life differed too much from theirs to enable us to come to a lasting agreement. That I absolutely insisted on behaving according to my own views, however strictly on my own. And that I relinquished my share in the inheritance; inasmuch as during the last years I had lived in great discord with my father, I felt I did not have a right to anything that was his, and for that matter I did not covet it. You will agree with me that this puts a definite stop to all disagreements with my family. So there is an *end* of them, and otherwise I am on quite good terms with those at home. If I took such vigorous measures in one matter, then please remember that, however gladly I shall make up with you, I am very far from admitting the justice of your grievances, and my condition remains: withdrawal of your letters without reservation, for though some of the details in them are right, I don't deserve their general contents.

Greetings.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half June 1885

Nuenen, 2nd. Half June 1885

Dear Theo,

I think you will have received the box by now.

I must tell you that I have another similar subject, a white clay cottage, the size more in the breadth.

Yesterday I witnessed a large forest fire on a blazing hot afternoon. It was a wood in the middle of a bare stretch of moor, and those enormous masses of black-and-white smoke that went straight up into the air were a peculiar sight. The fire was limited to the heath, the fir needles and dry twigs. The stems remained standing.

I am very busy drawing figures, but I shall have to make a hundred of them before I paint them, as this will save me time and money.

I think they are getting rounder and fuller than at first.

But I am absolutely without money, and hardly know how to get to the end of the month.

At times it makes me quite melancholy that the result is always “unsaleable.”

But I go on, and harden myself against it.

Others have had to bear it too. Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Hasn't there been a Lhermitte number this May?

I repeat - work in spite of all *indifference* is not easy to keep up, but what is easy isn't worth much.

Painting rural life is a thing that will keep its value, and the fight won by others *continues* all the same. And one can win it anew. Far from there being too many painters of rural life - in my opinion it would be better to have some hundreds more.

It is no bad idea that in France they are decorating the town halls with scenes from rural life, like a number of pictures at the Salon. I suppose they will carry it still further.

But - it is even better that the pictures of peasants get into *houses* in magazines and other reproductions, directly among the people.

And so my being discouraged is only a passing mood.

At home I heard that you had written them something about Serret, his having said that I could count on his sympathy, *etc*. Is Serret a painter, a dealer or an art lover? Up to now I'd never heard of him. I wanted to put Germinal into the box with the pictures, but in the end I was afraid it would get shoved in between the pictures and damage them. But I shall put it in the next box or return it by post; I think it is splendid.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 21 or 28 June 1885

Dear Theo,
Today being Sunday, I want to write you again.
Because I forgot to say something of Uhde's picture, “Laissez venir à moi les petits enfants.”

Yes, I like it, but it isn't new.

And I prefer interiors in a bright tone with peasant children, *without* a mystic figure of Christ, as Israëls or Artz paint them, to this one, where one gets a mystic Christ into the bargain.

The children are very expressive - but are they better than those by Labrichon, Frère or even Knaus, Vautier (in their best period)?

Do not think this unimportant, for all those people I mention were, especially in the past, extraordinarily clever in expressing character.

My objection to Uhde's picture is that there is a certain coldness in it like in new brick houses and schools and the Methodist churches. And notwithstanding the great merits of the picture, excuse me, but it makes me long for Decamps's or Isabey's less orthodox style of painting.

There is after all something consumptive in it, and I think a Corot, a Dupré, a Millet, infinitely healthier in tone.

But I can only judge from the reproduction; perhaps if I saw the picture, I should get more reconciled to it as to technique.

You know how much I like the bright painters too, but you see it goes too far, and Mantz expresses it very subtly when he says, “Ceux qui rêvent toujours partout le maximum des clairs, trouveraient d'une intensité un peu noire les verts de M. Harpignies” [those who are forever and everywhere dreaming of the maximum of light tones would find Mr. Harpignies's greens somewhat black].

That's it exactly: They begin to find heresy in every effect against a strong and coloured light, in every shadow - they never seem to walk early in the morning or in the evening at sunset - they want to see nothing but full daylight, or gaslight, or even electric light!

Now, the effect of all this on me is that I sometimes detect in myself a longing to see things like, for instance, “The Moving Out” by Nuyen, like an old Leys, like a Cabat, a Diaz, or Lepoitevin.

Perhaps you will call this nothing but my constant waywardness. But I begin by admitting that I find Uhde's picture very good; only having found it good, I became conscious of an aftertaste that is not altogether peasant, at least not cheering, because that kind of painter generally doesn't improve in his later pictures.

Well, it is a typical picture for the house Goupil & Co.; of their best. They have also had Knaus at Goupil's, and Labrichon too. I assure you that I do not systematically despise all this, far from it. Does it express what I mean when I say it thus: “It is a *good* picture of Messrs. Goupil & Co.'s?” Does it express what I mean when I say, “Beaucoup, mais *beaucoup* de talent - autant que possible - du génie? *Non.*” [Lots, oh, *lots* of talent - as much as you like - but genius? *No*.]

This picture of Uhde's is much more German (notice in Mantz's article how slyly he chaffs Meyerheim, “*nature mortier*” - did you notice it?), I repeat, much more German than it seems.

Oh, how wise, those new, those arrogant people of the new progress who criticize Harpignies, I am sure that you cannot stand them either, and in character they are a new edition of Monnier's M. Prudhomme.

To speak of something more stimulating. I enclose a wood engraving after Clausen; he began rather in a German style but has improved, as Neuhuys also often improved.

The reason why I send you this little print is - here at last you have something of English art; it reminds me of work by Pinwell and Fred. Walker. It is different from Millet, but you will see, however long you look at it, it never bores you.

Don't throw it away, for one so seldom sees something of that rare art, which one must not mistake for Bridgmann, for instance.

And the other little print, though less virile in conception, is mighty good as to sentiment and also quite original.

Every day I work hard on drawing figures. But I must have a hundred of them, even more, before I am through. I want to find something different from my old drawings and to grasp the character of the peasants - especially those from this neighbourhood.

And it is about harvest time, and then I must make a campaign both of corn reaping, and potato digging. At that time it is twice as hard to get models, and yet it is necessary, for I become more and more convinced that one cannot be too conscientious, that one must always exert oneself on what Daudet calls “the search for the model” (in L'Histoire de mon Livre, an article about “Les rois en exil,” which I just read).

I should like to show Serret the studies of the harvest too. Therefore I cannot tell exactly when I shall be able to send the portfolio with studies from the model. But at all events it will be soon. I also hope to send before the harvest about three more cottages, painted studies, like those last ones. Am I wrong when I think there is some good in the old tower? Have you already varnished it?

Both are now dry enough for a little varnish, and *need it badly*, because both are painted over something else. Can you fix the time of your coming approximately? And are there no new Lhermittes? Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I repeat, there are only too many examples of the very bright painters later becoming chalky or oily; it is because I noticed this so often that I have certain reservations, that I cannot altogether admire Uhde's picture. “The Two Blacksmiths” by Raffaelli is very beautiful.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early July 1885

Dear Theo,
Thanks for the money, your letter and the Raffaelli catalogue. I think the drawings in it masterly. What he himself says further about “le charactéristique” is interesting.

His article is a mixture of very simple words that come from the heart and from a nervous artistic temperament; these are striking. And besides - of words which, I think, Raffaelli himself understands as little as those who must read them. So it is an article full of very fine things and full of mistakes. That's what I like to read more than anything else. For what he talks about is so intensely complicated after all.

Yet the substance of what he says is satisfactory in the reading, and with all his queer sallies he says something that is healthy and true.

Theo, you must not think that if I saw Uhde's picture myself I should lose the impression I got from it. I repeat, I think it will be the same with this man as with Knaus and Labrichon. After a few things of character, it is the very technique that will be his undoing, that is to say, he will become more and more correct in his work and more and more dry.

In my opinion as a painter Raffaelli ranks much higher than Uhde.

You never hear me being pessimistic about Lhermitte, do you? So I am not a man who always doubts. On the contrary, I have a very strong confidence in some people.

I had never seen anything of Raffaelli's except those two blacksmiths; I wrote you about it at the time.

Raffaelli and especially Lhermitte possess what Raffaelli calls “conscience.”

I am afraid that this will be Uhde's weak point, that he will no longer know his own mind.

So much for that. You say that the silvery grey Uhde uses is so beautiful and that if I saw the picture I should think differently of it.

No, boy - I have seen so much grey in my life that such a bit of silver-grey cannot seduce me so easily as it used to.

Painting grey as a *system* is becoming intolerable, and we shall certainly get to see the other side of the coin.

Yet in order to convince you that I want to appreciate its good qualities, and have nothing against it, I am just now working on a grey picture. We can't help discussing these things further someday. Don't forget, however, that though I have some objections to Uhde, I admit that I certainly admire the main part of *this* picture, which forms three-quarters of it - the children.

I must go out and work - I didn't want to put off writing any longer; I am dog-tired every day because I have to go far, far across the heath!

I have also done some more figures.

I am very sorry to hear what you said about the money, that you will be very hard up yourself.

Painting is sometimes so damned expensive, and especially nowadays, it is so necessary to follow one's own idea, coûte que coûte.

“Il nous faut un art de force vive” [What we want is an art with live vigour], Raffaelli says, and in order to reach that aim in figure drawing, it costs a lot of trouble to find models.

The time has past - and I don't want it back - when it was enough for a figure to be academically, conventionally correct, or rather, though many still ask for this, a reaction is setting in - and I hope it will make some stir. The artists call for character, well - the public will do the same.

I assure you that Uhde's Christ is a *sad* failure indeed, it is definitely below the mark - the children are good.

I like Lhermitte and Raffaelli so much because their work is so thoroughly logical, sensible and honest!

I have here before me some figures: a woman with a spade, seen from behind; another bending to glean the ears of corn; another seen from the front, her head almost on the ground, digging carrots. I have been watching those peasant figures here for more than a year and a half, especially their action, just to catch their character. Therefore I cannot stand such a Santa Claus as Uhde painted in that little school - the little school in itself is very beautiful though. Uhde himself - oh, I am sure that he knows it quite well, and that he has only done so because the honest people in his country want a “sujet” and “something (conventional) to make them think,” as otherwise he would have to starve. One of these days, if I can find a moment when I am not too tired to write, I shall try to tell you once again how splendid I find some things in Raffaelli. Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 1st half July 1885

Nuenen, 1st half July 1885
Amice Rappard,
To my regret I have not yet discovered any reply from you. The more I think about it the more I feel that I shall personally not be at all sorry to be done with you - unless you withdraw once and for all a correspondence that - in my opinion - is hardly a credit to you. But I repeat that I am willing to look upon the whole business as a misunderstanding, and not to alter our friendly relations, provided that you realize yourself - that you were mistaken.

As I don't want things to drag on on any account, I beg you to answer me before the end of the week. And I shall know, according to the contents of your letter, what to decide.

In case you do not write this week - *I no longer desire your reply*. And then time will tell whether your remarks about my work and my person were justified or not - were made in good faith or not.

With greetings,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, mid July 1885

Dear Theo,
The last time I wrote you I was in such a hurry. Right now I need all my time, because I am working a full two hours from here. What I want is to have some more beautiful hovels far away on the heath. I have four now, as large as the two I last sent you, and a few smaller ones. They are not yet dry, and I think I shall give them the finishing touches in the studio. But then I want to send them to you together with some figure studies, to show the latter to Serret. But now I want to tell you that for the present, as there are about six rather large paintings, I intend to make only small ones. Especially because according to what Raffaelli and Mantz and others' articles say, at the last Salon and in general there were a great many enormous canvases.

Though I have not read this in one of the articles, this Salon might perhaps be called “Le Salon des marchands de couleur.”

I should like to send you this lot before you come here, because otherwise so much time will be lost.

And then I shall take up quite different subjects again.

I think that you will see from the things I brought from the heath that it is very characteristic there. The interiors are splendid, and now I have made some friends there among the people, with whom I am always welcome.

How did it go with the money this month? I hope a little better than you expected, for it worried me when you wrote that you were hard up yourself. I had to pay so much in the beginning of this month and have only just 5 guilders left. And it is still a long time before the end of the month.

And next month I shall again have much to pay. I cannot and may not do otherwise than spend relatively much on models.

It is the same here as everywhere, people do not like to pose, and if it weren't for the money, *nobody* would.

But as they are for the most part very poor, and especially many weavers are out of work, I can somehow manage to get them. But painting what I want, and especially improving the figures, is a question of money.

Did you read in Sensier's book that when Millet had the good fortune to inherit some thousand francs, instead of using it to make himself a little more comfortable - indeed, he was poor enough - he immediately set out on a trip to his native village, in order to paint the peasants there again, and it swallowed up his whole legacy, and *Millet was right*.

Others did the same - for instance, Paul Dubois, who spent his whole patrimony on models, and was for a time quite melancholy because of money worries.

But I haven't any legacy to expect - and I cannot do as I should like.

But pardon me when I say that, if Serret and you - and very rightly too - want to see other qualities in my figures, I shall have to spend more on my models. I do not know how people manage to fill the Salon with yards and yards of canvas. Well, among those cottages there are a few that I have painted in a much brighter tone; but I repeat, however much I may like grey pictures, more and more I appreciate the people who also paint the more gloomy effects beside the silver-grey colour scale.

What I shall do now - if the month turns out a little better than you expected, and if you can send something extra, however little - is to send you the four pictures. Otherwise - I shan't have the money to send them. But in that case I will send them as soon as I have the money for next month, and, at all events, before that time, the figure studies to show Serret.

But I hope you will bring those figure studies back when you come. For I am going to add others which I need for painting.

I shall want them for figures that are definitely not larger than, for instance, a span and even less - so that everything in it will become even more concentrated.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, July 1885

Dear Theo,
I wish the 4 canvases I wrote to you about had gone. If I keep them here for much longer, I might paint them over again and I think it's better if you get them just as they come, off the heath. The reason I haven't sent them is that I don't want to send them to you carriage forward at a time when you say that you yourself might be short of cash, and I cannot afford the carriage myself.

I have never seen the little house in which Millet lived - but I imagine that these 4 little human nests are of the same sort. One is the residence of a gentleman popularly known as “the mourning peasant” - the other is inhabited by a worthy soul who, when I went there, was up to nothing more mysterious than digging her potato-clamp, but who must be capable of practicing witchcraft - she goes by the name of “the witch's head,” anyway.

You'll remember that Gigoux's book tells how it came about that 17 of Delacroix's pictures were turned down all at the same time. That shows - to me at least - that he and others of that period were faced with connoisseurs and non-connoisseurs alike, who neither understood them nor wanted to buy anything by them - but that they, who are rightly called “les vaillants” [the brave] in the book, didn't talk of fighting a losing battle but *went on painting*.

What I wanted to say again is that if we take that story about Delacroix as our starting point, we still have a lot of painting to do.

I find myself faced with the necessity of being that most disagreeable of people, in other words of having to ask for money. And since I don't think that sales will pick up in the next few days, the situation seems rather dire. But I put it to you, isn't it better for both of us, après tout, to work hard, no matter what problems that may entail, than to sit around philosophizing at a time like this?

I can't tell the future, Theo - but I do know the eternal law that all things change. Think back 10 years, and things were different, the circumstances, the mood of the people, in short everything. And 10 years hence much is bound to have changed again. But *what one does* remains - and one does not easily regret having done it. The more active one is, the better, and I would sooner have a failure than sit idle and do nothing.

Whether or not Portier is the right man to do something with my work - we need him now at any rate. And this is what I have in mind. After, say, a year's work, we shall have put together more than we have now, and I know for sure that my work will fare better the more I can add to it. People who show some liking for it now, who speak of it as he does, and show it from time to time are useful, because if I work for, let's say, another year and they are able to add a few more things to their collection, that will speak for itself even if the collectors themselves have nothing to say at all.

If you happen to see Portier, tell him that, far from giving up, I intend sending him much more. You, too, must go on showing my work if you meet people. It won't be all that long before we have more important things to show.

You yourself will have seen - and it is something that pleases me enormously - that 1-man shows, or shows by just a few who belong together, are becoming increasingly popular. I'm sure that in the art world this has more avenir [future] than other ventures.

It's a good thing people are beginning to realize that a Bouguereau does not do well next to a Jacque - or a figure by Beyle or Lhermitte next to a Schelfhout or Koekkoek. Scatter Raffaelli's drawings about and judge for yourself if it's still possible to get a good idea of that singular artist. He - Raffaelli - is different from Régamey, but I think he has just as much personality.

If I kept my work with me, I am sure I should go on repainting it. Sending it to you and Portier just as it comes from the countryside or from the cottages, I may well include an example that isn't any good - but some things will have been saved that would not have been improved by frequent repainting.

Now supposing you had these 4 canvases and a few smaller studies of cottages, someone who saw nothing else of mine would be bound to think that I painted nothing but cottages. And likewise with the series of heads. But peasant life involves so many different things, that when Millet speaks of “travailler comme *plusiers* nègres” [working like a bunch of slaves], this is truly what has to be done if one wants to assemble a body of work.

One may laugh at Courbet's saying, “Peindre des anges! Qui est-ce qui a vu des anges?” [Painting angels! Who has ever seen angels?] But to that I should like to add, “des justices au harem, qui est-ce qui a vu des justices au harem?” [Justice in the harem, who has ever seen justice in the harem?] And Benjamin Constant's painting, Des Combats de Taureaux, “qui est-ce qui en a vu?” [Bullfights, who has ever seen those?] And so many other Moorish and Spanish things, cardinals, and then all those historical paintings they keep on doing yards high and yards wide! What is the use of it all and what are they doing it for? Within a few years most of it looks dull and dreary and more and more boring. But still, perhaps they are well painted, they could be that.

Nowadays, when connoisseurs stand in front of a painting like the one by

Benj. Constant, or like some reception given by some cardinal by I don't know which Spaniard - it's the custom to say, with a meaningful air, something about “clever technique.” But as soon as those same connoisseurs are confronted by a subject from peasant life or a drawing by, say, Raffaelli, they criticize the technique with the same knowing air - à la C. M.

You may think I'm wrong to comment on this, but I'm so struck by the fact that all these exotic pictures were painted *in the studio*. Just try going outside and painting things on the spot! All sorts of things happen then. I had to pick off a good hundred or more flies from the 4 canvases you're about to receive, not to mention dust and sand, etc., not to mention the fact that if one carries them through heath and hedgerows for a couple of hours, a branch or two is likely to scratch them, *etc*. Not to mention the fact that when one arrives on the heath, one feels tired and hot after a couple of hours' walk in this weather. Not to mention the fact that the figures don't stand still like professional models, and that the effects one wants to capture change as the day wears on.

I don't know how it is with you - but as far as I am concerned, the more I work at it, the more absorbed I get in peasant life. And the less I care for Cabanel-like things, among which I would include Jacquet, and the present-day Benj. Constant - or the highly praised but inexpressibly, hopelessly dry technique of the Italians & Spaniards. “Imagiers!” [Popular print makers!] I often think of that term of Jacque's.

Yet I do have *parti pris* [prejudice], I respond to Raffaelli, who paints something quite other than peasants - I respond to Alfred Stevens, to Tissot, to mention something completely different from peasants - I respond to a beautiful portrait.

Zola, who otherwise, in my opinion, makes some colossal blunders when he judges pictures, says something beautiful about art in general in Mes haines: “Dans le tableau (l'oeuvre d'art), je cherche, j'aime l'homme - l'artiste.” [In the picture (the work of art), I look for, I love the man - the artist.]

There you have it; I think that's absolutely true. I ask you, what kind of *man*, what kind of visionary, or *thinker*, observer, what kind of human character is there behind certain canvases extolled for their technique - often *no kind at all*, as you know. But a Raffaelli is somebody, a Lhermitte is *somebody*, and with many pictures by almost unknown people one has the feeling that they were made with a *will*, with *feeling*, with *passion*, with *love*.

The *technique* of a painting from peasant life or - in Raffaelli's case - from the heart of urban workers, introduces problems quite other than those of the smooth painting and portrayal of actions of a Jacquet or Benjamin Constant. Namely, living in cottages day in and day out, being out in the fields just like the peasants

- in the heat of the sun in summer, enduring snow and frost in winter, not indoors but out in the open, and not just while taking a walk but day in, day out, like the peasants themselves.

And I ask you, all things considered, am I really so wrong to object to the criticisms of those experts, who more than ever before bandy this so *often* irrelevant word “technique” about (giving it an increasingly conventional relevance)? Considering all the traipsing and trudging it takes to paint “the mourning peasant” in his cottage, I dare say this work involves a longer, more tiring journey than the one so many painters of exotic subjects - whether “la justice au harem” or “reception at a cardinal's” - have to go on to produce their choicest eccentric subjects - since Arabic or Spanish or Moorish models are readily available, against payment, in Paris. But anyone who, like Raffaelli, paints the ragpickers of Paris *in their own quarter*, has greater problems and his work is more serious.

Nothing seems simpler than painting peasants or ragpickers and other workers, but - there are no subjects in painting as difficult as those everyday figures! As far as I know, not a single academy exists in which one can learn to draw and paint a digger, a sower, a woman hanging a pot over the fire, or a seamstress. But every city of any importance has an academy with a choice of models for historical, Arabic, Louis XV - in a nutshell, *every sort of figure, provided they do not exist in reality*.

When I send you and Serret a few studies of diggers or peasant women weeding, gleaning corn, etc., *as the first* of a whole series on all kinds of work in the fields, you or Serret may discover flaws in them, which it will be helpful to me to know about and which I shall in all probability acknowledge.

But I should like to point out something perhaps worthy of consideration. All academic figures are put together in the same way, and, let us admit, “on ne peut mieux” [it cannot be done better] - impeccably - *faultlessly*. You will have gathered what I am driving at - they do not lead us to *any new discoveries*.

Not so the figures of a Millet, a Lhermitte, a Régamey, a Lhermitte [sic], a Daumier. They are also well put together - but *après tout, not the way the academy teaches*. I believe that no matter how academically correct a figure may be, it is superfluous, though it were by Ingres himself (with the exception of his Source, because that *surely* was, is and always shall be, something new), once it lacks that essential modern aspect, the intimate character, the real *action*.

You may ask, when will the figure *not* be superfluous, for all its faults, and grave faults to my way of thinking? When the digger digs, when the peasant is a peasant and the peasant woman is a peasant woman, is this anything new? Yes, even the little figures by Ostade and Terborch don't work as people do today.

I could say much more on the subject, and I should like to say how much I myself want to improve what I have begun - and how much more highly I value the work of some others than I do my own. I ask you - do you know of a single digger, a single sower, in the old Dutch school? Did they ever try to do “a worker”? Did Velásquez look for one in his water carrier or his types from the people? No. *Work*, that's what the figures in the old pictures don't do.

I've been plodding away the last few days at a woman whom I saw pulling carrots in the snow last winter. Look - Millet has done it, Lhermitte, and by and large the painters of peasants from this century - say an Israëls - they consider it more beautiful than anything else. But even in this century, how relatively few among the legion of artists paint *the figure* - yes, *for the figure's sake* avant tout [above all], *i.e.* for the sake of form and modelé [modelling], yet *cannot imagine it otherwise than in action*, and want - what the old masters and even the old Dutch masters who depicted so many conventional actions avoided - want, as I say, *to paint the action for the action's sake*. So that the painting or the drawing has to be a *figure* drawing for the sake of the figure and of the unutterably harmonious form of the human body - but at the same time a *pulling of carrots in the snow*. Do I make myself clear? I hope so, and you might mention it to Serret.

I can put it more succinctly - a nude by Cabanel, a lady by Jacquet, and a peasant woman *not by Bastien Lepage*, but by a *Parisian* who has learned his drawing at the academy, will always convey the limbs and the structure of the body in the same way - sometimes charming, accurate in proportion and anatomical detail. But when Israëls, or, say, Daumier or Lhermitte, draw a figure, one gets much more of a sense of the *shape* of the body, and yet - and that's the very reason I'm pleased to include Daumier - the proportions will sometimes be almost *arbitrary*, the anatomy and structure often anything but correct *in the eyes of the academicians*. But it will *live*. And Delacroix too, in particular.

It still isn't well put. Tell Serret *that I should be in despair if my figures were good*, tell him that I don't *want* them to be academically correct, tell him that what I'm trying to say is that if one were to *photograph* a digger, he would certainly not be *digging* then. Tell him that I think Michelangelo's figures are splendid, although the legs are unquestionably too long, the hips and buttocks too broad. Tell him that, to my mind, Millet and Lhermitte are the true artists, because they do not paint things as they are, examined in a dry analytical manner, but as they, Millet, Lhermitte, Michelangelo, feel them to be. Tell him that I long most of all to learn how to produce those very inaccuracies, those very aberrations, reworkings, transformations of reality, as may turn it into, well

- a lie if you like - but truer than the literal truth.

And now it's nearly time to close - but I felt the need to say once more that those who paint peasant life or the life of the people, though they may not be counted among the “hommes du monde” [men of the world], may well stay the course better in the long run than the creators of exotic harems and cardinal's receptions, painted in Paris.

I know that it is disagreeable of one to ask for money at awkward moments - but my excuse is that painting what appear to be the most commonplace things is sometimes the most difficult and expensive. The expenses that *I must incur if I want to work* are at times considerable when compared with my means. I assure you that had my constitution not become virtually like that of a peasant, through exposure to the elements, I should not have been able to endure it, for there is simply nothing left over for my personal comfort. But then I don't seek that for myself either, any more than many peasants seek anything other than to live as they do. But what I do ask for is paint, and above all models.

From what I write about the figure drawings you will no doubt have gathered that I am particularly keen on going ahead with them. You wrote not long ago that Serret had spoken to you “with conviction” about certain faults in the structure of the figures in the Potato Eaters. But you will have seen from my answer that I found fault on that score myself as well, though I did point out that this was my impression after I had seen the cottage many evenings in the dim lamplight, after I had painted 40 heads, from which follows that I set out from a different point of view.

However, now that we have started to discuss the figure, I have a great deal to say. I find Raffaelli's perception of “character,” that is, the words he uses to describe it, good and well chosen and exemplified by the drawings. But those who, like Raffaelli, move in artistic and literary circles in Paris, have, après tout, different ideas from, for instance, mine, out here in the country among the peasants. My point is that they are looking for a single word that will sum up all their ideas - he suggests the word “character” for the figures of the future. I agree with that, with what I think is the meaning - but I believe as little in the accuracy of the word as in the accuracy of other words - as little as in the accuracy or effectiveness of my own expressions.

Rather than say, “there must be character in a digger,” I would put it like this: the peasant must be a peasant, the digger must dig, and then there will be something essentially modern in them. But I feel that even these words may give rise to misconceptions - even were I to add a whole string of them.

Far from cutting down on the expenses for models - which is a fairly heavy burden on me now as it is - I think spending a little more is called for, very much called for. For what I am aiming at is quite different from doing “a little figure” drawing. To show the *peasant figure in action,* that - I repeat - is what an essentially modern figure painting really does, it is the very essence of modern art, something neither the Greeks nor the Renaissance nor the old Dutch school have done.

This is a question I ponder every day. The difference between the great, or the lesser, masters of today (the great, *e.g.* Millet, Lhermitte, Breton, Herkomer; the lesser, *e.g.* Raffaelli and Régamey) and the old schools is, however, something I have rarely seen expressed in articles about art. just think about it and see if you don't agree. They started doing peasants' and workmen's figures as a “genre” - but nowadays, with Millet, the perennial master, in the lead, these figures have become the very essence of modern art and so they will remain.

People like Daumier - one must respect them, for they are among the pioneers. The simple *but modern nude* - as revived by Henner and Lefevre - ranks high. Baudry, and above all such sculptors as Mercier and Dalou, are also amongst the very soundest. But the fact is that peasants and ouvriers [workers] are not nudes, nor does one need to imagine them in the nude. The more that people begin to do workers' and peasants' figures, the better I shall like it. And for myself, I can think of nothing I like as much.

This is a long letter and I'm not even sure if I've made myself entirely clear. Perhaps I'll write a few lines to Serret too. If I do, I'll send the letter to you to read, for I do want to make plain how much importance I attach to the figure issue.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 21 July 1885

Amice Rappard,

The reason it is necessary to put a stop to these bickerings is, first of all, that they begin to bear too close a resemblance to the dispute between a certain pair of devout preachers, who argued with so much ferocity over a difference of opinion concerning the exact geographical location of the road to salvation that at the very same moment and with the very same gesture they threw their respective wigs into each other's face. Indeed, the wigs would be appropriate - and - how, with the best will in the world, could we go on, seeing that we have just arrived at a critical point, and neither you nor I possess the indispensable missile in question? -I am therefore at my wits' end, and I deeply regret that we have started something that we are unable to bring to the above-mentioned triumphant end - quite worthy of the cause.

Our dispute has a decidedly ridiculous side, in my opinion, and it is bound to get more and more so, for which reason I won't go into the subject any further. It is too absurd.

Be sensible, and put a stop to it on your part too.

All the thoughts that occur to one's mind don't come straight from one's conscience - whether your *conscience* dictated your letters to you? - whether it was your duty to write them? - what drivel is this! - laugh it off.

But since you *thought* it was your duty, since you *thought* your conscience urged you to do it, I will let the whole business with all its extra adornments go, and so be *finished*.

The question remains as to whether you are thinking of coming here to do a number of studies, and if so, approximately when. Then I shall see to it that you can stay at my mother's house as usual.

With greetings,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 3 August 1885

[The envelope of this letter is addressed to: Furnée, Korte Poten, The Hague, and bears the postmark: Nuenen, 3 August 1885.]

Dear Mr. Furnée,

In reply to your postcard I want to submit a few things to you for your consideration.

I wrote you that after my father's death I had taken a house of my own here, and I requested you to have patience, as I should soon be able to send you the money.

But look here, perhaps you know that until now I have received financial help from my brother, who is an art dealer in Paris. I am making progress with my work, and the chances of selling are better than they used to be; but at the same time this is the very moment when financial assistance from others has been completely discontinued, and I am exclusively dependent on my own work. My father's decease as well as my wish to be quite on my own are two changes that for the time being make me even poorer than I was before.

And look here - suppose you draw a bill of exchange on me, well, I *cannot* pay cash; if I have it, it will be 10 guilders one time and 5 guilders another, and to earn these I shall have to pay for canvas, colours, brushes again. So if you should demand payment, you would have to resort to extreme measures (if you should insist on ready money), *i.e.* selling my furniture and my other possessions. These consist of a small number of old chairs and a plain wooden worktable, and the long and short of it is that they are of so little value that the whole lot together, in a village like the one I live in, would not bring 10 guilders.

So what will you gain by doing this? If you really want to, I should not much care, but it would most decidedly not bee the way to get your money; but if you will wait, I will pay you in full.

If you should draw your bill and take these tremendous measures - well, it would be to my advantage.

I have only one thing, and that is steadily improving: I mean my pictures and my drawings.

What I hear people say about them is good as well as bad, and they can all think whatever they like of them. But as for the present case - seeing that they represent my only means of paying you, what do you want?

Will you wait until I sell something and settle my account? *All right* - I am not dishonest, and I *shall* pay you as soon as I have the money.

Do you want me to send you some of my work, so that you will be able to show it to art lovers?

There is nothing I should like better.

I have inherited - not a single cent.

In the first place my father was not rich, and in the second place not one of the children has claimed his or her portion of the inheritance.

I don't think you will be the loser if you try to achieve some success with my paintings. I am willing to send you a number of them, and perhaps they will not disappoint you. It might mean that I should not only be able to pay you, but also to buy even more colours.

At present I need colours quite as much as money.

As I am *very much afraid of being in debt*, I do not run up high bills, I buy very little and only cash down, and I use only the colours I get brayed here.

If I am forced to let you wait, it is because I have to wait even worse myself.

As for drawing a bill of exchange, I tell you emphatically that I do not appeal to your clemency, that you would, however, have to take extreme measures, and I add that it would be to my advantage, as I possess literally nothing but my tools. Please answer this letter in any case, for you should know that if you draw a bill, you will *not* gain your object, and that later on I shall certainly not pay you, seeing that in that case you will have lost your rights. But *you will be paid*, either if on your part you are willing to try and dispose of some of my work for me, or if you will wait until I sell something of what I have on hand here.

I offer you my apologies for all this, but the circumstances I related are my excuse. However, I am not doing so badly, and *above all things you should not despair of getting your money*; it will be all right, but I myself have to wait worse and longer than you.

With regards,

Yours obediently, Vincent van Gogh

One last word.

If I were dishonest, certainly no moment could be more opportune than the present to get rid of a few small debts by letting you draw your bill of exchange, and then passively awaiting developments. But I need not be disturbed by the comparatively small amount I have to pay. I work too hard to believe that I work in vain. If I said to you and Leurs, to whom I owe another 25 guilders, go ahead with your bills, *you*, and not *I*, would be the losers.

Please note once and for all that I am not exactly afraid of bills of exchange. I buy nearly everything cash down and I regulate my requirements so much in accordance with my ready money that now and then weeks pass without my spending a single guilder except on bread. Last year I had an ugly setback in the matter of the decoration of a dining room, which I did for somebody who would not pay me. If you take into consideration that notwithstanding all my exertions I have not yet recovered from the deficit thus occasioned - the colours I got from you and Leurs last year were destined for that purpose - you will understand that the year was not lucrative for me. I have no friends - and yet I tell you, do not despair of getting your money!

But could you manage to show some of my work at The Hague? That would be the best thing, and in this way you would serve your own interests as well as mine. I don't ask high prices, and the amount in question is not big. And therefore I suggest you try it. I haven't any money, less than ever before, as this is a period in which I am making myself independent of all subsidies.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 6 August 1885

Dear Theo,
Just a line to welcome you. I wish it would be convenient for you to drop in with your friend Bonger this afternoon before dinner, let's say between 3 and 5.

I thought this might be the best thing to do, as you will then be free to spend the whole evening at home.

I am rather busy, as they are reaping the corn in the fields, for, as you know, this lasts only a few days, and it is one of the most beautiful things.

But I will take care to be in the studio between 3 and 5.

In the evening I'll drop in at Mother's for a little talk.

But for the rest, you must not be offended when I go on with my work.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 7 August 1885

Dear Theo,

The thing in our conversation that makes me utterly disconsolate was that, when I said I was afraid that you would have a hard nut to crack during the current year, you answered that “you had observed I should like to see this happen, that you see quite clearly that you cannot count on me, and that you know all right that I shall reward you with stinking ingratitude.” This is not true, and I am disconsolate that you see it that way.

Let me give you this hint: don't consider this painting business of mine a burden, and don't treat it in a stepmotherly way, because it may prove to be *a little lifeboat* when the big ship is wrecked. My hint is now, and will be in the future: Let's try and keep the little boat trim and seaworthy, whether the tempest comes, or my uneasiness proves unfounded. At present I am a tiny vessel which you have in tow, and which at times will seem to you so much ballast. But this - I mean the ballast - you may leave behind by cutting the towrope, if you like… But I, who am the skipper of my tiny vessel, ask in this case that - far from having the towrope cut - that my little boat be kept trim and well provisioned, in order that I may do better service in times of need.

If you doubt the good faith of this request, then the only thing for me to do is to repeat it even more urgently. For I perceive that in the matter of my colour bill my little vessel is leaking here and there. However, I am trying to stop these leaks to the best of my ability, and I have not lost my self-command yet. Neither am I desperate. But considering that both of us may be overtaken by the same tempest, I am speaking concretely and, as far as I can see, in our mutual interest.

I can summarize your answer to my question thus: it may be that there will be a tempest, but even in that case don't count on repairs or provisions, and bear in mind that under the pressure of certain circumstances I may feel obliged to cut the towrope.

This answer I must accept, but only as long as it is not aggravated by doubting my good faith.

However, with this letter I cry out to you once more that my request for reinforcement may prove to be in both our interests, and I do not make it out of selfishness, as you suppose. That in case of a tempest, *I shall be willing, and perhaps able*, to be of some use and service to you, but that this will be impossible if my own vessel is swamped (a thing I try to prevent) before the critical moment. This, however, is a thing I seek to stave off myself, but I should not cry out to you without necessity. I am not afraid in the midst of danger either, but I try to be ready at the moment of distress.

It may be that you don't think it reasonable of me to insist on *my* - and I should much prefer to say *our* - little painting business becoming the centre of a larger business which we might undertake together later on; but I for my part persist in claiming that something will and *shall* come of it, if only we remain sufficiently united.

If I haven't the same ideas as you, don't suspect me of bad faith or of evil intentions, either toward you or toward those at home. With regard to those at home I do nothing that I have no right to do, seeing that I refrain strictly and permanently from interfering in their affairs, or from obtruding either my advice or any questions, and remain absolutely on my own ground - and that I even keep back my opinions of their affairs, as in point of fact we do not understand each other's interests.

And to you I speak, and I shall go on speaking, as one person dealing in pictures to another person dealing in pictures, and *I will not trespass* on the other territory.

And the question I started discussing with you is that however great the depression may be, and however much trouble we shall have to take, we must try energetically to push forward the little painting business that belongs to you as much as to me.

I say it may be a lifeboat which may be of use to you in the tempest, although I don't wish for this tempest any more than you can wish for it.

Goodbye.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, mid August 1885

Dear Theo,
That colour dealer writes me that I can send him the pictures. But he wants me to send them as soon as possible, because there are many foreigners in The Hague just now. He is perfectly right there.

Now I must beg you to try to send me enough money to have a box made and to pay the carriage. Deduct it from the next month's allowance if you like, but I haven't got a cent and I want to send the pictures at once.

Your visit has really left me no comforting impression; more than ever I believe that more difficulties are threatening you in the coming years than you suppose.

I go on insisting that it is fatal that your energy has manifestly taken another direction, instead of being turned to making a success of painting for both of us. And yet it is only a very short time ago that you wrote you had more confidence now, and that my work was good.

You take it as though I were misbehaving toward you, or were your enemy, because at present I object to quite a number of things. And I am very uneasy about the future. For all that, I cannot speak otherwise than I did.

In my opinion you don't in the least belong among the rising men. Resent this if you like, and in the future treat me just as you like because of it.

I will take back my objections as soon as I see quite different things in you - but that I made them on the occasion of your visit - *yes*.

Though you say *today*, “I am selling to the tune of 500,000 fr. a year” - this does not impress me the least little bit, as I am too much convinced of the difficulty of keeping it up for one-half, or one-fifth, and of delivering the goods in the years to come.

It is too high up in the air for my taste, too little on solid ground. And, after all, art itself is solid enough, that isn't the trouble. But being a counting house is a *passing* thing, “être un comptoir *cela passe*,” is not a phrase of my own but of somebody whose sayings have come terribly true.

I wish you were or would become a painter.

I say this straight out, more emphatically than before, because I really believe that the great art-dealing business is in many respects a speculation like the bulb trade was. And the situations in it, dependent on chance and freaks of fortune.

Make a mistake in a calculation - even supposing it is only an insignificant slip - and what will become of the enormous figure of your present turnover? This figure is wholly dependent on a whim of Messrs. Goupil & Co.'s.

And *connoisseurship*, the clean aspect of it without *claptrap*, is more nearly related to the practice of art than you would be inclined to think. Dealing in pictures is quite different when one is entirely on one's own from doing business in the employ of big distributors. And the same is true of a lot of other things.

So, in short - work hard - but at the same time try to work sensibly. The trouble you have taken along with me - for furnishing money is taking trouble too, and I don't in the least try to get away from it - this trouble anyway has been an act of personal initiative, of personal will and energy - but what shall I have to say and think of it if there is nothing to compensate for the gradual but undeniable weakening of financial aid?

In my opinion, at least, now is just the moment to try to do something with my work. I have looked for addresses in Antwerp, too, and expect to hear more definitely from there shortly. Then I could probably send something there, too. But if you should know of anything, help me carry it through.

You told me yourself, “*Where there's a will there's a way*.” Well, I am going to take you at your word a little, at least as to your really wanting us to make *progress* together.

If I were to demand extravagant things and you refused - well, all right then - but when it is a question of the most urgent, the very simplest necessities of life, and it is increasingly and ever more badly becoming downright starvation, only then do I think you go too far in your economizing, and that in this respect it is far from useful.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

A few more words about Serret and Portier. Tell them the simple *facts*, namely *that* I did have some studies ready, but *that* I had to pay a colour dealer who was getting troublesome just now. *That* in order to put a stop to it I wrote him that his colours were invested in my studies, and that in consequence I requested him to do his best to sell something for me instead of bothering me. *That* I must follow this up and send him some things.

That as to the drawings I said I should show Serret, I need them myself, as I am in a hurry to do new things. But to a certain extent I attach importance to his knowing that I really had them when you came here, and to your telling him that you saw them in my house - and after that tell him exactly what you think.

I will not influence your own opinion.

However, that I feel sad at your approving of things as they are - yes, that is a fact.

But I do not refuse to take such measures - and even if such a colour-selling gentleman should want to sell up my poor sticks, he would be welcome to fill my cup to the brim. It is certain that the colour-dealing gentlemen are quite capable of being ruthless.

However, I am more than tired of talking about it - I've said my say - and you - you may take my hint as you think proper.

If those fellows want to attack me, and sell me up, seeing that they emphatically threatened to resort to legal measures to collect their money, and this in a matter of less than 30 guilders, then I shall not be able to resist them, and I shall let them have their way, but it will happen as it were under your very nose, as it is only a short while ago that you were here.

That I am *unable* to stop working at the height I have risen to now, that is a fact - every day I need colours, etc., I must push on, and if I want to pay for what I need today, yesterday's arrears will have to wait.

For your further guidance, here is a survey of my circumstances for the remainder of the current year, precise and in detail.

I have to pay three dealers, who are all three troublesome; I owe one 45 guilders; the second, 25 guilders; the third, 30 guilders. These amounts are exactly what remain of the bills - which were, of course, much bigger - incurred in the course of one year, and which I am paying off cash down as much as is possible for me with the utmost exertion.

Accordingly, deficit 100 guilders

Add rent for November 25 guilders

----

125 guilders or 250 fr.

Now suppose I get from you in September, October, November and December 4 X 150 fr. = 600 fr. Then 350 fr. remain for me until New Year's. *Add to this that for the current month I am left with literally nothing*, and that I must live during this month.

So from August until the first of January, *i.e. nearly five months*, I shall have to live *and paint* on 350 fr.

Which I *can* do on 150 fr. a month, although *not comfortably*, but all right, it can be done by way of a minimum.

But in the course of four months 250 fr. must be deducted for the payment of colours and rent; well, then my work is hampered and obstructed to such an extent that I am at my wit's end, and I prefer to tell the fellows: *Sell the whole* *lot! But let me work*!

This month I unhesitatingly threw in all I had in order to appease these fellows, but the cares arising from it are bad enough.

And my last word in this matter is that if my work were bloodless and rotten, I should think you were right to say, “*There is nothing I can do about it*.”

But now - seeing that larger and smaller painted studies as well as new drawings ought to make it clear to you that we are making progress, I am not so sure that “there is nothing I can do about it” must inevitably be your last word.

Discuss it with Serret, discuss it with Portier - and tell them how much I should like to work on, and how small are the opportunities I myself have of finding buyers, as the painting of rustics does not take me *to the cities* but *to the countryside* as my field of work.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half August 1885

Nuenen, 2nd half August 1885
Dear Theo,
Today I had a visit from Wenkebach, a painter from Utrecht, who is a friend of Rappard's. He is a landscape painter and I have often seen his name mentioned; he received a medal in London at the same time as Rappard. He has seen my work, those cottages which I am going to send you and also the drawings of figures.

I told him I was sorry to say there had been a misunderstanding between Rappard and me, which I could hardly explain otherwise than that he had been gossiping about my work with other people from The Hague, and as he had not seen anything of it for a long time, he had involuntarily been turned against me. I showed Wenkebach figures which Rappard used to like, and at the same time the new ones, and showed him that indeed I had changed in some respects and would change even more, but that what I made now was certainly not inferior.

Then he said that he did not doubt that Rappard would take back what he had written.

Then I showed him that, as to colour, I certainly do not want to *always* paint dark. Some of my cottages are even quite light.

But that my aim is to proceed from the primary colours - red, blue, yellow - and not from grey.

We had a long discussion about colour, and among other things he said he had noticed how Jaap Maris in old watercolours also frequently used ruddy, brownish-grey, red colours. So that if one puts them beside one of his present drawings, they become quite red.

It is the same with Israëls.

Perhaps I do more harm than good by telling you this, because it is only part of the conversation, and I ought to tell the whole of it. But we have discussed it before, so you will perhaps understand it in its real connection. In order to get an *honest, sound* palette, and *to stick to it,* it is necessary to practice the strongest colour scales too, and to continue to use them, especially in these days when imitators (not the masters themselves) of the great painters in grey want to paint more and more, always and everything *light*.

So Wenkebach said, for instance, that he liked the picture of the old tower for its technique too; I painted it last year, with a lot of bitumen in it. He said he found it quite original.

The same with other old things. That water mill, the plough with oxen, the avenue of autumn trees.

But what pleased me most of all was that he liked the figures.

He called them Millet-like. But I know for sure that I will get them even better if only I have some luck with the money and can continue working on them at full speed; but that is what rather worries me, and for this month I am *absolutely* cleaned out. I am literally without a penny.

We shall have hard times; it is not all my fault, but only by perseverance do we have a chance to reap, after some time, what we are sowing.

And it worries me enough that you have all those money troubles; I wish I could lighten them for you somewhat.

When you come over to Holland, wouldn't it be advisable to try Tersteeg once more?

Tersteeg is a man who *dares*; once he is convinced, he is all right. And the same with Mauve.

If there were many people who persevered in *studying* the figure, I should say there is little chance of finding help.

But they aren't so very numerous, and yet they aren't less necessary than before.

It is hard for you to keep it up all by yourself, and I cannot do anything to lessen the expenses; on the contrary, I wish I could take even more models. What is to be done?

One must not call it engaging in a hopeless struggle, for others have won, and we shall win too.

As to Rappard, I just wrote to him, I want him to retract completely what he has written. But you see, Theo, how much depends on being consistent in one's work.

I wrote Rappard that actually we have to fight other things than each other, and that at this moment those painting rural life and the life of the people must join hands because union is strength.

At any rate, one cannot do it alone; a whole group that is of the same mind can do more. You too must be of good courage, for perhaps we shall make more friends and then will become more animated, and perhaps the mutual discord will change into a peasant uprising against the kind of painters one finds on every jury nowadays, who, if they could, would even now obstruct the ideas which Millet pioneered.

Goodbye, send me something if you can, even if it's only 10 francs to help me through these last days of the month.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half August 1885

Nuenen, 2nd half August 1885
Dear Theo,
To my letter of the day before yesterday I want to add that yesterday I had a letter from Rappard, and that our quarrel is completely made up, that he has sent me a sketch of a large picture of a brickyard which he is painting. It looks very original; if you wanted to mention other pictures in the same style, it would be, for instance, Meunier, whose miners you saw in Antwerp.

He has taken a small house outside Utrecht, close to the brickyard, nothing but a studio (with a skylight); he also intends to go back to Terschelling, so he is again quite absorbed in nature, and in my opinion that is better than working in the city.

But I want to tell you that I hope we two shall also come to a better understanding. Just as little as I could accept his criticism can I be satisfied with the present condition in which my financial difficulties hamper my work too much. I don't want you to be the only one to put this right, but I simply want that we together (and not I alone) do our best to improve the situation. I know that it costs trouble and is not easy for you either, and as such I readily appreciate it; but to take trouble for a certain aim is no misfortune, and having to fight is essential to every honest victory.

The expenses of painting cannot always be avoided, and not to make them is *not* always the best policy, for if one hesitated to take models or to buy the necessary painting materials, no serious work could result.

And as things are getting worse and worse for me instead of better, they have finally got so bad that I really must complain.

And I repeat, let's keep that little painting business of mine in good shape, for sooner or later we may need it badly. If a storm is threatening, one must keep the boats well trimmed.

That man in The Hague is Leurs; he no longer lives in Practizijnshoek, but in Molenstraat.

He begs me to send him more than one picture in order to have more than one chance, and he offers me his two show windows. And as he himself is very much in need of money, he will not spare any effort.

I sent him a few cottages, the old church tower and some smaller studies with figures.

And while these are on show, I shall make some new ones to keep things going.

There is some chance of getting a second man at The Hague. But the main thing for me is to be able to go on with my work. Since you left, I have made another little picture of the harvest, the size of those carrot diggers in the snow - a reaper, a woman binding sheaves, and the mill, like those drawings you saw. An evening effect after sunset.

I also made some studies on interiors.

Once more I beg you to talk it over with Portier and Serret, to tell them that I am rather hard up, to stimulate them to do their best, that I for my part shall try to send them new things.

And let us manage to send off the box.

I have painted 3 more studies of women in the potato fields, of which you already saw the first one.

Rappard had seen Wenkebach, and in his letter there was no longer any trace of the tone which he had tried to adopt at first. And though he is going to Terschelling first, he writes about coming to paint some studies here.

Goodbye, and wishing you good luck,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, 2nd half August 1885

Nuenen, 2nd half August 1885
Amice Rappard,

I just received your letter and the sketch of your picture. It certainly is a beautiful subject, and I have nothing to object to in the composition as far as the equilibrium is concerned.

But will you allow me to say *one* thing? - which I would *not* say if the picture were finished and therefore difficult to alter, but which I *do* say because certain alterations that *won't* affect the *lines* might be carried out to advantage. Here you are then: the figure in the middle of the picture - the woman with the rake [sic] - is well placed. But the raking of that spot is a matter of *such* minor importance, in my opinion, that it ought not to be done by a *main figure*. For this reason I for my part should prefer the central figure - in the foreground - to be the one *who carries the bricks* (this being an action that would be very expressive here, and motivated by the *whole*), and I should prefer to give the figure on the *second* plane (who is now carrying bricks - and who now occupies a secondary place in the composition) a rake to hold in her hands.

Is this possible with regard to the working process? If not, please think about the problem - for it is not unimportant, it seems to me, and might be criticized. It is *right* for the figure to be standing erect in that place, but wouldn't it be possible to invent a more interesting *action* - without altering the lines? Don't take offense at this, please - I don't believe it can do any harm to make such suggestions when a picture is in the planning stage. I don't think this means forcing my ideas upon you. Especially if the picture is to be a large one, I consider it most important for the *actions* to be expressive. I know this is making *high* demands - I know that the lines and the equilibrium of the lines are paramount factors here.

But these lines may remain beautiful and quiet. Well, it is *possible* that I am not wrong about this - and your principal figure is at stake - so I did not dare conceal my impression. If it is not asking *too* much, I want to offer the suggestion that you let one of the women carrying bricks stoop and lay them out, so that the two of them are not doing the same work. But it would come to the same thing, as there would then be *two stooping* figures. *And after all it does not matter so much*. But my *first* observation is what I really mainly feel.

As for my work, that scene of the potato eaters - you saw the lithograph of it - is a subject that I tried to paint, being inspired by the peculiar light effect in that grimy cottage. It is kept in such a low scale of colours that the *light* colours, smeared on white paper, for instance, would look like ink stains; but on the canvas they stand out like lights because of the great forces opposed to them, for instance by putting on absolutely unmixed Prussian blue. My own criticism is that by paying attention to this, I lost sight of the form of the torsos. Heads and hands, however, were done very carefully; and as they were of the greatest importance and all the rest was nearly entirely dark (therefore *quite different* in effect from the lithograph), my painting the picture *as I did* is to be excused to a greater extent than you think. And besides, the real picture differs in design from *either* the rough sketch for it, which I still have and which I made in that cottage by the light of a little lamp, *or* from the lithograph.

I want to tell you further that I have drawn quite a number of heads since you were here, and quite a lot of peasants besides: diggers, weeders, harvesters. The thing that occupied my attention, either directly or indirectly, and was the great problem in all this, was colour. I mean the *breaking* of the colours - mixing red with green, blue with orange, yellow with violet. Always the combination of the complementary colours, their influence on each other - which nature is as full of as of light and brown. Another problem - which engrosses me every day anew - is precisely the one I think you asserted I neglected: rendering the form and its modelling, its great lines and masses - one considers the contours in the *last* instead of the *first* place in doing this.

Herewith two sketches of smaller compositions - I painted both of them. Lately I have been working mostly on things of a smaller size.

As I go on concentrating my attention on the *poor peasants* especially, I have to cope with the landscape every blessed day. When Wenkebach came to see me, I had just finished painting some cottages.

In the matter of wood engravings I have literally nothing new except four large compositions by Lhermitte. For me that man is Millet the Second, in the *full* sense of the term; I adore his work as much as that of Millet himself. I think his genius of the same order as that of Millet the First.

My brother was here; he told me a few things about the talk of the day in Paris now which I think very fortunate - the success of the Eugene Delacroix exhibition. I was further interested in what he told me about Raffaelli, a figure painter, and Claude Monet, a landscape painter cum *colourist*.

For the rest - you will experience it yourself - it is less a *golden* age than an iron age for painters - I mean, it is not exactly easy for them to keep alive - no more than that. At least as far as I am concerned it is misère ouverte - but despite that my courage, and perhaps my powers too, are greater rather than smaller than they were before. Don't think you're the only one who considers or considered it his duty to criticize me, you know, even to the limits of total annihilation; on the contrary, it's about the only thing I have encountered so far. For the very reason that you are, or were, not the only one to speak in this way and no other, your criticism is connected with other criticism to which I on my part oppose the conviction that my endeavours have a raison d'être, and to which I shall continue to oppose it more and more strongly.

The reason why - although I did not insist on what I wanted, but gave in to what *you* wanted - the reason why I started out by suggesting that you should withdraw your criticism completely was not that I wanted to bend or break your opinions despotically. Nothing was further from my intention, although you took it that way.

There are details that are quite correct - I have made it hot for you on account of plaster-of-Paris drawing, and I freely admit that I am capable of doing it again.

And as for other questions - I cannot always keep quiet under it; now and then it seems to me as though people were touching my body, so much do I feel taken up by the question, and so much is my conviction a part of myself.

It is true that there are faulty things in that lithograph as well as in my other work - certainly there are. But my other work proves so clearly that I render what I see that people cannot be justified, or speaking in good faith, when they judge my work otherwise than as a whole and in a broader way, taking into account my purpose and endeavour - namely to paint le paysan chez soi, peasants in their surroundings.

Now you call the aggregate of my work *utterly weak*, and you demonstrate at great length that its deficiencies exceed its good qualities.

Thus about my work, *thus* about my person.

Well, I *won't* accept this - *never*.

The work in question, the painting of peasants, is such a hard job that the *utterly weak* won't even attempt it.

And at least I have attempted it, and I have laid certain foundations, which is not exactly the easiest part of the job! And in drawing as well as in painting I can sometimes keep hold of certain solid and useful things, a firmer hold than you think, amice. But I am always doing *what I can't do yet* in order to learn how to do it. But writing you about this bores me. So I'll end by saying that the work is difficult, and that, instead of quarreling, the fellows who paint peasants and the common people would do wisely to join hands as much as possible. Union is strength, and *what we have to fight against is not each other* but those fellows who, even in the present period, are obstructing the progress of the ideas which Millet and others of a past generation fought for and which they pioneered. Nothing is a greater hindrance than this fatal fighting among ourselves.

As for you and me, let's put a stop to it, for our goal is the *same*.

But my real motive was the wish that your efforts and mine, though *not identical,* should run *parallel* and not in opposite directions. And seeing that in the matter of tendency and principle there are enough points of agreement, which I think will be permanent, it would appear to me that your criticism as a whole - when *you applied this criticism to me* - was inconsistent with the character of your own work.

This much we have in common, that we seek our subjects in the heart of the people; and we further have in common a desire - either as a *final purpose or as a means* - to obtain our studies from reality. And that means - having *much* in common. And that we are *opposed* to each other *basically,* with regard either to the technique of drawing or the technique of painting, is something I'm not convinced of. You are ahead of me in many things, I don't deny that; still I think you went too far.

But, be that as it may, inasmuch as, if we want to and it is our earnest endeavor, we may be useful and give support to each other - and because union is strength - I deem it desirable for us to remain friends.

And as regards technique, I am still searching for many things; and though I happen to find some of them, still there are an infinite number of things wanting. But for all that I know *why I work as I do,* and my efforts are planted on solid ground.

I said to Wenkebach only the other day that I did not know any painter who had as many faults as I do - but for all that I was *not* convinced that I am radically wrong.

At times my case is like this: the product of two negatives is a *positive*. Take whatever drawing or study of mine you like, especially those that I myself would point out to you with a certain resignation, and - in the drawing as well as in the colour or the tone - there will be errors that a *realist would hardly commit*...certain inaccuracies which I am convinced of myself - and which under certain circumstances I could point out with keener discernment than others - errors maybe, or imperfections.

And yet I believe that - even if I go on producing work in which people can point out *errors* - when they want to, if this is their special purpose and point of view - it will still have a certain vitality and raison d'être of its own that will hurl the errors into the shade - in the eyes of those who *appreciate* character and the spiritual conception of things. And it will *not* be so easy to confound me as they think, despite all my faults. I know too well what my ultimate goal is, and I am too firmly convinced of being on the right road after all, to pay much attention to what people say of me - when I want to paint what I feel and feel what I paint.

Nevertheless it makes life difficult at times, and - I think it quite possible that later on some fellows will regret either the things they said of me or the opposition and indifference which they have pestered me with. The way I see it is this: I withdraw from people to such an extent that I literally don't meet anybody except - the poor peasants - with whom I am directly concerned because I paint them.

And this will remain my policy, and it is quite possible that I shall give up my studio before long and go live in a peasant's cottage, so as not to hear or see educated people - as they call themselves - any longer.

When I tell you - and I mean it - that I want to remain friends with you, it is because I observe in you an endeavour which I highly esteem. You penetrate the heart of the common people deeply, and you have the will power to carry it through. When I say that we may be useful and give support to each other, I say so because, if you *don't* give in to convention, you will probably, when you are better known, do even *bolder* things, and then it may come to a regular light in which the pictures of one school are used as weapons against those of another! And in that case it might be a good thing for a number of painters to act in unison On the other hand - I don't think it is useless to exchange views and to see each other's work.

Herewith a third little sketch of a study I did yesterday [F 097, JH 876].

Goodbye. I felt impelled to submit the remark on the action of the woman in the center of your composition to your consideration; otherwise I think the composition very sensible and the whole conception sympathetic. When you see Wenkebach, don't forget to give him my regards.

Ever yours, Vincent

From my little sketch you will see that I take rather great pains to get action into my little figures, to express their being at work, their *doing* something.

I think it a good thing that at least *one* figure in your composition is already stooping down - perhaps relatively *many* vertical lines in the composition would make it more difficult to express the fact that work is *actually in progress*.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late August 1885

Dear Theo,

I received your letter and enclosed 20 francs in good order. Many thanks. Now I can tell you that I sent off to Leurs the box containing 7 paintings of different subjects, and to make it more complete, I added 12 smaller painted studies. I also wrote Wisselingh that I had sent those pictures, and asked him to go and see them. Yet I am still sorry that these pictures did not go to you.

If we had paid off Leurs and you had taken these pictures and if you had got too many of one kind, we might have picked out some from the various lots to show in Holland; then the things that remained with you would have been of the very best, a core to be gradually enlarged as we progressed. But, as you say, it is no use crying over spilt milk.

By way of provisional answer to what you wrote with regard to drawings of figures in their surroundings, I sent you a few today. But I doubt whether they are suitable for framing, and if, being in the fields, I am fortunate enough to find something better, I shall try and add a few others shortly.

In answer to what you write about being convinced as to *not having gone too far yet in economizing*, your ledger can prove this in case the expenses are greater than the profits. Perhaps so. But the reason? Yes, the people at home, but, boy, *you can't keep it up as you do now*. I suffer through it, I assure you, but if need be, I will consent to being even poorer than I was in previous years. But does it make those at home happier, and are they any better off? - and…later on, the consequences for them and for you - will you feel happy about them?

Really, when I think of my own experience, when I think how my working for some years at Goupil & Co.'s ended in my being drawn very strongly toward home, when I think how there followed for me an absolutely bewildering crisis which soon left me entirely alone, *and how everything and everybody* I had formerly relied upon changed completely and left me high and dry. When I think of those melancholy times, I am so afraid that the present will prove to be no firm ground under your feet. And then I feel obliged to state - not by way of reproach - not in order to frighten you - not on purpose to make you lose courage, but meaning it as a harsh truth - that in my opinion the sun may set on you; aye, *is* setting on you. But the fact that I add, “Renew yourself, but seek the renewal *in the core of the profession of painting and of dealing too,* but having your *own business*,” is in itself proof enough that I do not mean this in a reproachful or offensive way. I speak as somebody who has known strife and is still in the midst of the fight. Well with every new year time seems to go more quickly, more things seem to happen, things go in a greater rush.

I say this without beating about the bush in order to show you that, in case things were to change for you, I should think it the most natural and comprehensible thing in the world, and far from wanting to reproach you with anything, I should propose that we undertake more things together, and not let anything crush us, either of us. On the contrary, we should both show that our hearts are full of vim and energy - and love of art of a sterling quality.

I often have to fight against rather serious troubles, instead of being prosperous, quite the opposite.

Well - but the more unfavourable outward circumstances become, the more the inner resources, that is the love for the work, increase. And if no new resources, yet new - renewed - chances will offer themselves.

As I told you, I added to this little package of drawings a few new ones, but I shall try to make several more this month, the size of that woman shelling peas, which was the last one I did.

Goodbye.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 4 September 1885

Nuenen c. 4 September 1885

Dear Theo,

I should have let you know before that I received you letter and enclosed 150 fr. in good order.

I have also received the September Lhermitte, it is splendid. You write about the Poussins in the Louvre; I am very fond of Poussin. But how long - too long - is it since I saw those paintings? You cannot imagine what a longing I have to see pictures. I shall have to satisfy it anyhow. For the very reason that I hope to go on trying to find buyers for my own work, I think it will be a good thing for me to take a trip now and then.

Longing most of all for Rembrandt and Frans Hals, this week I shall go to the museum in Amsterdam for a day with a friend of mine from Eindhoven, some of whose studies I showed you.

If I can enter into connections for my own work, I shall not fail to do so, and I firmly believe that with perseverance I shall win.

Speaking of my work, I had already written you that I have been very busy painting still lifes lately, and I like it immensely. I shall send you some.

I know, they are hard to sell, but it is damned useful, and I shall continue to paint them this winter.

You will receive a big still life of potatoes, in which I tried to get *corps,* I mean, to express the material in such a way that they become heavy, solid lumps - which would hurt you if they were thrown at you, for instance.

Well, you'll see for yourself.

That affair with the priest has not given me any more trouble. But of course there will always be God-fearing natives in the village who will persist in suspecting me, for one thing is sure, namely that the priest would only too gladly throw the whole blame of that affair on me. However, as I am quite innocent, the gossip from that quarter leaves me perfectly indifferent; as long as they don't bother me in my painting. I don't take any notice of it whatever. With the peasants to whom the accident happened, where I often used to paint, I have remained on good terms, and I am as welcome in their home as I used to be. I am now busy painting still lifes of my birds' nests, four of which are finished; I think some people who are good observers of nature might like them because of the colours of the moss, the dry leaves and the grasses.

I will write you again at the end of the week, after my trip to Amsterdam.

As next month I shall have to pay the rent again, I can hardly afford the expense. But it must be done. So you will soon hear again.

Ever yours, Vincent

I firmly believe that my work will improve by my seeing more pictures, because when I see a picture, I can analyze how it is done. As to Poussin, he is a painter and a thinker who always gives inspiration, in whose pictures all reality is at the same time symbolic. In the work of Millet, of Lhermitte, all reality is also at the same time symbolic. They are different from what are called realists.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early September 1885

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and the enclosed 150 francs. I also received the two Lhermittes today. He is the absolute master of the figure, he does what he likes with it - proceeding neither from the colour nor from the local tone but rather from the light - as Rembrandt did - there is an astonishing mastery in everything he does, above all excelling in modelling, he perfectly satisfies all that honesty demands.

People talk a great deal about Poussin. Bracquemond also speaks of him. The French call Poussin the very greatest painter among the old masters. Well, it is certainly true that what is said about Poussin, of whom I know so very little, is also true of Lhermitte and Millet. But with this difference, that Poussin seems to me the original grain; the others, the full ear. As for me, I think the modern ones the *most superior*.

These last two weeks I have had a lot of trouble with the reverend gentlemen of the clergy, who gave me to understand, albeit with the best intentions and believing like so many others that they were obliged to intervene - that I ought not to be too familiar with people below me in station. But while they put the matter to me in these terms, they used quite a different tone with the “people of lower station,” namely, threatening them if they allowed themselves to be painted. This time I went straight to the Burgomaster and told him all about it, pointing out that it was no business of the priests, and that they ought to stick to their own sphere of more abstract concerns. In any case, for the moment I am having no more opposition from them and I hope it will stay like that.

A girl I had frequently painted was about to have a baby and they suspected me, though I had nothing to do with it. But I heard what had really happened from the girl herself, namely that a member of the priest's own congregation in Nuenen had played a particularly ugly part in the affair, and so they could not get at me, at least not on that occasion. But you can see that it isn't easy to paint people in their own home or to draw them going about their business.

Well, they will not easily get the better of me in this case, and this winter I hope to keep the very same models, who are thoroughly typical of the old Brabant race.

I again have a few new drawings, but I could by no means get anybody to pose for me in the fields these days.

Happily for me, the priest is getting rather unpopular. But it is a bad thing, and if it continued, I should have to move. You will ask, What's the use of making yourself disagreeable? - but sometimes it cannot be avoided. If I had argued gently with them, they would undoubtedly have got the better of me. And when they hinder me in my work, I sometimes do not see any other way than an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. The priest even went so far as to promise the people money if they refused to be painted: but they answered quite spiritedly that they would rather earn money from me than beg some from him.

But you see they do it only for the sake of earning money, and they do *nothing* for *nothing* here.

You ask me if Rappard has ever sold anything. I know that at present he is better off than he used to be, that, for instance, for some time he took models from the nude every day, that now, for the picture of a brickyard, he rented a small house on the spot itself, and had it improved with a skylight; I know that he made another trip through Drenthe, and that he will also go to Terschelling. All these things are rather expensive, and the money for it must come from somewhere. Though he may possess some money of his own, he must certainly earn something too, otherwise he couldn't do what he does. Perhaps his family buys, or friends - that may be - but somebody must.

But tonight I am much too occupied with Lhermitte's drawings to go on writing about other things. When I think of Millet or of Lhermitte, I find modern art as great as Michelangelo and Rembrandt - ancient art is infinite, modern art infinite too - the ancient masters are *geniuses* - the modern ones are *geniuses* too. A person like Chenavard does not think so perhaps. But I, for my part, am convinced that in this respect one can have faith in modern art.

The fact that I have a definite belief about art makes me sure of what I want in my own work, and I shall try to reach it even at the risk of my own life.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard

Nuenen, September 1885

Amice Rappard,
I sent a basket containing birds' nests to your address today. I have some in my own studio too. They are nests of the thrush, the blackbird, the golden oriole, the wren and the finch. I hope they will arrive safe and sound.

Do you know much about Eugène Delacroix? I read a splendid article about him by Silvestre. To write down a few words for you that occur to me right now, the article ended thus: “Ainsi mourut presqu'en souriant Eugène Delacroix - peintre de grande race qui avait un soleil dans la tête et un orage dans le coeur - qui - des guerriers passa aux saints - des saints aux amants - des amants aux tigres - et des tigres aux fleurs.” [Thus died, almost smiling, Eugène Delacroix - painter of noble race - who had a sun in his head and a thunderstorm in his heart - who - passed from warriors to saints - from saints to lovers - from lovers to tigers - and from tigers to flowers.]

These words struck me, as the whole article demonstrated that the atmosphere of the colours and the tone in his pictures was identical with their meaning - the contrast of the colours, the broken effect, the reciprocal reacting of black to white, of yellow to violet, of orange to blue, of red to green.

And further, Delacroix writes to a friend, “La chapelle où j'ai paint ma Pietà était tellement obscure que je n'ai pas su d'abord comment peindre pour faire parler mon tableau, - j'ai été obligé de peindre dans le cadavre du Christ les ombres avec du bleu de Prusse, les lumières avec du jaune de chrôme pur.” [The chapel where I painted my Pietà was so dark that I did not know at first how to paint so as to make my picture speak - I was forced to paint the shadows of the corpse of Christ with Prussian blue, the light parts with pure chrome-yellow.] To this the author adds, “Il faut être Delacroix pour oser cela.” [One would have to be a Delacroix to dare do this.]

Then I read somewhere else, “Lorsque Delacroix peint - c'est comme le lion qui dévore le morceau.” [When Delacroix paints - it's like a lion devouring a piece (of meat).]

And this last is the very thing Silvestre's article is full of.

What amazing fellows those French painters are - a Millet, Delacroix, Corot, Troyon, Daubigny, Rousseau, and a Daumier or a Jacque - not forgetting Jules Dupré especially! A new one of the same breed is Lhermitte.

Another thing about Delacroix. He had a discussion with a friend about the question of working absolutely after nature, and he said on this occasion that one must get one's *studies* from nature but that the *ultimate picture* ought to be made *from memory*. That friend was walking with him on the boulevard when they were having this discussion - which had already become pretty vehement. When they parted company, the other one still wasn't entirely convinced. Delacroix let him toddle on for a bit after he took his leave, and then (using his two hands as a speaking trumpet) he roared after him in a lusty voice, to the consternation of the respectable citizens passing by, “Par coeur! Par coeur!” [From memory!].

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed reading this article, as well as another one about Delacroix by Gigoux. I have read besides a fine book by Bracquemond, the etcher, *Du Dessin et de la Couleur*.

Another thing about Delacroix, writes Silvestre, “On dit que Delacroix ne dessine pas - dites que Delacroix ne dessine pas *comme les autres*.” [they say that Delacroix does not draw - they ought to say that Delacroix does not draw *like others*.]

How truly, my friend, one might say *the same* in denial of the assertion that Mauve, Israëls, Maris *do not* draw.

Another thing - the painter Gigoux comes to Delacroix with an antique bronze and asks his opinion about its genuineness. “Ce n'est pas de l'antique, c'est de la renaissance” [it is not from antiquity, it is from the renaissance] says D. Gigoux asks him what reason he has for saying this - “Tenez, mon ami, c'est très beau, mais c'est pris par la ligne et les anciens prenaient par les milieux (par les masses, par *noyaux*).” [Look here, my friend, it is very beautiful, but it is starved from lines, and the ancients started from the central things (the masses, the *nuclei*.] And he adds, “Look here a moment,” and draws a number of ovals on a piece of paper - and he *puts these ovals together* by means of little lines, hardly anything at all, and out of this creates a rearing horse full of life and movement. “Géricault and Gros,” he says, “have learned this from the Greek - to express the *masses* (nearly always egg-shaped) first tracing the contours and the action from the position and the proportions of these oval shapes.” And I say that this was first pointed out to Delacroix by Géricault.

Now I ask you, isn't this a *superb truth*?

But…does one learn it from the plaster-of-Paris artists or at the drawing academy? I think *not*! *If* it were taught *in this way*, I should be pleased to be an enthusiastic admirer of the academy, but I know only too well that such is not the case.

I sent Wenkebach an article about the Salon by Paul Mantz with a request to let you read it too. Have you got it? I thought it excellent.

I thought that you might like the birds' nests as much as I do myself, for really and truly birds - such as the wren and the golden oriole - rank among the artists too. At the same time they are beautiful stuff for still lifes.

Good-by, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late September 1885

Dear Theo,
I want to tell you that I have finished a few things which I should like to send you.
I have read the book by Bracquemond more than once, and have thought it over well. Though what he says about the colours isn't new, though after all it comes to the same thing as the theories discovered by Delacroix, though what he says about drawing - modelling is drawing, drawing is modelling - isn't new either, yet I have seldom read stronger expressions for these and other theories.

Well, I like the book enormously, and it has rather preoccupied me. The pictures I have for you are a few still lifes, a basket with potatoes in it, fruit, a brass kettle, etc., which I made especially with regard to the modelling with different colours, and I should like Portier to see them. I shall send them to you as soon as I have some money, for it's the end of the month.

I am curious to see the new Lhermitte, if there has been one this month. I ordered some colours from Schoenfeld in Dusseldorf, because I could not get the right ones here.

That the colour of the "Potato Eaters" is not good is, partly at least, the paint's fault. I was reminded of it because I painted a large still life in which I sought similar tones, and as I was not satisfied with it because I again got the same things as before, I painted it anew. Judging from this experience, it would have turned out much better with the mineral blue I have now than with what I had before.

Goodbye,
Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 10 or 11 October 1885

Dear Theo,
I have been to Amsterdam this week. I hardly had time to see anything but the museum. I was there three days, I went on Tuesday and came back on Thursday. The result is that I am *very* glad I went in spite of the cost, and I made up my mind not to go so long without seeing pictures again.

On account of the expenses I had put this trip off and off, like so many other things. But it is far better that I can no longer think this the right way. It is too important for my work, and when I look at the old masters, whose technique I understand much better now than before, then for the rest I need perhaps very little conversation.

I do not know whether you remember the one to the left of the "Night Watch," as pendant of "The Syndics," there is a picture (unknown to me till now) by Frans Hals and P. Codde, about twenty officers full length. Did you ever notice that??? that alone - that one picture - is worth the trip to Amsterdam - especially for a colourist. There is a figure in it, the figure of a flag-bearer, in the extreme left corner, right against the frame - that figure is in grey, from top to toe, I shall call it pearl-grey - of a peculiar neutral tone, probably the result of orange and blue mixed in such a way that they neutralize each other - by varying that keynote, making it somewhat lighter here, somewhat darker there, the whole figure is as if it were painted with one same grey. But the leather boots are of a different material than the leggings, which differ from the folds of the trousers, which differ from the waistcoat - expressing a different material, differing in relation to colour - but all one family of grey. But just wait a moment!

Now into that grey he brings blue and orange - and some white; the waistcoat has satin bows of a divine soft blue, sash and flag orange - a white collar.

Orange, "blanc," bleu, as the national colours were then - orange and blue, side by side, that most splendid colour scale, against a background of a grey, cleverly mixed by uniting just those two, let me call them poles of electricity (speaking of colours though) so that they annihilate each other against that grey and white. Further, we find in that picture - other orange scales against other blue, further, the most beautiful blacks against the most beautiful whites; the heads - about twenty of them, sparkling with life and spirit, and a technique! a colour! the figures of all those people superb and full size.

But that orange blanc bleu fellow in the left corner…I seldom saw a more divinely beautiful figure. It is unique.

Delacroix would have raved about it - absolutely raved. I was literally rooted to the spot. Well you know “The Singer,” that laughing fellow - a bust in a greenish-black with carmine, carmine in the flesh colour too.

You know the bust of the man in yellow, citron amorti, whose face, by the opposition of tones, has become a dashing masterly bronze, purplish (violet?).

Bürger has written about Rembrandt's “Jewish Bride,” just as he wrote about van der Meer of Delft, as he wrote about “The Sower” by Millet, as he wrote about Frans Hals, with devotion, and surpassing himself. “The Syndics” is perfect, is the most beautiful Rembrandt; but “The Jewish Bride” - not ranked so high, what an intimate, what an infinitely sympathetic picture it is, painted d'une main de feu. You see, in “The Syndics” Rembrandt is true to nature, though *even there*, and always, he soars aloft, to the very highest height, the infinite; but Rembrandt could do more than that - if he did not have to be *literally* true, as in a portrait, when he was free to *idealize*, to be a poet, that means Creator. That's what he is in “The Jewish Bride.” How Delacroix would have understood that picture. What a noble sentiment, infinitely deep.

“Il faut être mort plusiers fois pour peindre ainsi” [One must have died several times to paint like that], how true it is here. As to the pictures by Frans Hals - he always remains on *earth* - one can speak about them. Rembrandt is so deeply mysterious that he says things for which there are no words in any language. Rembrandt is truly called a *magician*…that's not an easy calling.

I have packed several still lifes, which you will receive next week, together with two souvenirs from Amsterdam, which I caught on the wing, and also a few drawings. In a few days I shall also send you a book by de Goncourt, Chérie. De Goncourt is always beautiful, and his way of working is so honest and he drudged on it so hard.

In Amsterdam I saw two pictures by Israëls, “The Fishermen of Zandvoort,” and - one of his very latest - an old woman huddled together like a bundle of rags near the bedstead in which the corpse of her husband lies.

Both pictures are masterpieces, I think. Let them jabber about technique as much as they like, in Pharisaical, hollow, hypocritical terms - the true painters are guided by that conscience which is called sentiment, their soul: their brains aren't subject to the pencil, but the pencil to their brains. Besides, the canvas is afraid of the real painter, and not the painter afraid of the canvas.

In Amsterdam I also saw pictures of today, Witkamp and others. Witkamp is one of the best, reminds one of Jules Breton; others whom I have in mind but I shall not name, who always talk about what *they* call technique, I found *weak in* *that very technique*.

You know all those cold grey tones which they think distinguished, but which are flat and uninteresting, childishly mixed. Nowadays they bring on the market ordinary colours purposely mixed with pure white, for the convenience of painters who paint in what they call a distinguished light colour scale.

Just listen, *the technique*, the colouring, the modelling of “The Fishermen of Zandvoort,” for instance, is in my opinion Delacroix-like and superb; today's cold flat greys are technically not worth much, but remain *paint*, and with Israëls one forgets the paint. But remember, I do not mean Jaap Maris, Willem Maris, Mauve, Neuhuys, who work in the right manner, each in his own colour scale, Blommers too. But those painters' school, their followers, Theo, I don't think are worth much.

I have also seen the Fodor museum. “The Shepherd” by Decamps is really a masterpiece; do you remember the Meissonier, a sketch of a deathbed? The Diaz?

Well, Bosboom, Waldorp, Nuyen, Rochussen, the *original* painters of that period of forty years back - I always like to see them.

Rochussen possesses an élan like Gavarni's.

The still lifes I am sending are colour studies, I intend to make more of them; don't think this is useless. After a while they will get darker, but in a year, for instance, they will be better than now, when, being dry to the core, they will have got a solid varnish. If you use some drawing pins and put a great number of my studies, the old as well as the new ones, pell-mell on a wall of your room, then I think you will see that there is a connection between those studies, that the various colours harmonize.

Speaking of black - the more I see of those pictures in a cold, childish colour scheme, the more I am glad that my studies are found too black.

Look at “The Fishermen of Zandvoort” and see what colours it is painted with - it is painted with red, with blue, with yellow, with black and some dirty white, with brown (everything well mixed and broken), or isn't it? When Israëls says that one must not paint black, he certainly never means what they now make of it, he means that there must be colour in the shadows, but that excludes neither a single colour scheme, however dark it may be, nor of course that of the blacks and browns and deep blues.

But what's the good of thinking about it; it is much better to think of Rembrandt, of Frans Hals, of Israëls, than to think of that fashionable impotency.

I am writing you rather a long letter - though perhaps you may not believe what I say about the colours, and though you may find me pessimistic when I say that much of what is called delicate grey is a very ugly grey; though you may find me pessimistic or worse when I also disapprove of the smooth polishing of faces, hands and eyes, because the great masters all worked in quite a different way, perhaps by and by your own study of art, which I am glad you took up again thoroughly, will change you too.

Now I have another favour to ask; that acquaintance of mine in Eindhoven, who went with me to Amsterdam, bought at Uncle Cor's: Bürger's Musées de la Hollande, Van der Hoop Rotterdam, but they did not have the first volume, Musées de la Haye et d'Amsterdam. However, we must have it; it is out of print, but you will be able to pick one up somewhere, and he will even pay 10 fr. for it, though preferably less of course. I shall send you the money immediately, as it is to be his and on that condition he has given me the order. So will you try to get it, please?

If you find one, first read it through once more yourself, it is so beautiful.

I did not enter Uncle Cor's shop with him.

The small panels I painted in Amsterdam were done in a great hurry. One even in the waiting room of the station, when I was too early for the train, the other in the morning, before I went to the museum at 10 o'clock. Yet I am sending them to you, look upon them as “Dutch tiles,” on which something is dashed off in a few strokes.

As to the end of the month, boy, I am literally cleaned out, what's to be done? Can't you send 20 fr. more, or however little it may be? Next month I also have to pay for colours, the first of November, 25 guilders rent.

As to connections for my work, I spoke with somebody about it, and whenever I go again, I shall take some work with me. There is a general slackness which makes it easy enough to find an occasion for exhibition. Let us paint much, this is necessary if we want to have success; just because times are slack we must work hard; then, instead of finding all harbours closed to us, we will one day sweep the seas with a broomstick in the mast.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, October 1885

Dear Theo,
Today I forwarded carriage-paid a box marked V4 containing the still lifes. The two sketches of Amsterdam are unfortunately somewhat damaged. They got wet on the way, then the panels got warped while drying and dust stuck on them, etc., but I sent them to show you that if in an hour's time I want to dash off an impression somewhere, I am learning to do so in the same way as others who analyze their impressions, and who account for what they see. This is a different thing from feeling, *i.e.* undergoing impressions, there is perhaps a great difference between undergoing impressions and analyzing them, that is to say, *taking them to pieces and putting them together again*. But it is pleasant work to dash something off in a rush.

What struck me most on seeing the old Dutch pictures again is that most of them *were painted quickly*, that these great masters, such as a Frans Hals, a Rembrandt, a Ruysdael and so many others - dashed off a thing from the first stroke and did not retouch it so very much.

And please note this too - if it was right, *they left it as it was*. I have especially admired the hands by Rembrandt and Hals, certain hands in “The Syndics,” even in “The Jewish Bride,” and in Frans Hals, hands that lived, but were not finished in the sense they demand nowadays.

And heads too - eyes, nose, mouth done with a single stroke of the brush without any retouching whatever. Unger, Bracquemond have etched it well - just as it was painted - and one can see in their etchings the way of painting.

Then, how necessary it is to look at the old Dutch pictures in these days! and at the French painters, Corot, Millet, *etc.* The rest might quite well be dispensed with, and it may lead others more astray than they think.

To paint in one rush, as much as possible in one rush. What joy to see such a Frans Hals, how different it is from those pictures - there are so many of them - where everything has been carefully smoothed down in the same way.

By chance I saw a Meissonier in the Fodor museum on the same day I saw old Dutch masters, Brouwer, Ostade, especially Terborch.

Well, Meissonier does it, like they did, a very well-considered, well-calculated touch - but in one stroke and if possible correct at once.

I think it better to scrape off with the knife a part that is wrong, and to begin anew, than to make too many corrections.

I saw a sketch by Rubens and a sketch by Diaz almost at the same time; they were not alike, but what they have in common is the belief that colour expresses form if well applied and in harmony. Diaz is indeed a painter to the very marrow - and he is conscientious to his fingertips.

The Diaz in Fodor is only sketchy, but perhaps for that very reason it was for me, who had not seen one for years, a great pleasure to see it again, and it stood up very well, even if one had just seen the technique of the old masters.

I must refer once more to certain present-day pictures, which are becoming more and more numerous.

About ten or fifteen years ago they started talking about “brightness,” about “light.” Originally this was right, it is a fact that beautiful things were produced by that system. But when this degenerates into an overproduction of pictures that have the same light all over the canvas, in all four corners - I think they call it day tone and local colour - is this right??? I think not. The Ruysdael at Van der Hoop's, the one with the mill, isn't it “plein-air,” isn't it enormously full of space? And yet the whole picture is in a much darker colour scheme than people would use now; besides, earth and sky form one whole, belong together.

Van Goyen, that Corot of the Dutch, I stood a long time before that superb picture in the Dupper collection, two oak trees on a dune in autumn, in the storm. A sentiment, let me say, like Jules Dupré or “Le Buisson.” But there is more common yellow ochre than white in the picture.

There is Cuyp - a view of Dordrecht in Van der Hoop's collection, it is quite *reddish*-gold - the ochres are there too.

The picture by Frans Hals, you may call it what you like; citron amorti or jaune chamois, what is it done with? In the picture it seems very light, but just put white against it.

I think a great lesson taught by the old Dutch masters is the following: to consider drawing and colour one, which Bracquemond also says. And this many painters do not do, they draw with everything except a healthy colour. Oh, Theo, it is such a nuisance, it is such a bore to listen to a fellow like Haverman when he talks about “technique”; I do not mean Rappard, because though he too talks that way, fortunately for him he paints better than he talks.

I don't care at all to make many friends in the painters' club, but I repeat - speaking of technique, there is a good deal more healthy, sound technique in Israëls, for instance in that very old picture, “The Fisherman of Zandvoort,” with its splendid chiaroscuro, than in the technique of those who are always equally smooth everywhere, flat and distingué in their sheet-iron frigid colour. You may safely put that “Fisherman of Zandvoort” beside an old Delacroix - “La Barque du Dante,” it is of one and the same family.

Those are the things which I believe in, but every day I hate more and more those pictures which are light all over. It is a bad thing for me when they say that I have “no technique”; it is possible that this will blow over, as I make no acquaintances among the painters; it is true that, on the contrary, *those who talk most about technique* are in my eyes weakest in it!

I wrote you so already. But when I show something of my work in Holland, I know beforehand what will be said, and by what kind of critics. Meanwhile I am going quietly to the *old Dutch masters*, and to the pictures by Israëls, and to those who have a direct affinity with Israëls, which the modern painters do not have. They are almost diametrically opposed to Israëls.

And I think I have noticed that Israëls himself, and Mans, Mauve, Neuhuys, too, look disapprovingly on a certain tendency which we are talking about now. Mesdag, for instance, who was at first very *realistic*, as you remember, has become in his later pictures and drawings deeper of tone and often somewhat more mysterious.

Witkamp has many good points, is rather like Jules Breton or Bastien Lepage, but Jules Breton is warm and he *is far too cold*. And that's a fault not easily remedied, to get some warmth into a thing, it must be put in from the very beginning, otherwise one cannot get rid of the coldness.

What they call brightness is in many cases an ugly studio tone of a cheerless city studio. The dawn in the morning or the twilight in the evening does not seem to exist, there only seems to be midday, from 11 to 3, a very decent hour indeed, but - often insipid as a milksop.

But for all that, Theo - I am damned hard up at present. Painting hard is very expensive, I am almost without a cent, and the end of the month is misery. The saying “l'argent est le nerf de la guerre” is alas also true of painting. In war, however, the result is nothing but misery and destruction, and in painting one sometimes sows, though the painter himself is not the man who reaps.

How are you, and how is business? I do not know if I am right, but judging from the show window, the shop in Amsterdam did not look very flourishing, but oh so quiet and respectable.

Indeed, too much courage and enthusiasm are not the faults(?) of today. I have hardly spoken to anybody, but indirectly I sounded people out here and there, because I am curious to see the art trade's results and what will become of it. I don't think you are exactly overwhelmed with pictures - are you?

This winter I am going to study several things of great technical skill which I noticed in the old masters. I have seen much that is of use to me. But above all things - what is called *enlever*, that is what the old Dutch masters did famously.

That enlever in a few strokes of the brush, they won't hear of it nowadays, but how excellent the results are, and how masterfully this was understood by many French painters, by Israëls too.

In the museum I was thinking continually of Delacroix, why? Because standing before Hals, before Rembrandt, before Ruysdael and others, I was constantly reminded of the saying: “Lorsque Delacroix peint, c'est comme le lion qui devore le morceau.” That is how it ought to be, and oh, Theo, when I think of what I will call the technical club, as they call themselves, how dull it is. If at any time I should come into contact with one of those gentlemen or meet one of them, you may be sure I shall play the fool, but *à la vireloque* with a *coup de dents* [bite] afterward.

I hate it when things drag and go amiss.

And isn't it a fatal thing, that forced finishing everywhere (what they *call* finish), everywhere that same monotonous grey instead of light and brown; colour - local colour - instead of tone, isn't it deplorable and yet isn't it so.

I find all these things wrong because I consider Israëls, for instance, such a master, and because there are so many modern as well as old painters whom one can admire.

I ought to have noticed before this that I am very probably boring you with this letter. But the fact is, I didn't think of it. For my part, I can tell you that I wish you would write me your impressions of things in the Louvre, or Luxembourg, or anywhere else.

Write soon if you can, and let me tell you that the end of the month is very hard. But I am glad to have been in Amsterdam, though it was at a moment when I could less afford the expenses than ever. The consequence is that around New Year's I shall be very hard up, but, oh well, faint heart never won fair lady and for the sake of painting, I will put up with always being in difficulties if it has to be.

Goodbye, I hope you will get my parcel in good order. There is a book by de Goncourt about *Chardin*, *Boucher, Watteau,* and *Fragonard*; I must read that; have you got it or one of your friends perhaps? I am afraid not, but do you happen to know if it is very important?

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 2nd half October 1885

Dear Theo,
Today I received your letter with enclosure. I was very pleased with your letter, because I noticed a few things in it which I want to talk over. To begin at the beginning; what you write about a certain study of a basket with apples is very well observed, but does this observation come from yourself??? because I fancy, I should almost say *I am sure*, that you used not to see that kind of thing: However this may be, here we are on our way to agreeing more about the colours.

Go more deeply into *those* questions, for that will be useful to you, and those are the things that Burger and Mantz and Silvestre knew.

Just to explain how that study was painted - simply this: green and red are complementary colours. Now in the apples there is a red which is very vulgar in itself; further, next to it some greenish things. But there are also one or two apples of another colour, of a certain pink which makes the whole thing right.

That pink is the broken colour, got by mixing the above-mentioned red and the above-mentioned green. That's why there is harmony between the colours.

Added to this is a second contrast, the background forms a contrast to the foreground, the one is a neutral colour, got by mixing blue with orange; the other, the same neutral colour simply changed by adding some yellow.

But I am awfully glad that you notice a combination of colour, be it through direct or indirect personal perception. Further, that one of the studies seemed to you a variation on the brown-grey theme, well, that certainly is the case, but all three potato studies are like that, with this difference, that one is a study in terre de Sienne, the second in terre de Sienne brûlée, the third in yellow ochre and red ochre.

The latter - that is the largest one - is in my opinion the best - notwithstanding the dull black background which I purposely left dull because the ochres are also naturally non-transparent colours. As to that study, the largest one of the potatoes, it is made by changing, by breaking, those untransparent ochres with a transparent blue. As red ochre with yellow ochre gives orange, their combination with blue is more neutral, and against that neutralized colour, they become either more red or more yellow.

The highest light in that whole picture is simply some pure yellow ochre. The reason why this dull yellow stands out so is because it is put in a wide field of, be it neutral, violet; because... red ochre with blue gives violet tones.

Well, the birds' nests were also purposely painted against a black background, because I want it to be obvious in these studies that the objects do not appear in their natural surroundings, but against a conventional background. A *living* nest in nature is quite different - one hardly sees the nest itself, one sees the birds.

But when one wants to paint nests from one's *collection of nests*, one cannot express strongly enough the fact that the background and the surroundings in nature are quite different, therefore I simply painted the background black. But it is a fact that in a still life a coloured background can be beautiful - in Amsterdam I saw still lifes by Miss Vos that were *excellent*, much more beautiful than those by Blaisse Desgoffe [a French still-life painter of the mid-nineteenth century] - really like Van Beyeren. I couldn't help thinking that those simple still lifes of hers had far more artistic value than many pretentious pictures by other Amsterdam painters.

They struck me as very well done. Especially one with a golden vase, a few empty oyster shells, a broken coconut shell and a crust of bread. I will send you the book by Blanc; I hope soon to get L'art auXVIIIme Siècle; I am especially longing to hear something from de Goncourt about Chardin. Lacaze's Rembrandt is really also in the sentiment of Rembrandt's last period; it is about twelve years since I saw it, but I still remember it because it struck me, just like that head by Fabritius in Rotterdam. If I remember correctly, that nude woman in the Lacaze Collection is also very beautiful, also of a later period. The fragment, Rembrandt's “Lesson in Anatomy,” yes, I was absolutely staggered by that too. Do you remember those flesh colours - it is - *de la terre* - especially the feet.

You know, Frans Hals's flesh colours are also earthy, used here in the sense that you know. Often at least. Sometimes, I almost dare say always, there is also a relation of contrast between the tone of the costume and the tone of the face. Red and green are opposites; “The Singer” (Dupper Collection), who has tones of carmine in the flesh colour, has tones of green in his black sleeves, and ribbons on those sleeves *of a red other* than that carmine. The orange-white-blue fellow I wrote about has a relatively neutral complexion, earthy-pink, violetish, in contrast with his Frans-Hals-yellow leather suit.

The yellow fellow, citron amorti, decidedly has dull violet in his mug. Well - the darker the costume, the lighter the face is sometimes - not accidentally - at least his portrait and that of his wife in the garden contain *two* blackish violets (blue-violet and reddish-violet) and a plain black (yellow-black?). I repeat, reddish-violet and blue-violet, black and black, the three gloomiest things, as it were; well, the faces are *very* fair, *extremely* fair, even for Hals.

Well. Frans Hals is a colourist *among colourists*, a colourist like Veronese, like Rubens, like Delacroix, like Velásquez.

Of Millet, Rembrandt and, for instance, Israëls, it has truly been said that they are more harmonists than colourists. But tell me, *black* and *white*, may they be used or may they not, are they forbidden fruit?

I don't think so; Frans Hals has no less than twenty-seven blacks. White - but you know yourself what striking pictures some modern colourists make of white on white. What is the meaning of that phrase: *one must not*? Delacroix called them *rests*, used them as such. You must not have a prejudice against them, for if used only in their places, and in harmony with the rest, one may of course use all tones.

I can tell you that I often think the things by Apol, for instance, white on white, very well done. His sunset in The Hague Wood, for instance, which is in Amsterdam. That thing is damn good indeed.

No - black and white have their reason and significance, and when one tries to suppress them, it turns out wrong; to consider both *neutral* is certainly the most logical thing to do, white - the highest combination of the lightest red, blue, yellow; black - the highest combination of the darkest red, blue, yellow. I have nothing to say against that theory, I find it perfectly true. Well, *light* and *brown*, the *tone* in its *value* stands in direct relation to that 4th color scale from *white to black*. For one finds there:

Scale I from yellow to violet
2 red “ green
3 blue orange
Sum ------------- ---------------- ------------------- ------------ ------------ ----------------------------

a fourth scale
(that of the neutral tones, that of red +blue + yellow) from White
(red +blue + yellow, extreme light) to Black
(red +blue + yellow, deepest black)

That is how I understand the blacks and the whites.

When I mix red with green to a red-green or green-red, by mixing it with white, I then get pink-green or green-pink. And if you like, by adding black, I get brown-green or green-brown. Isn't that clear? When I mix yellow with violet to a violet-yellow or yellow-violet, in other terms a neutralized yellow or a neutralized violet, by adding white and black, I get greys.

Well, *greys* and *browns*, there is especially question of them when one makes colours *lighter* or *darker*, whatever their nature and their gradation of red, yellow or blue may be.

It is quite correct to speak of light and dark grays and browns, I think. But how beautiful what Silvestre says about Delacroix is - that he put a fortuitous tone on his palette, *une nuance innommable violacée*, that he put that one tone down somewhere, *either for highest light or for deepest shadow*, but that of this *mud* he made something which either sparkled like light or was gloomily silent like a deep shadow.

So I have heard of an experiment with a sheet of neutral coloured paper - which became greenish against a red background, reddish on a green one, bluish on orange, orange on blue, yellowish on violet, and violetish on yellow.

Just listen, suppose one wants such a *muddy tone* or *drab colour* to become *light* in the picture, like Delacroix said of Veronese, that he could paint a blonde nude woman with a colour like mud in such a way that she comes out fair and blonde in the picture - then the question arises - how is this possible, unless by contrast of great forces in bluish-blacks or violets, or reddish-browns?

You - who are looking for dark shadows somewhere, and think that when the shadows are dark, aye, black, that it is all wrong then, is this right? I don't think so. For then, for instance, the “Dante” by Delacroix, the “Fisherman of Zandvoort,” for instance, would be wrong. For indeed, they contain the most vigorous blue-black or violet-black values. Rembrandt and Hals, didn't they use black? and Velásquez???

Not only one, but twenty-seven blacks, I assure you. So as to “one must not use black,” are you yourself quite sure that you know what you mean by it? and do you know what you want with it? Really, think it *over* carefully, for you might come to the conclusion - I think this very probable - that you have learned and understood that question of tones quite wrongly, or rather have learned it *vaguely* and understood it *vaguely*. Many people do, most of them do. But in the long run Delacroix and others of his time will teach you better.

Tell me - have you noticed that those studies of mine that have black backgrounds have their *highest light* put in *a low colour scale???* And when in this way I put my study in a *lower colour scale* than nature, I yet keep the harmony of tones because I become darker, not only in my shadows, but also in the same degree *in my lights*.

I painted my studies just as a kind of gymnastics, to rise and fall in tone, so - don't forget that I painted my white and gray moss literally with a mud colour and yet it looks light in the study.

Good-by,

Ever yours, Vincent

These things concerning complementary colours, simultaneous contrast, and the neutralizing of complementals, this question is the first and principal one; the second is the mutual influence of two *kindred colours*, for instance, carmine on vermilion, a pink-violet on a blue-violet. The third question is a light blue against the same dark blue, a pink against a brown-red, a citron yellow against a chamois yellow, *etc*. But the first question is the most important.

If you come across some good book on colour theories, mind you send it to me, for I too am far from knowing everything about it, and am searching for more every day.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, late October 1885

Dear Theo,

I read your letter about black with great pleasure, and it convinces me that you have no prejudice against black.

Your description of Manet's study, “The Dead Toreador,” was well analyzed. And the whole letter proves the same as your sketch of Paris suggested to me at the time, that if you put yourself to it, you can paint a thing in words.

It is a fact that by studying the laws of the colours, one can move from instinctive belief in the great masters to the analysis of why one admires - what one admires - and that indeed is necessary nowadays, when one realizes how terribly arbitrary and superficially people criticize.

You must just let me maintain my pessimism about the art trade as it is these days, for it does not at all include discouragement. This is my way of reasoning. Supposing I am right in considering that curious haggling about prices of pictures to be more and more like the bulb trade. I repeat, supposing that like the bulb trade at the end of the last century, so the art trade, along with other branches of speculation at the end of this century, will disappear as they came, namely rather quickly. The bulb trade may disappear - the flower-growing remains. And I for myself am contented, for better or for worse, to be a small gardener, who loves his plants.

Just now my palette is thawing and the frigidness of the first beginning has disappeared.

It is true, I often blunder still when I undertake a thing, but the colours follow of their own accord, and taking one colour as a starting-point, I have clearly before my mind what must follow, and how to get life into it.

Jules Dupré is in landscape rather like Delacroix, for what enormous variety of mood did he express in symphonies of colour.

Now a marine, with the most delicate blue-greens and broken blue and all kinds of pearly tones, then again an autumn landscape, with a foliage from deep wine-red to vivid green, from bright orange to dark havana, with other colours again in the sky, in greys, lilacs, blues, whites, forming a further contrast with the yellow leaves.

Then again a sunset in black, in violet, in fiery red.

Then again, more fantastic, what I once saw, a corner of a garden by him, which I have never forgotten: black in the shadow, white in the sun, vivid green, a fiery red and then again a dark blue, a bituminous greenish brown, and a light brown-yellow. Colours that indeed have something to say for themselves.

I have always been very fond of Jules Dupré, and he will become still more appreciated than he is. For he is a real colourist, always interesting, and so powerful and dramatic.

Yes, he is indeed a brother to Delacroix.

As I told you, I think your letter about black very good, and what you say about not painting local colour is also quite correct. But it doesn't satisfy me. In my opinion there is much more behind that not painting local colour.

“Les vrais peintres sont ceux qui ne font pas la couleur locale” [The true painters are those who do not render local colour] - that was what Blanc and Delacroix discussed once.

May I not boldly take it to mean that a painter does better to start from the colours on his palette than from the colours in nature? I mean, when one wants to paint, for instance, a head, and sharply observes the reality one has before one, then one may think: that head is a harmony of red-brown, violet, yellow, all of them broken - I will put a violet and a yellow and a red-brown on my palette and these will break each other.

I retain from nature a certain sequence and a certain correctness in placing the tones, I study nature, so as not to do foolish things, to remain reasonable - however, I don't mind so much whether my colour corresponds exactly, as long as it looks beautiful on my canvas, as beautiful as it looks in nature.

Far more true is a portrait by Courbet, manly, free, painted in all kinds of beautiful deep tones of red-brown, of gold, of colder violet in the shadow with black as repoussoir, with a little bit of tinted white linen as a repose to the eye - finer than a portrait by whomever you like, who has imitated the colour of the face with horribly close precision.

A man's head or a woman's head, well contemplated and at leisure, is divinely beautiful, isn't it? Well, that *general harmony* of tones in nature, one loses it by painfully exact imitation, one keeps it by recreating in an equivalent colour range, that may be not exactly or far from exactly like the model.

Always and intelligently to make use of the beautiful tones which the colours form of their own accord, when one breaks them on the palette, I repeat - to start from one's palette, from one's knowledge of colour-harmony, is quite different from following nature mechanically and obsequiously.

Here is another example: suppose I have to paint an autumn landscape, trees with yellow leaves. All right - when I conceive it as a symphony in yellow, what does it matter whether the fundamental colour of yellow is the same as that of the leaves or not? It matters *very little*.

Much, everything depends on my perception of the infinite variety of tones of one and the *same family*.

Do you call this a dangerous inclination towards romanticism, an infidelity to "realism," a "peindre de chic," [painting without copying reality] a caring more for the palette of the colourist than for nature? Well, que soit. Delacroix, Millet, Corot, Dupré, Daubigny, Breton, thirty names more, are they not the heart and soul of the art of painting of this century, and are they not all rooted in romanticism, though they *surpassed* romanticism?

Romance and romanticism are of our time, and painters must have imagination and sentiment. Luckily realism and naturalism are not free from it. Zola creates, but does not hold up a *mirror* to things, he creates *wonderfully*, but *creates, poetises*, that is why it is so beautiful. So much for naturalism and realism, which nonetheless stand in connection to romanticism.

And I repeat that I am touched when I see a picture of about the years '30-'48, a Paul Huet, an old Israëls, like the "Fisherman of Zandvoort," a Cabat, an Isabey.

But I find so much truth in that saying: "ne pas peindre le ton local," [do not paint local tone] that I far prefer a picture in a lower tonal scale than nature to one which is exactly like nature.

Rather a watercolour that is somewhat vague and unfinished than one which is worked up to simulate reality.

That saying: "ne pas peindre le ton local," has a broad meaning, and it leaves the painter free to seek for colours which form a whole and harmonize, which stand out the more in contrast to another combination.

What do I care whether the portrait of an honourable citizen tells me exactly the milk-and-watery bluish, insipid colour of that pious man's face - which I would never have noticed. But the citizens of the small town, where the above-mentioned individual has rendered himself so meritorious that he thought himself obliged to impress his physiognomy on posterity, are highly edified by the correct exactness.

Colour expresses something by itself one cannot do without this, one must use it; that which is beautiful, really beautiful - is also correct; when Veronese had painted the portraits of his beau-monde in the "Marriage at Cana," he had spent on it all the richness of his palette in sombre violets, in splendid golden tones. Then - he thought still of a faint azure and a pearly-white - which does not appear in the foreground. He detonated it on in the background - and it was right, spontaneously it changes into the ambience of marble palaces and sky, which characteristically consummates the ordering of the figures.

So beautiful is that background that it arose spontaneously from a calculation of colours. Am I wrong in this?

Is it not painted *differently* than somebody would do it who had thought at the same time of the palace and of the figures as one whole?

All that architecture and sky is conventional and subordinate to the figures, it is calculated to make the figures stand out beautifully.

Surely *that is* real painting, and the result is more beautiful than the exact imitation of the things themselves. To think of one thing and to let the surroundings belong to it and proceed from it.

To study from nature, to wrestle with reality - I don't want to do away with it, for years and years I myself have been so engaged, almost fruitlessly and with all kinds of sad results.

I should not like to have missed that *error*.

I mean that it would be foolish and stupid always to go on in that same way, but *not* that all the pains I took should be absolutely dismissed.

“On commence par tuer, on finit par guerir,” [One begins by killing, one ends by healing] is a doctor's saying. One starts with a hopeless struggle to follow nature, and everything goes wrong; one ends by calmly creating from one's palette, and nature agrees with it, and follows. But these two contrasts are not separable from one another. The drudging, though it may seem in vain, gives an intimacy with nature, a sounder knowledge of things. And a beautiful saying by Doré (who sometimes is so clever) is: *je me souviens*. [I remember.] Though I believe that the best pictures are more or less freely painted by heart, still I *cannot* divorce the principle that one can never study and toil too much from nature. The greatest, most powerful imaginations have at the same time made things directly from nature which strike one dumb.

In answer to your description of the study by Manet, I send you a still-life of an open - so a broken white - Bible bound in leather, against a black background, with a yellow-brown foreground, with a touch of citron yellow.

I painted that in *one rush*, during a single day.

This to show you that when I say that I have perhaps not plodded completely in vain, I dare say this, because at present it comes quite easily to me to paint a given subject unhesitatingly, whatever its form or colour may be. Recently I painted a few studies out of doors, of the autumn landscape. I shall write again soon, and send this letter in haste to tell you that I was quite pleased with what you say about black.

Goodbye,

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, early November 1885

Dear Theo,
I just received your letter and the enclosure, for which many thanks. I want to answer you at once that I often met with sayings of Diderot's, and that I too think that he fits well into the framework of his time. It's the same with him as with Voltaire himself, when one reads a letter of those men's, even on the most commonplace things, or about *nothing*, there is a brightness and a sparkling spirit in them which charm. Let's not forget that they were the men who made the Revolution, and that it is the work of a genius to dominate one's time, and to make the minds that are thoughtless and passive strive in one direction and after one aim. So I have all respect for them. Shortly you will receive two studies of the autumn leaves, one in yellow - poplars - the other in orange - oaks.

I am completely absorbed in the laws of colours. If only they had taught us them in our youth!

But it is the fate of most people that by a kind of fatality one has to seek for light a long time. For, that the laws of colour which Delacroix was the first to use, like Newton did for gravitation, and like Stephenson did for steam - that those laws of colours are a ray of light - is absolutely certain.

I have made another autumn study of the pond in the garden at home. There decidedly is a picture in that spot. I already tried to get it last year.

The one I made now is a rather stiff composition - to the right, two trees - orange and yellow; in the centre, two bushes of grey-green; to the left, two trees of brownish-yellow. In front of them the black pond - a foreground of withered grass. The background - a glimpse over the hedge on a very vivid green. A sky of slate-grey and dark blue to harmonize with this in strength.

I am sure they will find it too black and too dark, but the time of making dark studies is always too short.

I enclose the book by Ch. Blanc in the box with the studies, also a Bible which those at home gave me for you, of which I painted a still life.

Don't let it trouble you when in my studies I just leave the brush strokes as I put them on, with smaller or larger clots of paint. That doesn't matter at all; if one leaves them for a year (or half a year is enough), and then scrapes them off quickly with a razor, one gets a much more solid colour than would be the case after painting thinly. And this scraping off has been done by the old masters as well as by the French painters of today. I believe that glacis of a transparent colour often gets quite dark and disappears in time if they are applied before the picture in its preparation is thoroughly dry; but applied *later*, they will certainly keep. You yourself made the observation that my studies in the studio became better rather than worse in colour in the course of time. I think this comes from laying the colours on thickly, and not using oil. When it is a year old, the little oil which the paint always contains has evaporated, and the healthy solid part remains. This question - that of painting so that it keeps - is rather important, I think; it is a pity that some durable colours like cobalt are so expensive.

I do not know what to think of the chromates and dark carmines, but I can quite understand that especially the American sunsets - you know those kinds of paintings that are obtained by glacis of chromates only - last an exceedingly short time. Daubigny and Dupré, on the contrary, will keep. Isn't it curious that that Van der Meer of Delft in The Hague has kept colour so splendidly, with that whole series of glaring tones of red, green, grey, brown, blue, black, yellow, white?

Haverman's picture in Amsterdam, which I suppose you remember (as not good), is badly painted, terribly badly, considering the time, I fear. I just mention this because he especially is so much admired for *his technique*. But it is painted as well, I should say, as for instance Ary Scheffer painted, or like the technique of Delaroche - and lovers of healthy vigorous work have always had some objections to those two. I noticed in Fodor how those pictures that are smoothed with oil crack terribly. Yet Silvestre says that Delacroix bathed his pictures in oil "*les baignait d'huile*"; but I suppose that it was strongly *empâté* work, first treated *en pleine pâte, then left for a year,* and then *afterward* Delacroix drenched those pictures with oil, after they were dry to the core. Then it can do no harm.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Has there been no Lhermitte this month? I am longing for de Goncourt.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 8-12 November 1885

Dear Theo,
Yesterday evening I received de Goncourt's book. I began to read it at once, and though of course I shall read it over again quietly, this morning I already had a general view of the whole - I had been longing for it so much. I do not think he praises Boucher too much.

If I knew nothing of Boucher but the contrast of those three things, a rich blue (sky), a bronze (man's figure), and a mother-of-pearl white (woman's figure) especially together with that anecdote of “La Duchesse d'Orleans,” I would admit that he is a *personality* in the world of painters. Besides, he doesn't praise him too much, because he certainly also calls him canaille, in the way in which one may call the pictures by Bouguereau, Perrault, etc., canaille without doing an injustice to the honest fellows. Because they miss something touching and intimate, don't they? In my opinion he does not praise Boucher too much, because I do not fear for a single moment that de Goncourt would deny the superiority of, for instance, Rubens. Rubens who was even more productive than Boucher, not less than he, but even more so, as a painter of nude women.

Which very often in Rubens does not prevent the poignant pathos and intimacy I mean, especially in those portraits of his wives, in which he is then himself, or surpasses himself.

But *Chardin*!

I have often longed to know something about the *man* (Watteau was just as I expected).

Tiers élat, Corot-like as to bonhomie - with more sorrow and adversity in his life.

It is a splendid book. Latour-witty and Voltaire-like.

Pastel is a process which I should like to know. I shall certainly try it someday. If one can paint a head, one ought to be able to learn it in a few hours.

I enjoyed immensely what he says about Chardin's technique. I am more convinced than ever that the true painters did not finish their things in the way which is used only too often, namely correct when one scrutinizes it closely.

The best pictures, and, from a technical point of view the most complete, seen from near by, are but patches of colour side by side, and only make an effect at a certain distance.

That is what Rembrandt stuck to, notwithstanding all the trouble it caused him (the honest citizens greatly preferred Van der Helst, because his work can also be looked at up close).

In that respect Chardin is as great as Rembrandt. Israëls is the same, and I for my part think Israëls always admirable, especially in his technique. It would be too good if everybody knew this, and thought like this, as *Bonnemort* would say.

But to work like that one must be something of a magician, to learn which costs a great deal, and the sad sarcastic saying of Michelangelo's: “Ma manière est destinée a faire de grands sots” - is also true of the colourists who dare dash on their colours, this too cannot be imitated by cowards and weaklings.

I think that I am making progress with my work. Last night something happened to me which I will tell you as minutely as I can. You know those three pollard oaks at the bottom of the garden at home; I have plodded on them for the fourth time. I had been at them for three days with a canvas the size of, let's say, that cottage, and the country churchyard which you have.

The difficulty was the tufts of havana leaves, to model them and give them form, colour, tone. Then in the evening I took it to that acquaintance of mine in Eindhoven, who has a rather stylish drawing room, where we put it on the wall (grey paper, furniture black with gold). Well, never before was I so convinced that I shall make things that do well, that I shall succeed in calculating my colours, so that I have it in my power to make the right effect. This was havana, soft green and white (grey), even *pure* white, direct from the tube (you see that I, for my part, though I speak about black, have no prejudice against the other extreme, even the utmost extreme).

Now, though that man has money, though he took a fancy to it, I felt such a glow of courage when I saw that it was good that, as it hung there, it created an atmosphere by the soft melancholy harmony of that combination of colours *that I could not sell it*.

But as he had a fancy for it, I gave it to him, and he accepted it just as I had intended, without many words, namely little more than, “The thing is damned good.”

I don't think so yet myself. First I must see a little more of Chardin, Rembrandt, old Dutch and French painters, and think it over well - because I want to make it more elaborate with less paint than I used, for instance, in this thing.

Now as to that acquaintance of mine and his opinion of pictures; when someone with a clear intelligent head paints still life and works out-of-doors every day, if only for a year, he need not therefore be an art critic, neither does he feel he is a painter yet, but for all that he will observe more originally than many others.

Besides, his character is not just like everybody's, for instance, he was originally intended to become a priest, at a certain moment he flatly refused this, *and carried his point*, in which not exactly every one in Brabant succeeds. And there is something broad-minded and loyal about him.

Zola once referred to this something in a conversation between Mouret and his school-fellow, when he let Mouret get serious and say that it had cost him a great deal to free himself from that time and its influence, but that he had wanted to *live* and that he had *lived*. Many who undertake to change fall back, don't come any further than a certain insipid methodism because they don't take their measures energetically enough. But this is not the case with him, he is a *man of importance* in his little world.

Do you know that the de Goncourts have made etchings and drawings? You must not think me unpractical when I persist in encouraging you either to draw or to paint. You wouldn't be a failure either. If you just set yourself to it, the result would not be unsatisfactory either. And especially as an art *dealer*, especially as an *art expert*, it would give you an edge over many others. An edge which one really needs.

I refer once more to that acquaintance of mine; it is exactly a year ago that I saw him for the first time, when I made that large sketch of a water mill which you perhaps know (its colour is ripening well). Herewith a description of a study by that acquaintance of mine - some roofs, backs of houses, factory chimneys, dark against an evening sky. That evening sky blue, changing at the horizon into a glow between clouds of smoky colour, with orange or rather ruddy reflections. The masses of houses, dark yet of a warm stone colour, a silhouette that has something gloomy and threatening. The foreground, a vague plot in the dusk, black sand, faded grass, a bit of garden with a few dark melancholy apple trunks, with here and there a tuft of yellow autumn leaves.

It was all his idea alone, but isn't it a good conception, a real *impression*, well felt? But one doesn't become a *painter* in one year, nor is it necessary.

But there is already one good thing among the lot, and one feels hopeful, instead of feeling helpless before a stone wall.

I do not know how I shall fare in the future. At present when I read of that splendid devil, that famous Latour, by *God*, how real it is, and how well that fellow, except for his enormous passion for money, has attacked life and painting.

Only *recently* I saw Frans Hals. Well, you know how enthusiastic I was about it, how I immediately wrote you a long letter about painting in one stroke. How great is the similarity between the ideas of Latour, for instance, and Frans Hals, when they express life with pastel which one could almost blow *off*. I don't know what I shall do and how I shall fare, but I hope not to forget the lessons which I am thus learning these days: *in one stroke* - but with absolutely complete exertion of one's whole spirit and attention.

At present - I like nothing better than working with the brush, drawing with it too - instead of making a sketch in charcoal.

When I ask myself how the old Dutch masters worked, I find so relatively few real drawings. And how wonderfully they draw. But - I think in most cases they began, continued and finished with their brush.

They did not *fill in*.

A Van Goyen, for instance - I just saw that one of his in the Dupper Collection, an oak tree on a dune in the storm; and the Cuyp, view of Dordrecht.

An astonishing technique, but done with nothing and quite naturally - clear of paint, and - apparently - quite simple.

But either in figure or in landscape, how the painters always did try to convince people that a picture is something different from nature in a mirror, different from imitation, *i.e.* re-creation.

I should like to tell you a great deal more, especially about what Chardin made me think about colour and that not painting the local colour. I think it splendid.

“Comment surprendre - comment dire de quoi est faite cette bouche démeublée, qui a d'infinies délicatesses. Cela n'est fait que de quelques traineés de *jaune* et de quelques balayures de *bleu*!!!” [How to surprise - how to tell what that toothless mouth is done with, which is so infinitely delicate. It is done only with some streaks of *yellow*, and some broad strokes of *blue*!!!]

When I read this I thought of Van der Meer of Delft; if one sees his city view at The Hague close up, it is incredible, and painted with entirely different colours than one would suspect at a few steps' distance.

Goodbye, I had to tell you at once how I admire de Goncourt's book.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, 12-15 November 1885

Dear Theo,
Would it greatly amaze you - let's suppose those at home intend to move between March and May next - would it greatly amaze you if something happened to Mother before that time? Now and then this thought occurs to me when I go there. I have the impression that lately there has been a change. “Aging” is such a strange thing, and it is absolutely certain that there are many cases of a wife's not outliving her husband by long. The change I observed is that at times Mother's thoughts are more lucid, whereas during these last months there were long periods when they seemed more or less fuzzy - which is really not to be wondered at. For a time thee was something overwrought in her, due to - at least so I imagine - the void around her and the feeling of loneliness.

Now *it struck me* that she has turned quite calm and collected - something resolute has taken the place of the worrying. Nothing more is to be *seen*.

I do not think it *impossible* that to her too death may come unexpectedly and softly, just as it came to Father, and for a similar reason. Seeing that I was struck by it - and because Wil, when I discussed it with her, told me that she had also observed that Mother was changing a great deal, and that it made her uneasy too - I am writing to let you know.

For the rest, however, one might say that Mother is looking *particularly well*. But there is something that makes me think of what I told you. I don't think it would be a bad idea at all if Mother made a few trips shortly, to Anna, to Amsterdam, to Cor - especially as she seems to be resolved on it and to long to see them all once more. But it might well be that she herself has a presentiment that at the same time it will be a leave-taking.

This month I had to pay my rent, and at the same time I gave notice that I shall leave my studio toward May. Its drawback is, as you know, that I am greatly handicapped by the neighbours, and I notice that people are still afraid of the priest, though perhaps he wouldn't meddle any further. But since there has been trouble once, the best thing is a radical change.

The last thing I painted is rather big; it's an old mill on the barren heath, a dark silhouette against an evening sky.

Now this is an uneasiness that I arrived at on my own, however, to such a degree that I feel obliged to inform you of it. But as Mother goes to see Van der

Loo from time to time, we may expect him to warn us if there is anything to be warned of. But if it should be a passing similar to Father's, that is to say, sudden, it is equally possible that it will happen within a few days as within a few years. So - who can tell? If the lucidity and the calm persist, I personally expect a crisis after the trip, that is, within a short time - and dying without a struggle. But sometimes it happens that the mind gets a little clouded, then things drag on, and then it may still be necessary to struggle through much suffering and worry. Please think over whether I am not right in setting the two chances against each other: either an early death without suffering or the other thing.

Goodbye, with a handshake,
Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, mid November 1885

Dear Theo,
In de Goncourt's book I found the following sentence in the article about Chardin marked by you. After having talked about the bad financial conditions of painters, he says: “Que faire, que devenir? Il faut se jeter dans une condition subalterne ou mourir de faim. On prend le premier parti” [What to do, what to become? One must throw oneself into a subordinate condition or starve. One chooses the first], so, he continues, except a few *martyrs*, the rest become fencing masters, soldiers or actors. After all, this has remained true up to now. As you had marked the above, I thought it possible, especially as I had just mentioned to you that I am going to give up my present studio, that you might want to know what I intend to do. The present days are not quite exactly like those of Chardin, and there are a few things which can hardly be argued away at present. The number of painters is much larger.

Now it always makes a fatal impression on the public when the painter “takes a job on the side.” I don't feel above this at all, but I should say, Go on painting, just make a hundred, and if that is not enough, two hundred studies, and see if this doesn't help you more than the “job on the side.”

Accustoming oneself to poverty, seeing how a soldier or a labourer lives and thrives in wind and weather, with ordinary people's fare and dwelling, is just as practical as earning a few guilders more a week.

After all, one is not in the world for one's own comfort, and one does not need to be better off than one's neighbour.

Being a little better off helps so little after all. Anyhow, we cannot prevent the days of our youth slipping from us. If *that* were possible! But the real thing that makes one happy, materially happy - being young, and remaining so a long time - does not exist here - that doesn't even exist in Arabia or Italy, though it is better *there* than here.

And I personally think that one has the greatest chance of remaining strong and renewing oneself under the present-day tiers état. Well, so I say that I try to find it in painting without any thoughts on the side. But I shall do well to keep my eye on portrait painting if I want to earn something. I know it is difficult to satisfy people as to the “likeness,” and I dare not say beforehand that I feel sure of myself on that point. But I don't think it entirely impossible, for the people here are not much different from people elsewhere. Now the peasants here and the people from the village don't make mistakes and immediately say, *contradicting me even when I say they are wrong*: This is Reinier de Greef, that is Toon de Groot and that is Dien van de Beck, *etc.* And sometimes they even recognize a figure seen from behind. In the city the honest middle-class citizens, and certainly not less the prostitutes, attach great importance to portraits. And Millet discovered that *sea captains* even “respect” somebody who knows how to do them (probably these portraits are destined for their mistresses ashore). This has not yet been exploited. Do you remember this in Sensier? I have always remembered how Millet kept himself afloat in Le Havre this way.

Now I certainly intend to go to Antwerp; it is impossible for me to tell how or when beforehand.

I found six art dealers' addresses, so I shall take some things with me; and further, as soon as I get there - I intend to paint a few city views - rather large size - and to exhibit them at once.

Thus concentrating everything on the work there, and going there as a poor man, I have nothing to lose in any case.

As to this region here, I know the country and the people too well and love them too much to be positively leaving them for good. I shall try to rent a room where I can put my things, and shall be safe then, in case I want to leave Antwerp for a time or if I get homesick for the country.

As to that “job on the side,” from the very beginning, Tersteeg, for instance, had bothered me with it. And that was *nonsense*, whatever Tersteeg may say. Those who talk most about it are unable to decide what it must be. And as to that, to make my case quite clear, if I should take up a “job on the side” the only thing would be that if I knew dealers or painters, I should try to do something with pictures, for instance by going to England for them, *etc.*

Such things, of course, which are directly connected with painting, are an exception, but otherwise, as a matter of principle a painter must be only a painter.

And then, don't forget that I am not a born melancholic. The general nickname I have in this neighborhood is “ `t schildermenneke,” [The little painter fellow] and it is not without a certain dose of malice that I go abroad.

Now I have also thought of Drenthe, but it is more difficult to carry out. That, however, would be a good thing, in case my painting of rural life might please in Antwerp. Sooner or later when the things from here have some success, I would go on with them and vary them with the same kind of things from Drenthe.

But the fact is that I can do only one thing at the time, that when I am busy painting peasants, I cannot occupy myself with business in town. Now is just the moment to break free for a while, as I have had trouble with my models, and in any case I am going to move.

In this Studio, just next door to the priest and the sexton, the trouble would never end, that is clear, so I am going to change this. But then it does not make an *absolute* impression on people, and by renting another room and taking no notice of it for a few months, the intrigue will lose most of its virulence.

Now wouldn't it be best if I could spend the next two months, December and January, in Antwerp?

In Amsterdam I stayed at a People's hostel for 50 cents. I would do the same there, or better still, I should like to make an arrangement with some painter to work in his studio. Another reason is that it is not absolutely improbable that I shall find an opportunity somewhere to paint from the nude. They would not want me at the academy, nor would I want to go there - but - perhaps a sculptor, for instance (there surely must be a few living there), might be sympathetic. Of course one can get as many models as one likes with money; but without it, it is a difficult problem. But there will certainly be some people there who take models for the nude, and with whom one might make an arrangement as to the expenses. I need it for many reasons.

I received your letter while writing this.

If necessary I am willing to go to Doctor Van der Loo; however, you know that doctors do not always tell everything, particularly in doubtful cases. Also you should understand that that slight clouding of her mind I told you about will presumably recur, a thing that many people are afflicted with as they get older. At any rate, I think it a practical idea not to let her be present at the bustle of moving, unless she should insist on it.

For the rest, old fellow, I myself am convinced that Van der Loo has advised Mother everything, absolutely everything, that could be advised, and would not say anything new. I mean he would already have warned us if a danger threatened that might be averted. But if he said nothing it might be a sign that, if there is anything the matter with Mother, he would not be able to do anything about it, and that nothing ought to be done. If he leaves nature to her own devices, he does it because it is the best thing to do. Van der Loo is awfully precise and, Zola-like, cool-headed and equable.

Well, I think I shall speak about it some time or other, either I might go to him, or Mother might meet Van der Loo when he is visiting the village. We shall try to do something. But I think things will have to take their course without our being able to do much. Well, in such cases worrying or being exaggeratedly uneasy is insupportable to the patient, *if she is aware of it*; I think you will admit this. And with old people it is absolutely impossible to predict anything, because often the heart is no longer normal, for instance because of fatty degeneration, and then they may be gone all at once, or they may go on for another five or ten years. Of course emotions may have a great influence, and that is why there is a much better chance of keeping alive if the mind is no longer so very clear as in the periods of lucidity. And there is something else - with Mother I am quite sure that, at least at times, there is a substratum of deep thoughts (for her inner mental life is rather complicated, and has different floors or layers) which she neither would nor could talk about. In many cases she used to be rather chary of speech, so I for one prefer to say that I don't know everything about her. *Because of the very fact that her mind is now quite lucid, letting her do what she wants to do* is certainly the easiest way, in the first place for herself, and secondly it is the most justifiable way for us.

Silently understanding that to her it would mean anything but a misfortune if she should not have much longer to live, and departed this life without much suffering, serenity in this matter is reasonable; but serenity too if there should prove to be many years yet of practically mechanical life.

You see that I wanted to fix my going to Antwerp at about the same time as Mother's trip, which will be over by February, between then and their definite moving, I shall either be back in Nuenen or, if I were kept there for some reason or other, I should always be ready to come back at once if necessary.

This letter must go, but in a few days I shall write you again about what I arrange with Wil. I shall propose that she go with Mother to Van der Loo before the trip; to Mother this is an entirely natural thing to do. After Van der Loo has seen her, it will be the moment for either Wil or me to ask him outright whether he can tell anything about her life expectancy. If necessary, according to what you and Wil think, I am willing to go and prepare Van der Loo before Mother's visit, and to tell him what we should very much like to know, and ask him to give her an especially thorough check-up.

Good-by,

Yours, Vincent

Write me soon what you think of my going to Antwerp. I don't suppose there will be any objection.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 15-20 November 1885

Dear Theo,

I will tell you what Doctor Van der Loo said about Mother in a few words.

He says:

1. that there is nothing the matter with her;
2. that she may live another ten years or so;
3. that she would have to contract some disease or other to die earlier.

And finally he seems to think it quite natural that at times she should be a little bit dazed, but he did not attach much importance to it.

So she can do whatever she likes, and does not need to be very careful in the matter of making trips or moving.

So much the better in any case. At any rate it is reassuring. For, speaking for myself, I believe what he says, and taking into consideration the excellent care Wil takes of Mother, there is not much chance of her contracting a disease.

I wanted to inform you of this promptly. It sets my mind at rest too.

I must say I am longing for Antwerp now. Probably the first thing I shall do there will be to go and see the pictures by Leys in his dining hall, if it is open to the public. You know that “Walk on the Ramparts,” and those which Bracquemond etched, “The Table” and “The Servant Maid.”

I imagine it will be beautiful there this winter, especially the docks with snow.

Of course I shall take a few pictures with me, and they will be those that I would otherwise have sent to you one of these days.

A big mill on the heath in the evening, and a view of the village behind a row of poplars with yellow leaves, a still life, and a number of drawings of figures.

At present I am rather in a fix with my work here. It is freezing hard, so working out-of-doors is impossible. It is better to take no models at all as long as I live in this house, at least until I come back. Then I save my colours and canvas so as to have ammunition there. So the sooner I can go, the better.

The other day I had a letter from Leurs about my pictures. He wrote that Tersteeg and Wisselingh had seen them, but did not care for them.

All the same I maintain that I shall bring people to have other ideas, although Tersteeg and Wisselingh may be indifferent. I have just read a few books in the style of the Souvenirs of Gigoux, which my friend in Eindhoven had ordered, and in which I found very interesting things about the men of that period, beginning with Paul Huet. And which encourage me to think that I have not attacked nature in the wrong way, nor the technique of painting, though I readily admit that I shall and must change a lot more. As to the heads which I sent you, there must be some good ones among them. I am almost sure of it. So let's go on quietly.

I don't think this winter will be tedious. Of course it will be especially a question of hard work. But there is something curious in the very feeling that one has to enter the fight. I am taking a good supply with me of the colours that I can get brayed here myself, but it will certainly be a good thing if I can get some colours of a better quality there.

I am also taking along at least forty small stretchers, of the size of those study heads which you have. And drawing material and paper, so that whatever happens, I shall always have something to do.

As I have been working absolutely alone for years, I imagine that, though I want to and can learn from others, and even adopt some technical things, I shall always see with my own eyes, and render things originally. However, it is quite certain that I shall try to learn some more. And, if possible, especially the nude. But I am afraid I shall not succeed in getting good models, as many as I like and good ones, but shall have to find the money for it by making other things, either landscapes or city views or portraits, as I said, or even signboards and decorations. Or, what I did not mention in my previous letter among the “jobs on the side” that would be possible, by giving painting lessons, letting them begin by painting still life, which I think is a different method from that of the drawing masters. I have tried it on those acquaintances of mine in Eindhoven, and I should dare to repeat it.

I shall certainly leave immediately, as soon as I get the monthly allowance from you. And if you should by chance be able to send it a week earlier, I would also start a week earlier. But of course I do not count on this. I am glad I have now been to see the Amsterdam museum, for since then I have noticed that what I saw there has been useful in my work.

Write soon if you have time. As I am busy packing my things, my thoughts are of course more there than here.

I painted continuously here to learn painting, to get firm notions about colour, etc., without having much room in my head for other things.

But when I got off to Amsterdam for a few days, I enjoyed seeing pictures again immensely.

For sometimes it is damned hard to stand completely outside the world of painters and pictures, and to have no contact with others. Since then I have felt the longing to go back to them, at least for a time. Having been entirely out of it for a few years and having wrestled with nature sometimes helps, and one may get a new store of courage and also of health by it, of which one can never have too much, for a painter's life is often hard enough.

As to my work, I shall have to act according to circumstances. I mean, if I can get in touch with an art dealer, I must try and get him to show some things of mine. But all is not lost that is delayed, and especially if I may succeed in making new studies of heads or figures, I will soon show you some of them.

The one landscape I am taking with me, and if possible both, but the one with the yellow leaves, I believe you would like too. I am enclosing a hasty scratch of it.

The horizon is a dark streak against a light streak of sky in white and blue. In that dark streak, little patches of red, bluish and green, or brown, forming the silhouette of the roofs and orchards, the field greenish. The sky higher up, gray, with the black saplings and yellow leaves against it. The foreground all covered with yellow leaves, in which are two little black figures and a blue one. To the right, a birch trunk, white and black, and a green trunk with red-brown leaves.

Good-by. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Nuenen, c. 18-22 November 1885

Dear Theo,

Very many thanks for the 50 francs and your letter.

You will be able to understand that I shall leave next Tuesday if you consider, firstly, that I am simply longing for it, secondly, that I risk getting stuck here with my work through lack of models, while working out-of-doors has stopped because of the cold.

As to my feeling the loss of a studio in Antwerp, yes, I certainly shall. But I must choose between a studio without work here, and work without a studio there.

I chose the latter. And I did it so gladly that it seems to me like a return from exile. For I have been altogether out of the painters' world for a long time. And meanwhile my power has somewhat ripened, so that I feel more independent of the common intrigues, which enables me to pitch certain fellows out. I mean that in The Hague I was somewhat weaker with my brush than the rest - I don't say in my drawing - and as they asked only for painting and colour, I was more easily crushed than will prove possible now.

As for Rubens, I am looking forward to him very much, but do you object to my thinking Rubens's conception and sentiment of his religious subjects theatrical, often even badly theatrical in the worst sense of the word? Look here - take Rembrandt, Michelangelo - take the “Penseroso” by Michelangelo. It represents a thinker, doesn't it?

But his feet are small and swift, his hand has something of the lightning quickness of a lion's claw and - that thinker is at the same time a man of action, one sees that his thinking is a concentration, but - in order to jump up and act in some way or other. Rembrandt does it *differently*. Especially his Christ in the “Men of Emmaus” is more a soul in a body, which is surely different from a torso by Michelangelo, but still - there is something powerful in the gesture of persuasion.

Now put a Rubens beside it, one of the many figures of meditative persons - and they become people who have retired into a corner in order to further their digestion. That's how it is in everything religious or philosophical he does, it is flat and *hollow*; but what he can paint is - women - like Boucher and better - there especially he gives one most to think about and there he is at his deepest.

What he can do - combinations of colours - what he can do is - paint a queen, a statesman, well analyzed, just as they are. But the supernatural - where magic begins, no - unless putting something infinite into a woman's expression, which, however, is not dramatic.

I found a passage about Gainsborough which again stimulates me to work with one stroke. Look here:

It is this brusqueness of touch that produces so much effect. The spontaneity of his impression is all there, and communicates itself to the spectator. For the rest Gainsborough had a perfect method of ensuring the completeness of his composition. He planned his picture all at once, and carried it out harmoniously from top to bottom, without concentrating his attention on separate little fragments, without obstinately worrying over details, for he sought the general effect, and he nearly always found it, thanks to his broad vision on the canvas, which he looked at as one looks at nature, at a single glance.

I shall send you the book by Ch. Blanc, etc., from Antwerp, as soon as I can add a few studies.

As I don't know where I shall stay, I'll ask that when you write on December 1, address your letter c/o G.P.O., unless I let you know otherwise.

For I shall write again one of these days.

I found the enclosed sonnet by Jules Breton in a magazine.

I repeat, as to my rather sudden departure from here, if I hadn't had trouble with the models, I should have spent the winter here. But working steadily with models here is not so much hampered by the priest's opposition, which in itself would have been neutralized by my ignoring it completely, but the worst is that though I have the courage to stand my ground, people hesitate, and are more frightened than I thought they would be.

And I am not going to undertake it unless I am quite sure that they have the courage. Now it might help if I go away for a couple of months, and if it doesn't help, then not one of those to whom I gave something for it every week last winter will earn a penny with it this winter.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 24-27 November 1885

Dear Theo,
I want to tell you that I am in Antwerp, and that I already have seen a few things. I have taken a room for 25 fr. a month, No. 194 Rue des Images, over a colour dealer's. So when you write, kindly send your letter to that address, instead of c/o G.P.O.

I shall begin by telling you that I saw Ley's dining hall, you know, “The Walk on the Ramparts,” “The Skaters,” “The Reception” and “The Table,” and on a panel between the windows “St. Luc.” To my astonishment the composition was somewhat different from the ultimate compositions, at least I imagine so - although I have not yet been able to compare photos of the *pictures* with them.

Then, it was painted in fresco - *i.e.* on the plaster of the wall. Now fresco really must and can last for centuries, but these have already faded considerably, and the one over the mantlepiece especially (part of “The Reception”) already shows some cracks. The highly ingenious son of Baron Leys has also improved the hall by having a door enlarged so that in “The Skaters,” the legs of the fellows standing on the bridge looking over the railings have been cut away, which makes a deplorable effect. Besides, the light is terribly bad there; now that hall was originally painted - I imagine - to be used by lamplight. Therefore, because I honestly could not see anything, I gave the servant a tip and asked her to light the chandelier for me, and then I could see better.

After so much that had rather disappointed me - in the first place that the colour of the fresco, and, alas, I am afraid *bad* fresco, is not what we are used to from Leys - after so much that disappointed me - after all it is superb.

The maidservant, the woman near the baker's shop, the lovers and other figures in “The Walk on the Ramparts” - the bird's-eye view of the city, the silhouette of the towers and roofs against the sky, the bustle of skaters on the frozen moat - are superbly executed.

I have also seen the museum of old pictures and the Musée Moderne. I agree with you that the figures on the first plane, those heads in “Le Christ au Purgatoire,” are *very* beautiful, finer than the rest, and than the principal figure; those two blonde women's heads especially are Rubens at his best.

I was very much struck by Frans Hal's “Fisherboy”; Mr. De Vos - portrait of master of the guild - Rembrandt, *very* beautiful, two small Rembrandts, which perhaps are not by Rembrandt, but by N. Maes? or somebody else; Jordaens - “a chip off the old block”; Van Goyen, S. Ruysdael. And the Quentin Matsys; the drawing “St. Barbara” by Van Eyck, *etc.*

In the Musée Moderne: the great Mols is Mesdag-like, with smears of Vollon plainly visible. (Vollon knew him well.) Braekleer, *not* the bad one - a Brabant inn, curiously fine, beautiful landscapes by C. de Cock, Lamorinière, Coosemans, Asselbergs, Rosseels, Baron, Munthe, Achenbach, a good Clays, two old Leyses - one Braekleer-like, the other romantic, the latter good; a beautiful portrait by Ingres, a fine portrait by David, other good things, also horrible things like life-sized cows by the God-fearing Verboeckhoven, *etc.* But I have seen very little at the art dealers', next to nothing, one little painting the size of a hand, not even as good as Raffaelli, otherwise nothing special, and I am afraid that metaphorically business is at death's door. But - there is a good old Dutch proverb, “Never despair.” I like Antwerp, have explored the city in every direction; the quays are most characteristic.

Well, it will never hurt knowing Antwerp a bit; it will probably prove to be like everything everywhere, namely disillusioning but with its own atmosphere.

Besides, it is good to have a change now and then.

Goodbye, write soon if you can.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 28 November 1885

My dear Theo,
I just wanted to send you a few more impressions of Antwerp. This morning I took a long walk in the pouring rain, the object of the outing being to fetch my things from the custom house. The various warehouses and storage sheds on the quays look splendid.

I've walked in many different directions along the docks and quays several times already. The contrast is particularly marked for one who has just arrived from the sand and the heath and the tranquillity of a country village and has been in quiet surroundings for a long time. It's all an impenetrable confusion.

One of de Goncourt's sayings was, “Japonaiserie for ever.” Well, those docks are one huge Japonaiserie, fantastic, peculiar, unheard of - or at any rate, that's one way of looking at them. I would love some day to take a walk there in your company, just to find out if we see things in the same way.

Everything could be done there, townscapes, figures of the most diverse character, ships as the main subject with water and the sky a delicate grey - but, above all - Japonaiseries. The point I'm trying to make is that there are always figures in motion there, one sees them in the strangest setting, everything looks fantastic, with interesting contrasts at every turn. A white horse in the mud in a corner where piles of merchandise lie covered with a tarpaulin - against the old, black, smoke-stained walls of the warehouse. Perfectly simple, but with a Black and White effect.

Through the window of a very elegant English public house one can look out on the filthiest mud and on a ship from which, say, such pleasing wares as hides and buffalo horns are being unloaded by docker types as ugly as sin, or by exotic sailors, while a very fair, very delicate English girl stands at the window looking out at this or at something else. The interior with figure wholly in tone, and for light - the silvery sky above the mud and the buffalo horns - again a series of fairly strong contrasts.

Flemish sailors with excessively ruddy faces and broad shoulders, lusty and tipsy, Antwerpers through and through, are to be seen eating mussels or drinking beer with a great deal of noise and commotion. In contrast - there goes a tiny little figure in black, small hands clasped close to her body, scuttling noiselessly past the grey walls. In an encadrement [frame] of jet-black hair, a small oval face. Brown? Orange-yellow? I'm not sure. For a moment she looks up and gives a slanting glance from a pair of jet-black eyes. She is a Chinese girl, quiet as a mouse, stealthy, small, naturally bedbug-like. What a contrast to the group of Flemish mussel-eaters!

Another contrast - one walks down a very narrow street between tremendously tall buildings, warehouses and storehouses. But at ground level in the street - alehouses for every nationality, with males and females to match, shops for food, for seamen's clothing, colourful and bustling. The street is long, at every turn one sees a typical scene, a commotion, perhaps, more intense than usual, as a squabble breaks out. For example, there you are walking along, just looking around - and suddenly cheers go up and there's a lot of yelling. A sailor is being thrown out of a brothel by the girls in broad daylight and is being pursued by a furious fellow and a string of prostitutes, of whom he seems to be terrified - anyway, I see him clamber over a pile of sacks and disappear through a window into a warehouse.

When one has had enough of this hullabaloo - with the city behind one at the end of the landing stages where the Harwich and Havre steamers lie, there is nothing, absolutely nothing to be seen in front except for an infinite expanse of flat, half-flooded pasture, immensely melancholy and wet, with undulating dry reeds, and mud - the river with a single small black boat, water in the foreground grey, sky misty and cold, grey - still as the desert.

As to the overall impression of the harbour, or of one of the docks - at one moment it is more tangled and fantastic than a thorn hedge, so chaotic that one finds no rest for the eye, grows giddy, and is forced by the “papillot-ering” [flickering. Vincent “Dutchified” the French *papillotement*] of colours and lines to look first here, then there, unable to distinguish one thing from another - even after looking at the same point for a long time. But if one moves on to a certain spot with an undefined stretch of land in the foreground, then one again encounters the most beautiful, most peaceful lines and those effects which Mols, for instance, so often achieves.

Here one may se a splendidly healthy-looking girl, who is, or at least seems, wholly honest and unaffectedly cheerful; there a face so slyly vicious, like a hyena's, that it frightens one. Not to forget faces ravaged by smallpox, the colour of boiled shrimps, with dull, grey little eyes, no eyebrows and sparse, greasy, thinning hair the colour of pure hog bristle, or a bit yellower - Swedish or Danish types.

I'd like to do some work around there, but how and where, for one would get into trouble exceedingly quickly. All the same I've roamed through quite a number of streets and alleyways without mishap, have even sat down to talk in a very friendly way with various girls, who seemed to take me for a bargee.

I think it not unlikely that painting portraits may help me to come by some good models. I got my gear today, and some materials, to which I'd been looking forward very eagerly. So now my studio is all ready. If I could come by a good model for a song, I'd be afraid of nothing. Nor do I mind very much that I haven't enough money to force the pace. Perhaps the idea of doing portraits and getting the subjects to pay for them by posing is a safer method. You see, in the city things aren't the same as when one deals with peasants.

Well, one thing is certain, Antwerp is a splendid and very remarkable place for a painter.

My studio isn't at all bad, especially now that I've pinned up a lot of small Japanese prints which I enjoy very much. You know, those small female figures in gardens or on the beach, horsemen, flowers, gnarled thorn branches.

I'm glad I came here - and hope not to sit still and do nothing this winter. Anyway, it's a relief to have a small hideaway where I can work when the weather is bad. It goes without saying that I won't be living in the lap of luxury.

Try to send your letter off on the first, for while I've enough to live on until then, I shall be getting the wind up after that.

My little room has turned out better than I expected and certainly doesn't look dreary.

Now that I have the 3 studies I took along with me here, I shall try to make contact with the marchands de tableaux [picture dealers], who seem, however, to live for the most part in private houses, with no display windows giving on to the street.

The park is beautiful too. I sat there one morning and did some drawing.

Well - I've had no setbacks so far, and I'm well off as far as accommodation is concerned, for by sacrificing another few francs I've acquired a stove and a lamp. I shan't easily get bored, believe me.

I've also found Lhermitte's *Octobre*, women in a potato field in the evening, splendid, but not his Novembre yet. Have you kept track of that by any chance? I've also seen that there's a Figaro illustré with a beautiful drawing by Raffaelli.

My address, as you know, is 194 Rue des images, so please send your letter there, and the second de Goncourt volume when you've finished with it. Regards,

Ever yours, Vincent

It's odd that my painted studies look darker here in the city than in the country. Is that because the light isn't as bright in the city? I'm not sure, but it might matter more than one might think at first sight. I was struck by it and can imagine that some of the things that are with you now also look darker than I thought they were in the country. Yet those I brought along with me don't seem the worse for it - the mill, avenue with autumn trees, a still life, as well as a few small things.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 6-7 December 1885

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosed 150 fr. I want to tell you that I am glad I came here. Last week I painted three more studies, one with backs of old houses, seen from my window, two in the park. I have exhibited one of those at a dealer's. Further, I have given the ones I brought along from the country to two others on commission. At a fourth, I can exhibit a view of the quay as soon as the weather permits me to make it, because he had a Mols, along with which he could exhibit another one. Then I have got an address from this dealer, where he assured me I should be well received.

Now these dealers are not the biggest ones in Antwerp, but at all their places, among many things I did not like, I saw things which pleased me: for instance one had a picture by Van Goyen and a study by Troyon; at another's I saw a Mols and small Dutch pictures; at another place there was that small picture I mentioned to you, like Raffaelli (it is by Moormans), and a few good watercolours; at another's I found various good marines by young Belgians. I saw very little of figure painting, and so I intend to try and do some.

The address that dealer in question gave me happens to be of one of the big dealers, Nicolié, one of those who do not have show windows, but exhibit in private houses. But I want to come there with figure paintings.

Further, I have discovered useful resources for colours, etc., where I shall be able to get them fairly cheaply. I have also traced Linnig, whom you mentioned to me this summer when I asked you whether you knew people in Antwerp; but he has *nothing* but a few miserable little old pictures, paints himself somewhat like Vertin, but seemed to me a discouraged man - if he ever had any courage, which I doubt. All these gentlemen, however, complain bitterly that trade is so slack, but that's not news.

Shortly I hope to be able to go and see that picture you wrote about. But I have been busy going backward and forward, and also tracing those people, and with model-hunting too. The latter is always tremendously difficult, but I have found them elsewhere, and so I shall find them here too. For tomorrow I have an appointment with a splendid old man - will he come?

Today I received the supply of colours which they forwarded to me from Eindhoven, and I paid more than 50 fr. for it.

It is hard, terribly hard, to keep on working when one does not sell, and when one literally has to pay for one's colour out of what would not be too much for eating, drinking and lodgings, however strictly calculated. And then the models besides. But all the same there is a chance, and even a good one, because comparatively speaking, there are only a few painters at work nowadays.

In my opinion they are only half to blame for that (for the other half, *they are*), for sometimes it is too hard.

All the same they are building State museums, and the like, for hundreds of thousands of guilders, but meanwhile the artists very often starve.

But, however this may be, I wanted to look into things myself again, and I find the chance of doing something not smaller, but bigger than I thought. I have seen several photos of pictures by Jan van Beers, some of his things have, after all, much character. But I imagine that someone like Manet, for instance, is much more of *a painter* than Van Beers, and paints more beautifully and artistically.

If only I were better known here, if only I could get hold of the models I saw! Yesterday I was at the Café-concert Scala, something like the Folies Bergères;

I found it very dull, and of course insipid - but the public amused me. There were splendid women's heads, really extraordinarily fine, among the good middle-class folks on the back seats, and on the whole I think what is said about Antwerp true, that the women are handsome.

I say it again, if only I had my choice of models! The mass of German girls one sees at the café-concerts leave me quite cool, one would say they are all manufactured after one model.

It seems that one sees that same race everywhere, just like Bavarian beer, it seems to be an article exported wholesale.

I find all those German elements, which nowadays nestle themselves wherever one goes, so terribly annoying. It is sure to be just the same in Paris, those Boches intruding everywhere. But it is an unpleasant thing to talk about.

Through seeing some pictures by others, I get all kinds of ideas for the time when

I shall be in the country again next spring; at the same time my conviction that I must go on with all the vigour I possess is also getting stronger.

Antwerp is beautiful in colour, and it is worth while just for the subjects. One evening I saw a popular sailors' ball at the docks; it was most interesting and they behaved *quitedecently*. However, that will not be the case at all those balls.

Here, for instance, nobody was drunk, or drank much.

There were several very handsome girls, the most beautiful of whom was plain-faced. I mean, a figure that struck me as a splendid Jordaens or Velásquez, or Goya - was one in black silk, most likely some barmaid or such, with an ugly and irregular face, but lively and piquant it la Frans Hals.

She danced perfectly in an old-fashioned style. Once she danced with a well-to-do little farmer who carried a big green umbrella under his arm, even when he waltzed very quickly.

Other girls wore ordinary jackets and skirts and red scarves; sailors and cabin-boys, etc., the funniest types of pensioned sea captains, who came to take a look, quite striking. It does one good to see folks actually enjoy themselves.

Well, you see, I don't sit still, but I can't tell you emphatically enough how difficult it is to be *court d'argent* [short of money].

My best chance is in the figure, because there are relatively very few who do it, and I must seize the opportunity. I must work myself into it here, until I get into touch with good figure painters - Verhaert, for instance, and then I imagine portrait painting is the way to earn the means for greater things.

I feel a power within me to do something, I see that my work holds its own against other work, and that gives me a great craving for work; lately, when I was in the country, I began to doubt, because I noticed that Portier does not seem to care for my things any more.

If I were better off, I should be able to paint more, but as far as producing goes I am partly dependent on my purse.

I also have an idea for a kind of signboard, which I hope to carry out. I mean, for instance, for a fishmonger, still life of fishes, for flowers, for vegetables, for restaurants. I think that if one takes well-composed subjects, 1 meter by ½ or ¾ meter in size, for instance, such a canvas would cost me 50 fr., not more, even perhaps 30 fr., and if possible I will try to make a few.

One thing is certain, that I want my things to be seen. Later on we may lose courage, but we will try and put it off for a long time.

Write me again if you should have the time. The end of the month will certainly be terrible unless you can help me a little more. A great deal may depend on my being able to stick to my guns. And one must not look too hungry or shabby either. On the contrary, one must try to make things hum.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 8-15 December 1885

Dear Theo,
I must write you again to tell you that I have succeeded in finding a model. I have made two fairly big heads, by way of trial for a portrait. First, that old man whom I wrote you about, a kind of head like Hugo's; then also a study of a woman. In the woman's portrait I have brought lighter tones into the flesh, white tinted with carmine, vermilion, yellow and a light background of grey-yellow, from which the face is separated only by the black hair. Lilac tones in the dress.

Rubens is certainly making a strong impression on me; I think his drawing tremendously good - I mean the drawing of heads and hands in themselves. I am quite carried away by his way of drawing the lines in a face with streaks of pure red, or of modeling the fingers of the hands by the same kind of streaks. I go to the museum fairly often, and then I look at little else but a few heads and hands of his and of Jordaens'. I know he is not as intimate as Hals and Rembrandt, but in themselves those heads are so alive.

Probably I don't look at those which are generally admired most. I look for fragments like, for instance, those blonde heads in “Ste. Thérèse au Purgatoire.” I am now looking for a blonde model just because of Rubens. But you must not be angry if I tell you that I cannot make both ends meet this month. I have bought some more colours and two new kinds of drawing brushes which suit me splendidly and with which I can work more accurately.

Then the canvases which I brought with me were too small for the heads, because by using other colours I need more space for the surroundings.

All that and the models are ruining me.

I tell you this as emphatically as possible, because when losing time one loses doubly.

In the last days of this month, after I have done some more heads, I hope to paint a view on the Scheldt, for which I have already bought a canvas. I can also go there in bad weather, to an inn at St. Anne's, that is on the other side, opposite the Lieve Vrouwekerk [Our Lady's Church]. Other painters have worked there before.

I am very glad I came here, for in many ways it is useful and necessary for me.

I made the acquaintance of Tyck, the best colour manufacturer here, and he was very kind in giving me information about some colours. About green colours, for instance, that are fast. I also asked him things about Rubens's technique, which he answered in a way that proved to me how well he analyzes the material used, which not everybody does, although it is very useful.

What more shall I tell you? Oh yes, I have seen two collections of modern pictures, first, what was bought at the exhibition for the raffle, and then a collection of pictures that was for sale.

So I saw several fine things, two studies by Henri de Braekeleer; you know that he is absolutely different from the old De Braekeleer, I mean the one who is a famous colourist, and who analyzes rigorously. He is somewhat like Manet, that is to say as original as Manet.

One study was of a woman in a studio, or some such interior, with Japanese objects; the woman wore a costume of yellow and black. The flesh colour, white with carmine. In the surroundings, all kinds of quaint little tones. The other one was a half-finished study of a landscape. Yellow, faded, flat fields à perte de vue [as far as the eye can see], crossed by a black cinder path, with a ditch alongside; over it, a sky of lilac gray, with accents of carmined lilac. Far away the little red patch of vermilion of a roof, and two little black trees. Hardly anything, and yet for me a great deal, because of the peculiar sentiment in the juxtaposition of colours. I also saw an old study by De Groux, a woman beside a cradle, somewhat like an old Israëls.

Further, what shall I say about those modern pictures? I thought many of them *splendid*, and then I mean especially the work of the colourists, or of those who try to be so, who look everywhere for mother-of-pearl-like combinations in the light parts. But to me it is not always perfect by a long shot; it is too affected. I prefer to see a simple brush stroke and a less far-fetched, difficult colour. More simplicity, in short that intelligent simplicity which is not afraid of frank technique.

I like Rubens just for his ingenuous way of painting, his working with the simplest means.

I don't count Henri de Braekeleer among those who look for mother-of-pearl effects everywhere, because his is a curious, very interesting endeavor to be literally true, and he stands quite apart. I also saw various gray paintings, including a printing shop by Mertens, a picture by Verhaert representing his own studio, where he himself is sitting etching and his wife standing behind him.

By La Rivière - an Amsterdam hired mourner after a funeral, *very fine* in the black tones, a Goya-like conception; that little picture was a masterpiece. In both collections I saw very beautiful landscapes and marines. But as to the portraits - those I remember best are the “Fisherboy” by Frans Hals, “Saskia” by

Rembrandt, a number of smiling or weeping faces by Rubens.

Ah, a picture must be painted - and then why not simply? Now when I look into real life - I get the same kind of impressions. I see the people in the street very well, but I often think the servant girls so much more interesting and beautiful than the ladies, the workmen more interesting than the gentlemen; and in those common girls and fellows I find a power and vitality which, if one wants to express them in their peculiar character, ought to be painted with a firm brush stroke, with a simple technique.

Wauters understood this, used to at least, for so far I haven't seen any work of his here. What I admire so much in Delacroix, too, is that he makes us feel the life of things, and the expression, and the movement, that he *absolutely dominates his colours*.

And in a great many of the good things I saw, though I admire them, there is often far too much paint. At present I am getting more and more in the habit of talking to the models while painting, to keep their faces animated.

I have discovered a woman - she is old now - who used to live in Paris and provided the painters with models, for instance, Scheffer, Gigoux, Delacroix and another one who painted a Phryne.

Now she is a washerwoman and knows a lot of women, and could always supply some, she said.

It has been snowing, and the city was splendid early this morning in the snow, fine groups of street cleaners.

I am glad I came here, for I am already full of ideas, also for the time when I shall be in the country again.

It was in the Etoile Belge, I think, that I read an article by Eugène Battaille, reprinted from the Figaro, about conditions in Paris, an article which impressed me as being very well thought out; but according to him conditions in general are very bad. This Mr. Battaille has, contrary to the opinion of the Dutch journalists, expressed himself in Amsterdam pessimistically about the state of affairs in Holland.

As to art dealing - as I have already written you, the dealers here complain like misère ouverte. And yet I believe that so much might still be done. To mention one thing, for instance, one sees no pictures in the cafés, restaurants, café-chantants, at least hardly any. And how contrary this is to nature. Why don't they hang still lifes there, like the splendid decorations Fijt, Hondekoeter and so many others made in times of old? Why not women's portraits, if they want prostitutes? I know one must work cheaply for such purposes, but one can work relatively cheaply. Raising prices to such a height is the trade's ruin, and leads to no good after all.

Goodbye, write again between times if you can. As to the money, do what you can, but remember that we must try our utmost to succeed. And I won't let that idea of painting portraits go, for it is a good thing to fight for, to show people that there is more in them than the photographer can possibly get out of them with his machine.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I have noticed the great number of photographers here, who are just about the same as everywhere, and seem to be pretty busy.

But always those same conventional eyes, noses, mouths - waxlike and smooth and cold.

It cannot but always remain *lifeless*.

And the painted portraits have a life of their own, coming straight from the painter's soul, which the machine cannot reach. The more one looks at photographs, the more one feels this, I think.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, c. 15 December 1885

Antwerp c. 15 December 1885

Dear Theo,

Today for the first time I feel rather faint - I had painted a picture of “Het Steen” and went to show it to some dealers. Two of them were not at home, and one did not like it, and one complained bitterly that in a fortnight literally not a single person had shown his face in the store. This is not very encouraging, especially when the weather is chilly and gloomy, and when one has changed one's last 5-franc piece and doesn't know how to get through the next two weeks.

Oh dear. Do try to keep me afloat these two weeks, for I want to paint some more figures. This morning I heard it said that some of those pictures I wrote you about had been sold privately - there was a rumour of 21,000 fr. I don't know if it is true, but at all events there was a crowd of spectators when I was there, and the exhibition for the raffle was also crowded. If there were more better things on view, more business would be done. But the shops have a desolate aspect. The picture of “Het Steen” is rather elaborate, and I shall make another one from a different spot on the quay. [Both paintings lost]

But I greatly prefer to paint the figure, I also believe the market might be overloaded with landscapes, and though painting the figure presents more difficulties because of the models, yet after all it gives perhaps a better chance. What the dealers say is that women's heads or women's figures are most likely to sell.

This spring I shall have to decide whether I shall stay in the neighbourhood of Nuenen or not. I should like to hear your opinion on the matter.

I cannot understand why Portier, after his first favourable impression of my work, has become so absolutely indifferent to it since then. I cannot get on when I must spend *more* on colour than I receive, and I am not the least bit, literally not the least bit, better off than I was years ago, that winter in Brussels. Then I received 50 fr. less, but painting costs me much more than 50 fr., and it has to be paid on the spot.

I do not feel faint as long as I am painting, but in the long run those intervals are always sometimes rather too melancholy, and it grieves me when I don't get on, and am always in a bad fix. Do you know, for instance, that in the whole time I've been here, I've only had three warm meals, and for the rest nothing but bread? In this way one becomes vegetarian more than is good for one. Especially as it was the same thing in Nuenen for half a year, and even then I could not pay my colour bill.

Painting is expensive, yet one must paint a great deal. I have half a promise of a model to sit for a portrait, I would do my utmost to get her. Now what I cannot understand is that people like Portier, like Serret, for instance, if they cannot sell, do not at least see their way of getting me some work or other.

Listen, Theo, another thing - I don't think it will seem incomprehensible to you that I haven't had the slightest inclination to write to the people at home when they are staying with my charming sister Anna or with other, to me, equally charming members of the family.

As I have received a letter from Mother asking me to write her and informing me that she has asked you to give her my address, will you let them know that I am not going to write, which for that matter I told them quite simply when I went away. You will understand that things like what happened in March are decisive.

Then I left the house, from which may be inferred as a matter of course that they got what *they* wanted; for the rest, I think of them extremely, extremely little, and I do not desire them to think of me, as far as that goes.

Certainly it is regrettable that such things much happen. But then, you see, there are certain recollections as, for instance, that up to the last Father spoke and behaved toward me, really, in the same way as the Roman Catholic priest. Can't they understand of their own accord that, for the very reason that you no longer feeling angry, you have definitely become more estranged from them than if they were strangers?

Tell Mother so, if you like, for I do not want to say a harsh word to her, but I positively decline to write. And Mother is old, so I do not want to tell her sharply that I refuse to write. Such things have happened to other painters too, and it is one of those things it is better to leave alone.

At the museum there is a portrait of Delroche painted by Portaels. During his life he seemed such a big man, but how hollow and empty he proved to be afterward! Manet and Courbet did not *seem* serious during their lives, yet how they proved themselves to be real painters!

By a curious mishap an accident has happened to the portrait of Delaroche, so that a hole was cut right in the middle of the forehead. It looks well, and really seems to belong to it. Ah! there is quite a curious race of people of whom one would not oppose at certain moments that they are actually absolutely hollow and empty. One can be mistaken. And sometimes it is quite refreshing to perceive one has been mistaken, though then one has to begin all over again from the very beginning. Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, c. 19 December 1885

Dear Theo,

Today I have painted another head of a model, whom I could not pay however; but having the opportunity, I profited by it. [Painting lost]

I also have the firm promise that I shall paint somebody's portrait, and in return for it, two studies that I can keep.

But I must tell you that I am at the end of my rope, with my last remaining 5 fr. I had to buy two canvases for those two portraits, and the laundry woman has just brought me my clean linen, so that for the moment I have only a few centimes left.

So I must ask you most urgently, for Heaven's sake don't put off writing, and send me much or little, according to what you can spare, but remember that I am literally starving.

If I succeeded in getting about 50 heads, then there is some chance of getting work - that is, I can try to get employment at a photographer's, which I would not like to do permanently but only in time of need. The photographers seem to be quite flourishing here. One also finds painted portraits in their studios, which are obviously painted on a photographed background, which is of course both weak and ineffective to anybody who knows anything about painting.

Now it seems to me that one could get a much better colouring if one worked from studies painted directly from life on the photographs which one wants to have painted. And, after all, this is at least one of the chances one might have to earn something.

But whatever and wherever I may want to start, of course I must have things to show. Because I need all my good spirits, all my vitality, I must confess I am afraid of feeling physically weak.

I showed my view of “Het Steen” to another dealer, who liked its tone and colour, but he was too engrossed in making up his inventory, and besides, he has little room, but he asked me to come back after New Year's. It is just the thing for foreigners who want to have a souvenir of Antwerp, and for that reason I shall make even more city views of that kind.

So yesterday I made a few drawings of a spot with a view of the Cathedral.

I also made a little one of the Park.

But I prefer painting people's eyes to cathedrals, for there is something in the eyes that is not in the cathedral, however solemn and imposing the latter may be - a human soul, be it that of a poor beggar or of a streetwalker, is more interesting to me.

So I firmly believe that nothing helps so much to make direct progress as working from the model.

Of course it is a great nuisance to have to pay the models - now is the time when all energy is needed, and the pictures will have to be energetic in order to find buyers.

That there is business to be done here, I am sure. There seems to be a lot of beautiful women in this city, and I feel sure that money is to be earned by painting women's portraits or fantasy heads and figures of women.

It is a real delight to me to work with a better kind of brushes, and to have cobalt and carmine, and the right kind of brilliant yellow and vermilion.

The most expensive colours are sometimes the cheapest, especially cobalt - the delicate tones one can get with it cannot be compared with those of any other blue.

And although the quality of the colour is not everything in a picture, it is what gives it life.

As to whether I should like to settle down here for good or not - as the art trade does not seem exactly rose-coloured here, and as there seems to be a certain tendency for each of the painters to be his own art dealer, which I suppose will increase more and more - the most sensible thing would be perhaps to keep a studio here.

If you have any wishes or ideas about it, either in favour of it or against it, I shall be glad if you will tell me so straight out.

But it strikes me at once that, if after a longer or shorter time you might decide to set up yourself (independent of the Goupils), Antwerp might be the place where, given the dismal show windows at present, business might be done by showing good things, which the other firms do not understand.

And then it is so convenient to cross over to England from here.

Why are all pictures always in frames in the art-dealing business? It would be so much better for business if they were light and easy to handle and dispatch.

Trade is so old-fashioned and…three times mouldy.

There must be renovation, for the old systems no longer work.

The prices, the public, everything needs renovation, and the future is to work cheaply for the people, because the ordinary art lovers seem to get more and more tight-fisted.

Starting with capital so very often leads only to losing everything at first, including one's courage and energy; whereas beginning with practically nothing rather makes one's character firmer and more decided.

Goodbye, but try to write me by return mail, for I am feeling rather faint, as I have somewhat overstrained myself with one thing and another, and I need my strength.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 28 December 1885

My dear Theo,
It's more than time I thanked you for the 50 fr. you sent, which enabled me to get through the month, although from today onwards things will be more or less back to normal.

But - a few more studies have been done and the more I paint the more progress I think I make. The moment I received the money I took on a beautiful model and did a life-sized painting of her head. It's all quite light, except for the black hair. Yet the head itself stands out in tone against a background into which I have tried to put a golden glimmer of light. [Painting lost]

Anyway, here is the colour range: a flesh colour full of tonal values, with more bronze in the neck, jet-black hair - black which I had to do with carmine and Prussian blue - off-white for the little jacket, light yellow, much lighter than the white, for the background. A touch of flame in the jet-black hair and again a flame-coloured bow in the off-white.

She's a girl from a café-chantant and yet the expression I was looking for was somewhat “ecce homo-like.” But that was because I was aiming for the truth, especially in the expression, though I also wanted to put my own thoughts into it. When the model arrived, it was obvious she had had quite a few busy nights - and she said something that was fairly characteristic: “Pour moi le champagne ne m'égaye pas, il me rend tout triste.” [For me, champagne doesn't cheer me up, it makes me very sad.] Then I knew how matters stood and tried to produce something voluptuous and at the same time heart-rending.

I've started a second study of the same subject in profile.

Apart from that I've done the portrait about which, as I told you, I'd been negotiating, and a study of the same head for myself. And now, during these last few days of the month, I'm hoping to paint another head of a man. I feel very cheerful, especially as far as work is concerned, and being here is doing me good.

I imagine that no matter what the girls may be, one can make money painting them, sooner than anything else. There's no denying that they can be damned beautiful, and that it is in keeping with the times that just that kind of painting should be gaining ground. Nor can there be any objections to that from even the highest artistic standpoint - painting *human beings*, that was the old Italian art, that was Millet and that is Breton.

The only question is whether one should start from the soul or from the clothes, and whether one allows the form to serve as a peg for hanging ribbons and bows from, or if one looks upon the form as a means of conveying an impression, a sentiment - or again, if one does modelling for the sake of modelling because it is such an infinitely beautiful thing to do. Only the first is ephemeral, the other two are high art.

What rather pleased me was that the girl who posed for me wanted to have one of the portraits for herself, preferably just like the one I'd done. And that she's promised to let me paint a study of her in a dancer's costume at her room, as soon as possible. It can't be done right away because the man who runs the café where she stays objects to her posing, but she's about to take lodgings with another girl, and both she and the other girl would like to have their portraits done. And I really very much hope that I'll get her back, for she has a remarkable head, and she's witty.

However, I must first get into practice because it certainly takes a special knack - they don't have much time or patience. Actually, the work needn't be the worse for being done fairly quickly, and one must be able to paint even if the model doesn't sit stock-still.

Well, you can see that I am working with a will. If I could sell something so that I could earn a bit more, I should work even harder.

As for Portier - I haven't lost heart yet - but poverty is dogging my steps and at present all dealers are suffering a little from the same defect, that of being more or less “une nation retirée du monde” [a people withdrawn from society] - they are so much sunk in gloom that how is one really to feel inspired to go grubbing about in all that indifference and apathy - the more so as the disease is contagious.

For it's just a lot of nonsense that business is slack, one has to work quand bien même with self-confidence and enthusiasm, in short with some zeal.

As for Portier - you wrote to me yourself that he was the first to show the impressions and that he was overwhelmed by Durand-Ruel - well, one is bound to conclude from this that he has the initiative not just to say things but also to *do* them. It could be put down to his 60 years, however - and anyway, perhaps it was just one of those many cases when, at the time when paintings were all the rage, and trade was doing well, a great many intelligent people were being wantonly brushed aside, as if they were incompetent and of no importance, simply because they couldn't bring themselves to believe that the sudden rage in paintings and the enormous rise in prices would last. *Now* that business is hanging fire, one sees those same dealers who were so very entreprenant [enterprising] a few years ago - let's say about 10 years ago - turning more or less into “une nation retirée du monde.” And we haven't yet seen the end of it.

Personal initiative with little or no capital is perhaps the seed corn for the future. We shall see.

Yesterday I saw a large photograph of a Rembrandt I didn't know - I was tremendously impressed by it - it was the head of a woman, the light falling on breast, throat, chin, the tip of the nose and the lower jaw. Forehead and eyes in the shadow of a large hat, with feathers that are probably red. Probably more red or yellow in the low-necked jacket. Dark background. The expression a mysterious smile like that of Rembrandt himself in his self-portrait with Saskia on his knee and a glass of wine in his hand.

My thoughts are full of Rembrandt and Hals these days, not because I see many of their paintings but because I see so many types among the people here that remind me of that period. I still keep going to those bals populaires [dance halls] to look at the heads of the woman and of the sailors and soldiers. One pays an entrance fee of 20 or 30 centimes and drinks a glass of beer - for there isn't much hard drinking and one can have a firs-rate time all evening, or at least I can, just watching the people's en-train [high spirits].

I must do a lot of work from the model, it's the only way to ensure real progress.

I've discovered that my appetite has been held in check a bit too long and when I received your money I couldn't stomach any food. But I shall certainly do my best to remedy that. it doesn't take away from the fact that I have all my wits and energy about me when I'm painting. But when I'm out of doors, work in the open air is too much for me and I come over all weak.

Well, painting is something that wears one out. However, Van der Loo [the van Gogh's doctor in Brabant] said, when I consulted him shortly before I came here, that I am reasonably strong après tout. That I needn't despair of reaching the requisite age to produce a complete body of work. I told him that I knew several painters who, for all their nervousness, etc., had reached the age of 60, or even 70, fortunately for themselves, and that I should like to do the same.

I also believe that if one aims for serenity, and retains one's zest for living, one's state of mind helps a great deal. And in that respect I have gained by coming here, for I've new ideas and new means of expressing what I want; the better brushes are going to prove a great help, and I'm very excited by those two colours carmine and cobalt.

Cobalt - is a divine colour and there is nothing as fine for putting an atmosphere round things. Carmine is the red of wine and is warm and lively like wine. The same goes for emerald green too. It's false economy to dispense with them, with those colours. Cadmium as well.

Something about my constitution that has pleased me a great deal is that a doctor in Amsterdam, with whom I once discussed a few things that sometimes made me think that I wasn't long for this world, and whose opinion I didn't ask for directly, wanting simply to gauge the first impression of someone who didn't know me at all and availing myself of a small upset I had at the time to bring the conversation round to my general constitution - I was absolutely delighted that this doctor took me for an ordinary worker, saying, “I daresay you're an ironworker by trade.” That's exactly what I'd been trying to achieve - when I was younger you could tell that my mind was overwrought, and now I look like a bargee or an ironworker.

And changing one's constitution so that one gets “le cuir dur” [a thick skin] is no easy matter. However, I must go on being careful, try to hold on to what I have and to improve on it still.

Above all, I should like you to tell me if you think it absurd of me to suggest that now might be a good time for us to sow the seeds of a future business. As far as my present work is concerned, I feel I can do better - however, I do need more air and space, in other words I must be able to spread my wings a little. Above all, above all, I still haven't enough models. I could soon produce work of higher quality, but my expenses would be heavier. Still, one should aim at something lofty, genuine, something distinguished, shouldn't one?

The female figures I see among the people here impress me enormously - far more for the purpose of painting them than having them, though if the truth be told I should like both.

I am again reading de Goncourt's book, it is first-rate. In the preface to Chérie, which you should read, there is an account of what the de Goncourts went through - and of how, at the end of their lives, they were pessimistic, yes - but also sure of themselves, knowing that they had *done something*, that their work would last. What fellows they were! if only we got on together better than we do now, if only we too could be in complete accord - we could be the same, couldn't we?

By the way, since, après tout, I've been virtually fasting for 4 or 5 days at this year's end - send your letter no later than 1 January.

You may well find it difficult to imagine, but it is a fact - when I receive the money my greatest craving will not be for food, though I shall have been fasting, but even more so for painting - and I shall immediately go on a hunt for models and continue until all the money has gone. Meanwhile what will be keeping me going is my breakfast with the people where I live, and a cup of coffee and some bread in the crêmerie in the evening. Supplemented, when I can, by a second cup of coffee and bread in the crêmerie for my supper or else some rye bread I keep in my trunk. As long as I am painting that is more than enough, but when my models have left, a feeling of weakness does come over me.

The models here appeal to me because they're so completely unlike the models in the country. And more especially because their character is completely different. And the contrast has given me some new ideas for the flesh colours in particular. And though I'm still not satisfied with what I've achieved with my last head, it does differ from the earlier ones.

I think you value the truth enough for me to speak freely to you. For much the same reasons that if I paint peasant women I want them to be peasant women - so I want to get a whore's expression when I paint whores.

That is precisely why a whore's head by Rembrandt struck me so forcefully. Because he had caught that mysterious smile in such an infinitely beautiful way, with a sérieux [gravity] of his very own - the magician of magicians.

This is something new for me, and I want to achieve it at all costs. Manet has done it and Courbet - well, sacrebleu, I've the same ambition too, the more so as I've felt the infinite beauty of the study of women by the giants of literature - Zola, Daudet, de Goncourt, Balzac - in the very marrow of my bones.

Even Stevens fails to satisfy me, because his women are not like any I know personally. And those he chooses are not the most interesting there are, I find.

Well, be that as it may - I want to get on à tout prix [at all costs], and - I want to be myself. I am feeling obstinate, too, and no longer care what people say about me or about my work.

It seems more difficult to get a nude model here - the girl I used wouldn't do it, at any rate. Of course, that “wouldn't” is probably relative, but you certainly can't take it for granted. Still, the fact is she would be splendid.

From a business point of view I can only say that we are in what people have already begun to call “la fin d'un siècle” - that the women have the same charm as at the time of revolution - and just as much to say - and that one would be “retiré du monde” if one worked without them. It is the same everywhere, in the country as much as in the city - one has to take women into account if one wants to be up to date.

Goodbye, have a happy New Year, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

1886

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, early January 1886

Dear Theo,
It is already late, but I will not put off acknowledging the good receipt of your letter, with enclosed 150 fr.
By the way, let me begin by answering your question of some time ago, about the picture by Franck or Francken at St. André, which I saw today. I think it is a good picture - especially fine in sentiment - the sentiment is not very Flemish or Rubens-like. It reminds one more of Murillo. The colour is warm, in a reddish colour scheme like Jordaens sometimes is.

The shadows in the flesh are very strong, that is what Rubens has not, and Jordaens often has, and it gives something mysterious to the picture which one must appreciate in that school.

I could not get near enough to analyze the technique close up, which would have been well worth while. The head of Christ is less conventional than the Flemish painters usually conceive it.

But l imagine I can also do it in that way, and the picture did not tell me anything new. And as I am not satisfied with what I can do now, and try to make progress - enough - let's talk about other pictures. What struck me in that church was a sketch by Van Dyck or Rubens (?), “The Deposition from the Cross,” which hung high, but seemed very beautiful to me. Much sentiment in the pale corpse - this by the way.

There is a painted window which I think superb - very, very curious. A beach, a green sea with a castle on the rocks, a sparkling blue sky of the most beautiful tones of blue, greenish, whitish, deeper, higher of tone.

An enormous three-master, quaint and phantasmal, stands out against the sky, diffusion everywhere, light in the dark, dark in the light. In the blue a figure of the Holy Virgin, bright yellow, white, orange. Higher up the window reappears dark green, with black, with fiery red.

Well - do you remember it? It is very beautiful, and Leys would certainly have fallen in love with it, or James Tissot in his old style or Thijs Maris.

I saw some pictures bought for the Musée Moderne, by Verhas and Farasyn. Verhas - Ladies mounted on donkeys, and fisherboys on the beach. Farasyn - A large picture of the old Antwerp Fishmarket.

Also an Emile Wauters - “A Market in Cairo.” The Verhas looks well, at all events it is a clever picture, daring of colour, in a light colour scheme, several beautiful combinations, including a figure in orange against light blue, light green and white.

I am working on my portraits all the time, and at last I have made two which are decidedly good “likenesses” (one profile and one three-quarter). That isn't everything, it isn't even the most important thing. But it still seems to me worth while to aim at it, and perhaps it teaches one to draw. Besides, I am getting more and more fond of making portraits. Now, for instance, some of those very famous Rubenses - “Vierge au Perroquet,” “Christ à la Paille,” *etc.* I personally prefer to ignore them and look rather at that boldly painted portrait of a man - painted with such a remarkably firm hand - still sketchy here and there, which is hanging not far from Rembrandt's “Saskia.”

In “The Deposition from the Cross” by Van Dyck, the large one, that one high up - there is also a portrait, decidedly a portrait - not only of a head, but, thank God, of a whole figure, splendid in yellow and lilac, a weeping woman bending over, the torso and the legs under the clothes well and intimately felt and expressed. Then art is high, when it is simple and true.

And an Ingres, a David, who as painters certainly did not always paint beautifully, yet how remarkably interesting even they become when, putting their pedantry aside, they forget themselves in being true, in reproducing a character like the two heads in the Musée Moderne. In short - oh, if only one could get the models one wants!!!

Now just tell me, always supposing that you want to be a financier - and I have nothing against it, it is even a thing that I highly approve of; but are you quite satisfied with your own argument when at the beginning of the year you say, to my disappointment, “I have so much to pay, you must try to manage till the end of the month.”

Just listen, this is what I have to say against it, and just think over whether I am right or not, at least if there is truth in my argument. Am I less than your creditors? - who must wait, *they or I*??? If one of us *must* wait, which belongs to the human possibilities.

A creditor is *no friend* to be sure, and I, even if you do not know it *for sure*, at least I am perhaps. And do you realize how heavy are my burdens which the work demands every day, how difficult it is to get the models, how expensive the painting materials are? Do you realize that sometimes it is almost literally impossible for me to keep going? and that I *must* paint; that too much depends on my continuing to work on here with aplomb *immediately* and without *hesitation*?

Too much hesitation might make me fall in a way which I could not redress for a long time. My situation is threatened from every side, and it can only be saved by working on vigorously. The colour bill is like a millstone round my neck, and yet I must *go on*!!!

I too must keep people waiting, and without mercy; they will *get their money* but they will have to wait, I passed this sentence on them - the less credit they give, the longer they will have to wait.

The only way to win at present is with very good work, with something that is not ordinary. That higher work costs more in money, in trouble, and in strenuous exertion; but now more than ever it is the only way.

What I tell you is simple and clear. Do you understand or don't you, that I am perfectly right when I point out to you the absolute necessity of having my studio full of very *good* heads if I want to get orders for portraits here? That is possible, it is a thing we can see accomplished in the end, though on the whole it is not easy to get them done.

Now, shall we say like impotent dullards and blockheads, “We cannot do it, we have no money - there is nothing doing, I tell you *No*.” This is what we'll say - and please let's both say it together, Personally we will endure poverty for it, and suffer want as long as it is necessary, *like one does in a besieged city* which one does not intend to surrender, but we will show that we are *men*.

Either one is brave or one is a coward. We must carry things to such a height that the public begins to like it. I mean, for instance, that the girls will begin to like having their portraits painted - I am sure that there are some who want them.

Today I spoke to a photographer's assistant, and asked him if he couldn't procure me orders for portraits. He wanted a commission for every woman he would bring to me for a portrait. I let the matter rest only in so far that I did not promise any commission before I knew my man somewhat better. But probably I shall see him again soon. And then I shall see if I can do anything with him directly, or if I shall go and speak to his boss; but sometimes the employee is better, it all depends. I told him now that I did not know him, and that I should like to see what he could do, but that it was a risk for me, because a portrait always entails expenses for me.

Well, I shall see later on; but the most urgent thing is that I have some fine heads to show. I must also try to make acquaintances among the prostitutes, which is not a pleasant task when one has a purse with very little in it. I can assure you it is no pleasure then.

But it is not taking trouble that I am afraid of But I believe that you have so accustomed yourself to thinking it all right that I am always to be neglected that you forget too easily how I have not had my due for so many years already.

And that my wanting to enlarge my business is not only good for me, but for you too, because only in that way can I earn something.

And now another thing. Theoretically at least you say that it is necessary to be well dressed and so on for the occasions when one has to go and see people, *etc*. Well, the time has come when it is necessary even for me, who, as you know, am not keen on such things. Are such things necessary or not??? Does anything depend on it - Yes or No?

Well, given that period of having to break through, the monthly allowance is too small for me to possibly make both ends meet.

You are thrifty yourself, you understand what is *absolutely* needed. And I ask you, can one do what is absolutely necessary with what remains for one's own use after paying for painting materials, models, and rent? If I had some friends, if I were a little known**,** yes, then it would be easier; but I have no friends, and my job is to try and make them.

But do not let me forget to thank you for sending the second volume of de Goncourt's book. It is a delightful thing to be able to study that period - from which *so much can be learned* by - to use the expression - *notre fin du siècle* in which we live.

I cannot tell you how glad I am that I went to Antwerp, and how many remarkable things there are here for me, who has been out of it all for so long.

How glad I am to see the city again, much as I like the peasants in the country. How the bringing together of contrasts gives me new ideas - the contrasts between the *absolute quiet of the country and the bustle here*. I needed it badly.

Ah, if only I could bring home to you how much more satisfaction you yourself might find, how much more you would be a friend to me if, instead of that frigid and unkind slighting and keeping me at a distance (only think of last summer, and the preceding summers!), you could at long last gain the conviction that this is not the right way.

Always to be in a state of exile, forever having to make great efforts, always half measures But never mind - the family stranger than strangers is one fact - and being through with Holland is a second fact. *It is quite a relief.*

That is my only feeling, and yet I have been so deeply attached to it all that at first the estrangement drove me crazy. But I have looked over the cards too narrowly to let myself hesitate now. And I have got my self-confidence and my serenity back. The secret of that clique - Delaroche-esqueness, *mediocrity*. Retrogression - I abhor it!

As far as you are concerned - you are still dangling between the two parties, and I have always told you that your character will have to set in a definite mold - that you will have to go through an inner struggle and possibly a social struggle for the sake of your position, both more serious than you ever went through in the past.

I know you think this merciless to those at home. And yet I tell you that at times *Father himself felt vaguely* that he had made a mistake and had taken the wrong side. But he tried to reconcile irreconcilable things, and...he had not as much firmness of character as he seemed to have, and as I thought him to have when I was a boy and even later. Oh well…

As to the “Tassaert Exhibition,” if ever a man was wronged, it is he. To mention another at the same time - I do not wait for exhibitions to form an opinion about painters - *Chaplin* will also have to be recognized. As to Tassaert's colour, he is a harmonist, and his work, painted almost in one tone, is beautiful because of the modelling, because of the delicate intuition of the female forms, because of something passionate in the expressions - and I think he belongs to the race of the Greuzes and Prudhons - better, more modern, more serious in sentiment than Greuze. Chaplin is a greater colourist than he.

And I think it rather a pity that Tassaert, who painted human flesh so well, did not put more glow and life into the colour. But he is certainly better than Scheffer and Delaroche and Dubuffe and Gérôme, who are so little *painters*.

What a great pity it is that a fellow like Gérôme, who painted “The Prisoner” and “The Russian Camp” and “The Syrian Shepherds,” is so cold and sterile. They will also have to recognize Isabey, Ziem too, these two are real *painters*, and that is what is needed in painting after all.

I must finish. What colour is in a picture, enthusiasm is in life, therefore - it is no little thing to try to keep that enthusiasm.

Because of the models this month I think I shall go and see Verlat, who is the director of the academy here - and I must see what the conditions are, and if one could work there from the nude. I shall take a portrait and some drawings with me then.

I have an immense longing to improve my knowledge of the nude. I have seen a large bronze group by Lambeau - two figures - a man embracing a woman, *superb*. Something like Paul Dubois, for instance, or in short the first-class people. It has been bought for the museum.

I often envy the sculptors. But it is somewhat the same everywhere. I ought to be able to earn more in order to be able to work more.

I must also tell you that in view of that longing to study the figure, in case I should not succeed here, I should rather go farther away than go back to Holland before I had worked for a time at some studio. That “farther” might perhaps be Paris, without any hesitation.

You may be of the opinion that I am an impossible character - but that's absolutely *your own* business. For instance, I *need not* care, and *I am not going* *to*. I know that your business routine induces you again and again to lapse into the old evil with regard to me. What I seek is so straightforward that in the end you cannot but give in. So let's conclude by saying, The sooner the better.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

As to the end of the month - I beg you most kindly but urgently - let one of your creditors wait, *i.e.* at least for 50 fr. (they can stand it, do not be afraid), but please do not let it be me, for *even then* it will still be tough for me.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, c. 12-16 January 1886

Dear Theo,

Last Sunday I saw for the first time the two large pictures by Rubens, and as I had looked at those in the museum repeatedly and at my ease, these two - “The Deposition from the Cross” and “The Elevation of the Cross” - were the more interesting. “The Elevation of the Cross” has a peculiarity that struck me at once, and that is - there is no female figure in it. Unless on the side panels of the triptych. Consequently, it is none the better for it. Let me tell you that I love “The Deposition from the Cross.” But not because of any depth of feeling such as one would find in a Rembrandt or in a picture by Delacroix or in a drawing be Millet.

Nothing touches me less than Rubens expressing human sorrow.

To explain my meaning more clearly, let me begin by saying that even his most beautiful weeping Magdalenes or Mater Dolorosas always simply remind me of the tears of a beautiful prostitute who has caught a venereal disease or some such small misery of human life.

As such they are masterly, but one must not look for more in them.

Rubens is extraordinary in painting ordinary beautiful women. But he is not dramatic in the expression. Compare him, for instance, to that head by Rembrandt in the Lacaze Collection; to the man's figure in “The Jewish Bride” - you will understand what I mean, as for instance, that his eight pompous figures of fellows performing a feat of strength with a heavy wooden cross in “The Elevation of the Cross” seem absurd to me from the standpoint of modern analysis of human passions and feelings. That Rubens's expressions, especially of the men (the real portraits always excepted), are superficial, hollow, pompous, yes - altogether conventional, like those of Jules Romain and even worse fellows of the decadence.

But I still love it because he, Rubens, is the very man who tries to express, and really succeeds in expressing, a mood of cheerfulness, of serenity, of sorrow, by the combination of colours - though sometimes his figures may be hollow, *etc.*

Thus in “The Elevation of the Cross” the pale spot of the corpse in a high accent of light - is dramatic in its contrast to the rest, which is kept in such a low colour scale.

Of the same order, but in my opinion far more beautiful, is the charm of “The

Deposition from the Cross,” where the pale spot is repeated in the blonde hair, the fair face and neck of the female figures, whereas the somber surroundings are enormously rich because of the various low-toned harmonizing masses of red, dark green, black, grey and violet.

And once again Delacroix has tried to make people believe in the symphonies of the colours. And one would almost say in vain, if one remembers how almost everybody understands by good colour the correctness of the local colour, the narrow-minded exactness which neither Rembrandt nor Millet nor Delacroix nor whoever else, neither Manet nor Courbet, has aimed at, as little as Rubens or Veronese.

I have also seen several other pictures by Rubens in various churches.

And it is very interesting to study Rubens, because his technique is so very simple, or rather seems to be so. His means are so simple, and he paints, and particularly draws, with such a quick hand and without any hesitation. But portraits and heads and figures of women are his specialty. There he is deep and intimate too. And how fresh his pictures remain because of the very simplicity of his technique.

What more shall I say? That I feel increasingly inclined to do all my figure studies over again, very calmly and quietly, without any nervous hurry. I want to progress so far in the knowledge of the nude and the structure of the figure that I might be able to work from memory.

I should still like to work sometime either at Verlat's or in some other studio, besides working for myself as much as possible from the model.

For the moment I have deposited five pictures - two portraits, two landscapes, and one still life in Verlat's painting class at the academy. I have just been there again, but he was not there either time. But I shall soon be able to tell you the result, and I hope that I shall be allowed to paint from the model all day at the academy, which will make things easier for me, as the models are so awfully expensive that my purse cannot stand the strain.

And I must find something to help me in that respect. At all events I think I shall remain in Antwerp for some time, instead of going back to the country; that would be much better than putting it off, and here there is so much more chance of finding people who would perhaps interest themselves in it. I feel that I dare undertake something, and can achieve something, and things have been dragging on far too long already.

You get angry whenever I expostulate with you, or rather you don't give a damn, and all the rest of it, which we know by now, and yet I believe a time will come when, of your own accord, you will come to the conclusion that you have been too weak to persevere in trying to help me regain some credit with people.

But never mind, we are not faced by the past but by the future. And again I tell you - I am convinced that time will make you see that, if only there had been more cordiality and warmth between us, we might have built a business of our own together. Even if you had stayed with Goupil & Co.

Indeed, you said to me that you know perfectly well you will be rewarded with stinking ingratitude, but are you quite sure this isn't a misunderstanding of the type Father himself laboured under? I for one shall not take it lying down, you can he sure of that. For there is still too much work to be done, even at present.

The other day I saw for the first time a fragment of Zola's new book L'oeuvre, which, as you know, appears as a serial in Le Gil Blas.

I think that this novel, if it penetrates the art world somewhat, may do some good. The fragment I read was very striking.

When you get right down to it, I'll admit that when one is working exclusively from nature, something more is needed: the facility of composing, the knowledge of the figure, but, after all, I do not believe I have been drudging absolutely in vain all these years. I feel a certain power within me, because wherever I may be, I shall always have an aim - painting people as I see and know them.

Whether impressionism has already had its last say or not - to stick to the term impressionism - I always imagine that many new artists in the figure may arise, and I begin to think it more and more desirable that, in a difficult time like the present, one seeks one's security in the deeper understanding of the highest art.

For there is, relatively speaking, higher and lower art; *people* are more important than anything else, and are in fact much more difficult to paint, too.

I will try hard to make acquaintances here, and I think that if I worked some time, for instance under Verlat, I would learn to know better what is going on here, and how to fit in with the rest.

So let me struggle along my own way, and for Heaven's sake do not lose courage, and do not slacken. I do not think you can reasonably expect me to go back to the country for the sake of perhaps 50 fr. a month less, seeing that the whole series of future years will depend so much on the relations I must establish in town, either here in Antwerp or later on in Paris.

And I wish I could make you understand how probable it is that there will be great changes in the art trade. And, consequently, many new chances will present themselves too if one has something original to show.

But *that* is certainly necessary if one wants to be of some use. It is no fault or crime of mine if I must sometimes tell you we must put more vigour into such and such a thing, and if we haven't got the money ourselves, we must find friends and new relations. I must earn a little more or have some more friends, preferably both. That is the way to success, but recently it has been too hard for me.

As for this month, I absolutely must insist on your sending me at least another 50 fr.

At present I am losing weight, and moreover my clothes are getting too shabby, *etc*. You know yourself that it isn't right as it is. Yet I feel sort of confident that we shall pull through.

But you wrote that if I fell ill, we should be worse off. I hope it will not come to that, but I should like to have a little more ease, just to prevent illness.

Just think how many people there are who exist without ever having the slightest idea what care is, and who always keep on thinking that everything will turn out for the best, as if there were no people starving or completely ruined! I begin to object more and more to your pretending to be a financier, and thinking me exactly the opposite. All people are not alike, and if one does not understand that in drawing up accounts some time must have passed over the account before one can be sure to have counted right, if one does not understand this, one is *no calculator*. And a broader insight into finances is exactly what characterizes many modern financiers. Namely not pinching, but allowing freedom of action.

I know, Theo, that you may also be rather hard up. But your life has never been so hard as mine has these last ten or twelve years. Can't you make allowances for me when I say, Perhaps it has been long enough now? Meanwhile I have learned something that I did not know before, that has renewed all my chances, and I protest against my always being neglected. And if I should like to live again in the city for some time, and afterward perhaps to work in a studio in Paris too, would you try to prevent this?

Be honest enough to let me go my own way, for I tell you that I do not want to quarrel, and I will not quarrel, but I will not be hampered in my career. And what can I do in the country, unless I go there with money for models and colours? There is no chance, absolutely none, of making money with my work in the country, and there is such a chance in the city. So I am not safe before I have made friends in the city - and that comes first. For the moment this may complicate things somewhat, but after all it is the only way, and going back to the country now would end in stagnation.

Well, good-bye. De Goncourt's book is fine.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp,

Dear Theo,
I want to tell you that Verlat has at last seen my work, and when he saw the two landscapes and the still life that I had brought from the country, he said, “Yes, but that does not concern me”; when I showed him the two portraits he said, “That is different, if it is figure painting, you may come.” So tomorrow I shall start working in the academy's painting class.

Besides, I have arranged with Vinck (a pupil of Leys's by whom I saw things in the manner of Leys, medieval) to draw works of antiquity in the evening.

I think neither of these things will do me harm, and perhaps can be of some use to me either in painting or in drawing. And at all events, it is an attempt to come into contact with people. In the painting and drawing class I saw in passing several fellows my age at work.

And if I might get on friendly terms with Verlat or Vinck or whoever it may be, it would certainly get me a lot of models.

Well, this is essentially the practical side of the matter.

Then I have to go and see two fellows about portraits; I do not know what the result will be.

One is a question of two portraits of a couple of very beautiful hussies, types with dark eyes, dark hair, two sisters, who I suppose are kept women.

And the other one is a portrait of a married woman. But I repeat, there is nothing definite, and it may come to nothing.

But I know that eventually I would be willing to do them for nothing, just for practice.

But just consider whether, if I must go and work there or anywhere else, it is necessary for me to do something about my clothes, for I have worn mine for two years now, and especially of late they have had much wear and tear. Even a suit for some 40 fr. would do.

And I must also be prepared for Verlat's saying I have to provide myself with some painting material or other, so that I must have the means to do so. Therefore try, as I asked you, to send me another 50 fr., then I can keep going till the end of the month, and could buy a new pair of trousers and a waistcoat at once, and the coat in February.

It is very cold here, and most of the time I feel far from well, but as long as the painting flourishes, it doesn't matter so much.

I have been drawing there for two evenings already, and I must say that I believe that just for the making of, for instance, peasant figures, it is very useful to draw from the plaster casts. But for goodness' sake, not the way it is usually done. In fact, in my opinion the drawings that I see there are all hopelessly bad and absolutely wrong, and I know for sure that mine are totally different. Time must show who is right.

The feeling of what ancient sculpture is, damn it, *not one of them has it*.

I, who for years had not seen any good plaster casts of ancient sculptures - and those they have here are very good - and who during all those years have always had the living model before me, on looking at them carefully again, I am amazed at the ancients' wonderful knowledge and the correctness of their sentiment.

Well, probably the academic gentlemen will accuse me of heresy, but never mind.

I should like to get on with Verlat. I think many of the things he makes both harsh and wrong in colour and *paint*, but *I know that he also has his good days*, for instance, that he paints a better portrait than most of the others. So we must wait and see.

I feel in high spirits notwithstanding all, just because it refreshes me to be in all kinds of conditions so disparate from those in the country, and it may be that I shall feel at home here after all - but do your best to write me soon, and it is really necessary that I get those 50 fr. for this month, otherwise I cannot manage, and things are too urgent. Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, c. 22 January 1886

Dear Theo,

I have now been painting at the academy for a few days, and I must say that I like it pretty well. Especially because there are all kinds of painters there, and I see them work in the most varied ways, something I have never experienced before - I mean seeing others work.

It would be by far the best thing for me to stay here a long time, for their models are good, and it will save a great deal of expenses of painting and models, and it is much more difficult than you seem to know, especially if one works alone. But let's hope that in this way things will improve.

Next Monday we shall get new models; in fact, then I shall begin in earnest, and for Monday I ought to have had a large canvas; they also told me that I must definitely have other brushes, *etc.*

But I haven't any money left, so it is really pressing, and I wish you would do what you can, for I am also doing what I can, and almost all the time it is such that hardly anything is left for food.

In the evening I also go there to draw, but I think the fellows in the drawing class all work badly and in an absolutely wrong way.

The painting class is better and, as I think I wrote you already, there are all kinds of people and of all ages, about five of them even older than I am.

I am working for the moment on a child's head.

It would be a relief to me if I could have your letter before Monday. What I wrote you about the clothes I want is also rather urgent. I have already made a few acquaintances who have seen the things I had brought for the admission.

Among the studies of former pupils that are hanging there are some damned good ones.

There are some by Neuhuys and Huibers among others.

But the best one perhaps is by an American, I do not know the name. A nude study of an old man, one would say like a Fortuny or a Regnault.

I do not think I can take a shorter cut to make progress, and whether I go to the country afterward or to a studio in Paris, at all events it is a good thing to see many others paint, and specially to work regularly from the model as much as ever is possible.

Goodbye, I write you in a hurry because I must get to work. But try your best not to keep me waiting, for the work depends on it, and I assure you in any case it will be hard enough for me.

With a handshake,
Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, c. 28 January 1886

Dear Theo,

I have already delayed too long in telling you of the safe receipt of your letter and enclosure.

In any case I think it will do no harm if we see each other in Paris after a while. As to your letter, it is always the same, and as I see it, in judging me you rely too much on generalities and prejudices, which are too superficial and too incorrect for me to believe you will cling to them forever.

I have been tremendously busy this week, for besides the painting class, I go and draw in the evening too, and after that, from half past ten till half past eleven, I work from the model at a club. For I have become a member of not less than two of these clubs, and I now know two fellows who draw well, I think, both Dutchmen.

This week I painted a large thing with two nude torsos - two wrestlers posed by Verlat, and I like that very much. [Painting lost]

And the same with the drawing from the plaster casts. I have now finished two large figures. At all events there are two things to be said for it, in the first place it interests me, after having drawn for years from fully clothed models, to see the nude again, and the works of the ancients, and to verify things.

In the second place, to be accepted somewhere in Paris one must have worked somewhere else before, and not be absolutely green any more, and one is always involved with people who have already worked at an academy for a longer or shorter time.

The advice Verlat gives me is very severe, and also what Vinck of the drawing class tells me, and they strongly advise me especially to draw for at least a year, *if possible* to draw nothing but plaster casts and the nude, and that this would be the *shortest* way, and I shall then go back to my other outdoor work or my portraits quite a different man; and I believe it is true, so I must try to be somewhere where both plaster casts and nude models are within my reach, at least at first.

The best one in the class has done the same, and he says that with each study he felt he was making progress, and I have noticed it myself in his old things and his recent ones.

I suppose you remember, “Les Grecs ne prennent pas le contour, ils prennent par les milieux, par les noyaux. Géricault a pris cela à Gros, qui lui l'avait pris des Grecs, mais Géricault a voulu lui-même le prendre aux Grecs aussi, et les a étudiés pour cela même; après Delacroix a fait comme Géricault.” [The Greeks did not start from the contour, they started from the centres, the nucli, Géricault got it from Gros, who had got it from the Greeks, but Géricault would also get it from the Greeks himself, for which very reason he studied them; later on Delacroix did the same as Géricault.]

That method - Millet too draws in the same way, more than anybody else - is perhaps the root of all figure painting, it depends enormously on that drawing the modelling directly with the brush, quite a different conception from that of Bouguereau and others who lack interior modelling, who are *flat* compared with Géricault and Delacroix, and do not emerge from the paint.

With the latter - Géricault, etc., - the figures have backs even when one sees them from the front, there is airiness around the figures - *they emerge from the paint*.

It is to find this - about which I would not care to speak with Verlat, nor with Vinck - that I am working; no fear *they* would teach me this, for the fault of both of them is in the colour, which, as you know, isn't right in either's work.

When I compare a study of mine with those of the other fellows, it is curious to see that they have almost nothing in common. Theirs have about the same colour as the *flesh*, so, seen close up, they are very correct - but if one stands back a little, they appear painfully flat - all that pink and delicate yellow, etc., etc., soft in itself, produces a harsh effect. The way I do it, from near by it is greenish-red, yellowish-grey, white-black and many neutral tints and most of them colours one cannot define. But when one stands back a little it emerges from the paint, and there is airiness around it, and a certain vibrating light falls on it. At the same time, the least little touch of colour which one may use as highlight is effective in it.

But what I lack is practice, I must paint about fifty of them; I think I shall have reached something then. Now I put the colours on somewhat too *painstakingly*, because I haven't had enough practice; I must hesitate too long, and so I work the life out of it. But that is a question of time, of exercise, till the touch becomes more immediately correct, the better one has it fixed in one's mind.

Some of the fellows have seen my drawings, one of them, influenced by the drawing of my peasant figures, has started at once to draw the model in the nude class with a much more vigorous modelling, putting the shadows down firmly. He showed me this drawing and we talked it over; it was full of life, and it was the finest drawing I have seen here by any of the fellows. Do you know what they think of it here? The teacher Sibert expressly sent for him, and told him that if he dared to do it again in the same way he would be considered to be mocking his teacher. And I assure you, it was the only drawing that was well done, like Tassaert or Gavarni. So you see how things are. However, it doesn't matter, and one must not get angry at it, but pretend one should like to cure oneself of the bad habit, but unfortunately one falls back into it all the time. The figures they draw are almost always top-heavy and are toppling over head first, not a single one *is standing* on its feet.

And that *standing* must already be fixed *in the very first planning*.

Well, I am still very pleased that I came here, whatever may happen, and whatever the results may be, whether I get along with Verlat or not.

I find here the friction of ideas I want. I get a fresh look at my own work, can judge better where the weak points are, which enables me to correct them.

But I most urgently beg you, for the sake of a good result, to lose neither your patience nor your good spirits; it would be fouling our own nest if we lost courage at the very moment that might give us a certain influence if we show that we know what we want, and dare to do something and to carry it through.

As to the money, if I work in a studio and so don't have to pay the expenses for models, even then 150 fr. is certainly not much, for painting is very expensive, but *it can be done* if one economizes even on food, *etc.*

But if models must be paid, 150 fr. is definitely *not enough* and one loses time, *etc.*

So the cheapest way is to go on in the studio, seeing that, especially for more elaborate studies from the nude, it is impossible to provide the models oneself.

I do not think it impossible that in the long run, especially if the other fellows can't help beginning to draw stronger shadows, that then Verlat or someone else will pick a fight with me, even if I systematically try to avoid it. Which I certainly shall do systematically, because it is to my advantage to stay here for some time.

I am longing to hear about your apartment. As for me, if I come to Paris, I shall be perfectly contented with a cheap little room in some remote quarter (Montmartre) or a garret in a hotel, but that is relatively unimportant, and we aren't yet that far. First let's stay here for some time, and don't let's worry before it's time.

The winter course ends on March 31.

Good-by,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, c. 3 February 1886

Dear Theo,

I already wrote you the day before yesterday that although on the one hand I felt far from well, I nevertheless began to see some light.

However, I am sorry to have to tell you more categorically that I am literally worn out and overworked. Just think, I went to live in my own studio (in Nuenen) on May 1 and I have not had a hot dinner more than perhaps six or seven times since. I do not want you to tell Mother that I am not well, for good reasons, for perhaps she would begin to worry, thinking that it was not kind to let things happen as they did, namely - that I did not stay at home to avoid these very consequences.

I will not mention it, so don't you, either.

But I have lived *then*, and I do *here*, without any money for a dinner, because the work costs me too much, and I have relied too much on my being strong enough to stand it.

What the doctor tells me is that I absolutely must *take better care of myself* and until I feel stronger I must take more rest.

It is an *absolute* breakdown.

Now I have made it worse by smoking a great deal, which I did the more because then one does not feel an empty stomach so much.

Well, manger de la vache enragée, that is what I have my share of.

For it is not just the food, at the same time it is all the worry and trouble one has.

You know how, for various reasons, the time in Nuenen was far from easy for me. Then I came here, and am very glad I did, but it has also been a difficult time for me.

What we must do, and where the greatest trouble lies, is this. To pay the models oneself is too great a burden; as long as one hasn't enough money, one must use the opportunities offered by the studios like those of Verlat or Cormon. And one must live in the artists' world, and work at the clubs where one shares the cost of the models.

It is true that I haven't thought of this before, at least I haven't done what was necessary, but now I wish I had done it a year earlier. If it could be arranged so that we lived in the same city, it would certainly be by far the best, at least for a time.

But the more I think about it, the more certain I am that it would perhaps be better not to spend too much on a studio the first year, because that first year I shall mainly have to draw.

For speaking of Cormon, I think he would tell me much the same thing as Verlat, namely that I must draw from the nude or plaster casts for a year, just because I have always been drawing from life.

That is not asking too much, for I tell you that there are some fellows here who have been plodding at it for three years, and are not yet allowed to give it up, yet they paint too. In that one year I must drill myself in the man's and the woman's figure, both in detail and as a whole, and then I shall know it almost by heart.

Drawing in itself, the technique of it, comes easily enough to me. I am beginning to do it like writing, with the same ease. But at that very point it gets more interesting if one is not satisfied with the skill gradually acquired, but aims seriously and thoroughly at originality and broadness of conception - the drawing of the mass instead of the outlines, the solid modelling.

And when people like Verlat or Cormon, for instance, demand this of a fellow, I assure you it is no bad sign. For there are plenty of those whom Verlat simply lets drudge on, for they will never attain anything. You speak of clever fellows in that studio of Cormon's - just because I would damn well like to be one of them, I feel for myself that I must insist on devoting at least a year in Paris to drawing from the nude and from plaster casts. For the rest, let me do what presents itself in the way of painting, when an effect out-of-doors strikes me or when I have a good model, *etc.* And do not think this is a *long* way, for it is a *short* one. One who can draw a figure from memory is much more productive than one who cannot. And you will see how productive I shall become by taking the trouble to draw for a whole year.

Neither must you suppose that those years of drawing out-of-doors have been wasted. For that is just the thing that those who have worked only at academies and studios lack - the power to see the reality in which they live and the ability to find subjects. Well, wouldn't it be wise to postpone renting a studio, at least for the first half year, just because we need the money so badly?

But for the rest, I am very sympathetic to founding a studio, inasmuch as one might combine with other painters to take models together.

The more energy, the better. And in hard times especially, one must look for friendship and co-operation.

But, Theo, this indisposition is a damn bad thing just now; I regret it terribly, *but yet I keep courage*. It will right itself.

You understand that if I had put off doing something about it, it would have become worse and worse. But my opinion is that one must not think that people whose health is impaired, wholly or partly, are no good for painting. It is necessary to reach the sixties, or at least the fifties, if one begins at thirty. But one need not be perfectly healthy, one may have all kinds of ailments. The work need not suffer from it. On the contrary, nervous people are more sensitive and refined.

But, Theo, just because my health is decidedly impaired, I am resolved to apply myself to the higher figure, and to try to refine myself. It overtook me so unexpectedly, I had been feeling weak and feverish, but I went on anyway; but I began to feel worried when more and more of my teeth broke off and I began to look more and more sick. Well, we will try to remedy it.

I think having my teeth attended to will already help, because my whole mouth being painful, I swallowed my food as quickly as possible; and it may help to improve my looks also.

As to this month, I paid for my room in advance (25 fr.); for food, 30 fr. in advance; and 50 fr. to the dentist; then a visit to the doctor and some drawing materials; there now remain six francs.

The main thing will be not to fall ill this month, which is not easy to achieve; it certainly might happen. I always believe that I have a certain toughness in common with the peasants, who also do not eat so particularly well, and yet live and work on.

But don't you worry about it. If you can send some more money, very well; but if you can't, I'll await events in all calmness.

What I do not like is that I am feverish, and I argue in this way: I may have become weak, but I have been as careful as I could not to take unwholesome food. Neither is the overexertion too great - because, notwithstanding everything, I keep up my spirits, so it is only that I am overstrained because I am weak. *I think it will redress itself*. But you understand, if it got worse and took a vicious turn, it might develop into malignant typhus or at least typhoid fever. And the only reason why I do not suppose this will happen is, in the first place, that I have had a great deal of fresh air; in the second place, I repeat, though I obviously haven't had enough nourishment, I have been careful to take very simple food instead of the rotten things in the cheap restaurants; and thirdly, that I have a certain calmness and serenity, notwithstanding everything, so we must wait and see how things turn out.

You must not worry about it, for I don't either. I repeat, suppose I got a fever; I have lived and nourished myself so simply that it is improbable that it should become so very malignant. After all, things don't just happen, and there is a reason for everything.

Do write soon, for I badly need to hear from you. As to going to Nuenen, I should like to know what you think best.

But it is not *necessary* for me to go, for somebody like Rijke, the gardener, for instance, can do the necessary packing or dispatching just as well. But if you think it would be better, I can be ready by March.

Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, early February 1886

Dear Theo,
Thanks for your letter and the enclosure. What pleases me so much is that now you yourself propose the plan of going to Cormon's.

Let me tell you how things have been going here.

The painting course ended last week, because at the end of the course a competition is held for those who have gone through the whole course, among whom I do not belong.

I am also drawing in the daytime now, and the teacher there, who makes portraits at present and gets well paid for them, has asked me repeatedly if I had never drawn from plaster casts before and if I had taught myself to draw, and he concluded: “Je vois que vous avez beaucoup travaillé,” and, “Vous ne serez pas long à faire du progrès, vous y gagneriez beaucoup - il faut un an, mais qu'est-ce que ça fait?” [I see that you have worked a lot, *and*, it will not take you long to make progress, you will gain much by it - it will take a year, but what does that matter?]

Now there is one fellow of my age sitting next to me to whom he does *not* say that, and he has also painted a long time and he has been drawing from plaster casts for three years. As a rule they draw there without a background, and especially the man in question is absolutely forbidden to do it. This makes awfully dry drawings.

Now Sibert, that is the name of the teacher who also directs the class for drawing from the nude, said, “Quant à vous, vous dessinerez comme il vous plaira, puisque je vois que vous prenez le dessin au sérieux, quant aux autres, en géneral je ne leur permets pas de faire un fond, parce qu'alors ils escamottent le dessin des formes, tandis que sur fond blanc ils sont bien obligés de les faire, c'est donc une camisole de force.” [As for you, you will draw as you please, for I see that you take drawing seriously; as for the others, I generally don't allow them to draw a background, for then they botch the drawing of the forms, whereas they are obliged to do them on a white background; so it is a straitjacket.]

Then he also said that Verlat had told him there was some good in my work which Verlat did not say to me.

Just after the receipt of your letter it happened that Sibert came to look at the drawings (mine was a head of Niobe and a hand that might be done by Michelangelo). I had drawn that hand within a few hours, and that was the drawing he liked best. Now l told him that l intended to go to Cormon, and he said: “Vous ferez comme vous voudrez, mais je vous dis que Verlat en a formé plusieurs de forts et nous y tenons à former des élèves qui nous fassent honneur - et je vous engage bien fortement de rester.” [You may do as you like, but I tell you that Verlat has trained several strong ones, and we attach great value to training pupils who are a credit to us - and I advise you most strongly to stay (with us).]

This is almost a handsome promise, as if they guarantee success, and what shall I do? On the other hand, I have become better acquainted with those English fellows who have been in Paris, and I have heard their experiences. One was at Gérôme's and one at Cabanel's, *etc.*

They say that one is relatively freer in Paris and, for instance, one can choose one's subjects more freely than one can here, but that the correction is not worth much.

Do you know what I think? In Paris I should certainly work *more* than here, for instance a drawing a day or every two days.

And we know, or rather you know, enough clever fellows who would not refuse to look them over and give some hints. So in fact we are at all events on the right track, whether I stay here some time or come to you.

For the rest, Cormon would probably say the same thing as Verlat. Just because I now have the opportunity to talk to several people about my drawings, *I see my mistakes*, and that is half the battle.

At all events let's keep courage. But now you must write a little more and we must try to do things energetically. I hear they work for four hours in the morning at Cormon's, then in the evening one can go and work at the Louvre or at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts or some other studio where drawing is done.

As to the portraits, there will not be much time left for them if I want to keep up all the other things regularly. It is the same here.

But it has struck me forcibly that there are still other things that I absolutely must change.

When I compare myself to the other fellows, there is something stiff and awkward about me, as if I had been *in prison* for ten years.

And the cause of this is that for about ten years I have had a difficult and harassed life, much care and sorrow and no friends.

But that will change as my work gets better, and I shall know something and be able to do something.

And I repeat, we are on the right track to accomplishing this. But do not doubt it, the way to succeed is to keep courage and patience and to work on energetically.

And it is a fact that I must change my outward appearance somewhat. Perhaps you will say that has nothing to do with art, but on the other hand, perhaps you will agree with me I am having my teeth seen to, for instance, there are no less than ten teeth that I have either lost or may lose, and that is too many and too troublesome, and besides, it makes me look over forty, which is not to my advantage.

So I have decided to have that taken care of. It will cost me 100 fr., but it can be done better now while I am drawing than at any other time, and I have had the bad teeth cut off and have just paid half the money in advance.

They told me at the same time that I ought to take care of my stomach, for it's in a bad state. And since I have been here this has far from improved.

But if one knows where the fault lies, that is something gained, and with some energy much can be redressed.

It is not at all pleasant, but necessity knows no law, and if one wants to paint pictures, one must try and stay alive and keep one's strength.

I thought my teeth were bad for another reason, and I didn't know that my stomach had deteriorated to such a degree. It is stupid if you will, but sometimes one has to choose between two evils, and is trapped on both sides.

During the last month it began to trouble me a great deal; I began to cough continually too, and to expectorate a grayish phlegm, etc., so that I began to get uneasy. But we will try to redress it.

You see I am not stronger than other people in that if I neglected myself too much, it would be the same with me as with so *many* painters (so *very many* if one thinks it over), I should drop dead, or worse still - become insane or an idiot.

This is a fact, and the question is to steer a clear course between the various cliffs, and even if one gets damaged, to try to keep the ship afloat.

I know that Delacroix said he had learned the secret of painting: “Lorsqu'il n'avait plus ni dents ni souffle.” [When he had neither teeth nor breath left.] But I also know that from that moment he took care of himself. And that, except for his mistress, he would have died ten or more years sooner.

So do not be angry with me because of the expense. I shall try to economize, but things were getting too bad and I had to remedy them.

As to what you wrote about the folks at home, in this matter I shall do what you think best.

I am free to leave here whenever I like. Let's say in the first days of March. But just consider if the help I might be able to give would be worth the journey there and back, for I would also approve of staying here without going back, and from here straight to Cormon, whenever you like. The journey is rather expensive when I reckon that the luggage costs me more than my own fare.

So let's think it over again.

I keep feeling satisfied with having come here, otherwise I should have remained in a fix; and now, though there are still many difficulties, I see some chance of making progress.

And by staying here somewhat longer, or by going to Paris, I shall get an even firmer hold.

As to the plan of possibly living together and taking a rather good studio where one can receive people if need be, keep it in mind, and let me keep it in mind too.

In the first place I see that year of drawing from which I'm afraid there's no escape. If it isn't expensive, and you find good quarters, then it would be all right; but if it is expensive, perhaps it would not be the cheapest way for the first year if we are rather hard up.

The year of drawing is the critical point; after that we are free to do other things, both portrait and landscape. I think we must put that first. There is no help for it - didn't Delacroix and Corot and Millet keep thinking of the ancients and continue studying them? People who just study them *in a hurry* are of course quite wrong. The ancients certainly require a great serenity, a knowledge of nature, they require tenderness and patience, otherwise they are no help.

And it is quite curious that Géricault and Delacroix both knew them more intimately than, for instance, David, and understood them better; they who were most strongly opposed to all academic routine.

I do not yet know Turgenev's books, but some time ago I read his biography, which was very interesting, how he had, in common with Daudet, that passion for working from the model, blending five or six models into a single type - I do not know Ohnet either, who I hear is very interesting too.

More and more I believe that l'art pour l'art, to work for work's sake, l'énergie pour l'énergie - is after all the principle of all great artists, for in the case of the de Goncourts one sees how necessary obstinacy is, for society will not thank them for it.

But in painting one finds a certain rest in the histories of those painters who aimed at the most sublime through it all.

Israëls himself, for instance, was still quite unknown and poor, even to the extent of having nothing to eat but dry bread - when he nevertheless wanted to go to Paris, though the circumstances were discouraging enough.

Not to be discouraged, even though one is almost starving, and though one feels one has to say farewell to all material comfort in life! So much for that. I wish you would write a little more, now that we are discussing a change.

Founding a studio together would perhaps be a *good thing*, but we must feel sure that we can carry it through - and we must know our own minds perfectly, and once we begin it, we must have a certain confidence after all, left us after a long series of lost illusions.

And such a studio - in starting it one must know that it will be a battle and that people in general will be absolutely indifferent, so one ought to begin it feeling confident of some power - wanting to be somebody, wanting to be active - so that when one dies one can think, I go where all those who have dared something go - well, we shall see.

Ever yours, with a handshake,

Vincent

That impression I can't help getting of myself when comparing myself to others, namely that I look as if I had been in prison for ten years, is not exaggerated; but to change it - and I will change it - I must primarily not get too far out of the art world, but stay some time longer in a studio or at an academy. Then it will disappear.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 1st half February 1886

Antwerp, 1st half February 1886
Dear Theo,
I decidedly want to tell you that it would make me feel much better if you would approve of my coming to Paris much earlier than June or July. The more I think about it, the more anxious I am to do so.

Just think, if all goes well, and if I had good food, etc., all that time, which certainly will leave something to be desired, even in that case it will take about six months before I shall have recovered entirely.

But it would certainly take a much longer time if between March and July I had to go through the same things in Brabant as I have had to go through these last months - and probably it wouldn't be any different.

Now, at this moment, I am feeling terribly weak, even worse than that, from reaction after overwork, but that is the natural course of things and nothing extraordinary; but as it is a question of taking better nourishment, etc., you see in Brabant I shall again spend my last penny on models; it will be the same story all over again, and I do not think that will be right. In that way we stray from our path. So please allow me to come sooner, I should almost say at once.

If I rent a garret in Paris, and bring my paintbox and drawing materials with me, then I can finish what is most pressing at once - those studies from the ancients, which certainly will help me a great deal when I go to Cormon's. I can go and draw either at the Louvre or at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

For the rest, before settling in a new place, we could plan and arrange things so much better. If it must be, I am willing to go to Nuenen for the month of March, to see how things are there and how the people are and whether or not I can get models there. But if not so, which I presume to be the case, I should go straight to Paris after March, and start drawing at the Louvre, for instance.

I have carefully thought over what you wrote about taking a studio, but I think it would be a good thing if we looked for it together, and if before going to live together definitely, we did so temporarily, and if I began by renting a garret, say from April till June.

Then I shall feel at home again in Paris by the time I go to Cormon's.

And in this way I shall keep up my spirits better.

I must also tell you that, although I keep going there, that nagging of those fellows at the academy is often almost unbearable, for they remain positively spiteful.

But I try systematically to avoid all quarrels, and go my own way. And I feel I am on the track of what I am seeking, and perhaps I should find it the sooner if I could go my own way when drawing from the plaster casts.

After all I am glad I went to the academy, for the very reason that I have abundant opportunity to observe the results of *prendre par le contour*.

For that is what they do systematically, and that is why they nag me. “Faites d'abord un contour, votre contour n'est pas juste, je ne corrigerai pas ça, si vous modelez avant d'avoir sérieusement arrêté votre contour.” [First make a contour, your contour isn't right; I won't correct it if you do your modelling before having seriously fixed your contour.]

You see that it always comes to the same thing. And now you ought to see how flat, how lifeless and how insipid the results of that system are; oh, I can tell you I am very glad just to be able to see it close up. Like David, or even worse, like Pieneman in full bloom. I wanted to say at least twenty-five times, “Votre contour est un truc, [Your contour is a joke] etc.” but I have not thought it worth while to quarrel. Yet I irritate them even though I don't say anything; and they, me.

But this doesn't matter so much, the problem is to go on trying to find a better working method. So - patience and perseverance.

They go so far as to say, “La couleur et le modelé c'est peu de chose, cela s'apprend très vite, c'est le contour qui est l'essentiel et le plus difficile.” [Colour and modelling aren't much, one can learn that very quickly, it's the contour that is essential and the most difficult.]

You see, one can learn some new things at the academy. I never knew before that colour and modelling came so easily.

Just yesterday I finished the drawing I made for the evening class's competition. It is the figure of Germanicus that you know. Well, I am sure I shall place last, because all the drawings of the others are exactly alike, and mine is absolutely different. But I saw how that drawing they will think best was made. I was sitting just behind it, and it is correct, it is whatever you like, but it is *dead*, and that's what all the drawings I saw are.

Enough of this, but let it annoy us so much that it makes us enthusiastic for something nobler, and that we hasten to achieve this.

You, too, need a more vigorous life, and if we might succeed in joining hands, together we should know more than each separately, and should be able to do more.

Tell me, did you notice that ingenious saying of Paul Mantz's, “*Dans la vie les* *femmes sont peut être la difficulté suprême*.” It was in an article on Baudry.

We shall experience our share of it, besides the experience we may have already gathered.

In a chapter in L'Oeuvre by Zola, in the Gil Blas, it struck me that the painter, Manet of course, had a scene with a woman who had posed for him, and to whom he had later become indifferent, oh - curiously well described. What one can learn in this respect from the academy here is never to paint women.

They hardly ever use nude women models. At least not at all in the class, and it's extremely unusual privately.

Even in the antiquities class there are ten men's figures to one woman's figure. That is easy enough.

In Paris, of course, this will be better, and it seems to me that, in fact, one learns so much from the constant comparing of the male figure with the female, which are always and in everything so totally different. It may be “supremely” difficult, but what would art and what would life be without it?

Goodbye, write me soon. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

My being in Nuenen, at least for the month of March, would only be for the moving, and I have to be there also for my change of domicile. But as to myself, I am quite willing not to go back there at all.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 1st half February 1886

Antwerp, 1st half February 1886
Dear Theo,

I received your letter and enclosed 25 fr., and thank you very much for both. I am very glad that you are not opposed to my intention of coming to Paris. I think it will help me to make progress, and if I did not go, I am afraid I should get into a mess, and continue to go in the same circle and keep on making the same mistakes. Besides, I do not think it would do you any harm to come home to a studio in the evening.

For the rest, I must say exactly the same about myself as you write about yourself: *You will be disappointed in me*.

Yet the thing to do is to combine. And the result may be a much better understanding.

Now what shall I tell you about my health? I keep thinking there is a chance of avoiding a real illness, but it will take some time to restore my health.

I have two more teeth that must be filled, then my upper jaw, which was in the worst condition, will be all right. I have still to pay 10 fr. on it, and then another 40 fr. to have the lower jaw taken care of too.

Thus some of those ten years which I seem to have spent in prison will disappear. Because bad teeth, which one rarely sees nowadays when it is so easy to have them taken care of, give the face a somewhat sunken look.

And then, even when taking the same food, one can digest it better when one can chew well, so my stomach will have a better chance to recover.

But I can feel that I am in a bad condition, and as you write yourself, by neglecting it, it might become much worse. But we will try to get over it.

I have not worked for a few days. I went to bed early a few times (generally after drawing at the club it was one or two o'clock) and I feel that it does me good.

I had a little note from Mother saying that they will start packing in March.

Further, as you tell me that your lease is not up till the end of June, perhaps it might be better after all if I went back to Nuenen in the beginning of March; but if I should have to meet with opposition and scenes like the ones before I left, I should lose time there, and then I should go somewhere else, if only for a few months, as I want to make some new things out-of-doors to take to Paris with me.

That Sibert, the drawing-class teacher who at first spoke to me in the way I wrote you about, definitely picked a fight with me today, perhaps to get rid of me, but he did not succeed because I told him, “Pourquoi cherchez-vous dispute avec moi, je ne veux pas me disputer, et en tout cas je n'y tiens aucunement à vous contredire, seulement vous me cherchez dispute exprès.” [Why do you pick a quarrel with me, I don't want to quarrel, and in any case I don't desire the least bit to contradict you, only you pick a quarrel with me on purpose.]

Apparently he did not expect this, and just this once could not say much in answer, but next time he can of course start a fight all right.

What's behind it is that the fellows in the class are discussing my work, and that I have said - not to Sibert, but outside the class to some of the fellows - that their drawings were absolutely wrong.

I can tell you, if I went to Cormon, and if sooner or later I got into trouble either with the teacher or with the pupils, *I should not mind it a bit*. Even without a teacher I might go through that course of drawing from the ancients, by going and drawing at the Louvre, for instance. And if necessary I should do so, though I should by far prefer to have my work corrected, as long as it does not become *deliberate nagging* - that correction without any other motive than a certain peculiar-ity in one's way of working which is different from that of the others.

If he begins again I shall say aloud in the class, “Je veux bien faire mécaniquement tout ce que vous me direz de faire, parce que j'y tiens à vous rendre ce qui vous revient à la rigueur, si vous y tenez, mais pour ce qui est de me mécaniser comme vous mecanisez les autres, cela n'a, je vous assure, pas la moindre prise sur moi.

“Vous avez du reste commencé à me dire tout autre chose, c'est a dire que vous m'avez dit: prenez vous-y, comme vous voudrez.” [I am quite willing to do all that you tell me to do mechanically, because, if necessary, I particularly want to give you your due, if you desire it, but as for mechanizing me as you mechanize the others, I assure you it will not influence me in the least.

Anyway, you started by telling me something quite different, that is, you said: Go to work just as you like.]

The reason I draw from the plaster casts, *ne pas prendre par le contour mais prendre par le milieux* - I have not mastered it yet, but I feel it more and more, and I shall certainly carry it through, it is too interesting. I wish we could be together in the Louvre for a few days and talk it over. I think it would interest you.

This morning I am sending you Chérie, especially because of the preface, which will certainly strike you.

And I wish that we too might work together somewhere at the end of our lives, and looking back, might say - “Firstly, we have done *this*, and secondly *that*, and thirdly *that*.”

And if we have the wish and the courage, will there be something to talk over then? We can try two things - make some good things ourselves - and collect and do business with what things of others we admire. But we must *both live* somewhat more vigorously, and perhaps joining hands is a step toward this.

But now, allow me to touch on a delicate question. If I have said some unpleasant things about our upbringing and our home, this has been because of finding each other and understanding each other in business; and when working together, we are on a ground where there *must be* criticism.

Now I can perfectly understand that one can love a thing or a person passionately, and cannot help it.

All right, I will not butt in, only in so far as it might make a fatal separation between us where unity is necessary. And our education, etc., will not prove to have been so good that we will keep many illusions about it, and perhaps we would have been happier with another education.

But if we keep to the positive fact of wanting to produce and to be something, then we can talk over accomplished facts, when it cannot be avoided, without getting angry, even if they might concern, or stand in direct relation with, the Goupils or our family. Besides, these questions are between you and me for a better understanding of the situation, and not out of spite.

But if we undertake something, it will be no unimportant thing for either of us to improve our health, because we shall need a long life, at least twenty-five or thirty years of incessant work. The present time is so interesting if one considers that it is possible we shall witness the beginning of the end of a society.

And in the same way as there is infinite poetry in autumn, or in a sunset, when one feels a mysterious aspiration in nature, so it is now. And in art there is decadence if you like, after Delacroix, Corot, Millet, Dupré, Troyon, Breton, Rousseau and Daubigny, que soit, but a decadence so full of charm that you can still expect enormously beautiful things, and they are made every day.

I am longing terribly for the Louvre, the Luxembourg, etc., where everything will be new to me.

All my life I shall regret not having seen the *Cent chefs-d'oevre*, the Delacroix exhibition and the Meissonier exhibition. But there are other things left.

It is true that I may have made less progress through wanting to get on here too quickly, but what shall I say? One of the reasons was my health, and if I get that back as I hope, my work here will prove to have been less unfruitful.

Am I right that if one asks permission, one may draw from the plaster casts in the Louvre even if one is not at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts? It would not surprise me if, once having got used to the idea of living together, you will think it stranger and stranger that for fully ten years we have been so little together.

Well, I certainly hope that this will be the end of it, and that it will not begin again.

The apartment which you mention is perhaps rather expensive; I mean, I should like a somewhat cheaper one just as well.

I wonder how those few months in Nuenen will be.

As I still have some furniture there, and as the country there is very beautiful, and as I know the neighborhood pretty well, it would perhaps be a good thing to keep a pied-a-terre there in some inn, where I could leave the furniture, as otherwise it would be lost, and under the circumstances it may be of so much use.

The best things are sometimes made when one comes back to old spots.

I must finish this as I must go to the club. Think over what would be the best thing to do.

Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 1st half February 1886

Antwerp, 1st half February 1886
Dear Theo,
I must write once again, for the sooner we can make up our minds, the better.
As to a studio, if we can find in one and the same house a room with an alcove and also a garret or corner of an attic, then you could have that room and alcove, and we could make ourselves as comfortable as can be. And during the daytime the room might serve as a studio, and the garret would serve for various more or less unsightly implements, and for dirty work; besides, I could sleep there, and you in the alcove of the studio.

Such an arrangement or something similar would be perfectly satisfactory for the first year, I think. What I am not sure of is whether we shall get on personally, though I don't despair of it, but it will be much more comfortable for you to come home in the evening to a studio than to an ordinary room which is always more or less dreary, and that dreariness is our worst enemy.

As the doctor tells me that I must improve my physical way of living, who knows but what you also would feel better for such a measure. For you too are neither happy nor in sufficiently good spirits, let's call things by their names, you have too many cares and too little prosperity.

But perhaps the fault is in ourselves, because we are both too isolated, and because our forces and resources are too much divided and therefore insufficient. So union is strength, that would be much better.

So I think there must be more animation, and we must throw all doubts overboard, and also a certain lack of confidence. Do you want a *motive* for keeping one's serenity even when one is isolated and misunderstood, and has lost all chance for material happiness?

This one thing remains - *faith*; one feels instinctively that an enormous number of things are changing and that everything will change. We are living in the last quarter of a century that will end again in a tremendous revolution.

But suppose both of us see its beginning at the end of our lives. We certainly shall not live to see the better times of pure air and the rejuvenation of all society after those big storms.

But it is already something not to be duped by the falsity of one's time, and to scent the unhealthy closeness and oppressiveness of the hours that precede the thunderstorm.

And to say, We are still in the closeness, but the following generations will be able to breathe more freely.

Zola and the de Goncourts believe in it with the simplicity of grown-up children. They, the most rigorous analysts whose diagnoses are both so merciless and so exact.

And the very ones you have mentioned too, Turgenev and Daudet, they do not work without an aim or without looking ahead. But all avoid, and with reason, prophesying Utopias, and are pessimistic in that if one begins to analyze, the history of this country shows terribly clearly how revolutions may come to nothing, though they begin ever so nobly.

You see the thing that supports one is that one doesn't always have to be alone with one's feelings and thoughts when one works and thinks together with other people.

At the same time that increases one's strength, and one is infinitely happier.

Now I have wanted it to be this way between us for a long time already, and I imagine if you stayed alone, you would get depressed, because times are not cheerful *unless one finds satisfaction in one's work.*

I am sending you that novel by de Goncourt, especially for the preface, which gives a summary of their work and aims. You will see that those people have not been exactly happy, in the same way as Delacroix said of himself, “Je n'ai pas du tout été heureux dans le sens ou je l'entendais, le désirais autrefois.” [I have not been at all happy in the sense in which I understood, I desired it formerly.] Well it may come sooner or later, but for you too there will come a moment when you know *for sure* that all chance of material happiness is lost, fatally and irrevocably. I feel sure of it, but remember that at the same moment there will be a certain compensation in feeling the power to work within one's self.

What cuts me to the heart is the beautiful serenity of the great thinkers of the present, as, for instance, that last walk of the two de Goncourts, of which you will read the description. The last days of the old Turgenev were the same way, too; he was with Daudet a great deal then. Sensitive, delicate, intelligent like women, also sensitive to their own suffering, and yet always full of life and consciousness of themselves, no indifferent stoicism, no contempt for life. I repeat - those fellows, they die the way women die. No fixed idea about God, no abstractions, always on the firm ground of life itself, and only attached to that. I repeat - like women who have loved much, hurt by life, and as Silvestre says of Delacroix, “Ainsi il mourut presqu'en souriant.”

Meanwhile we are not yet that far; on the contrary, we have to work first, to live first, although without happiness in the ordinary sense of the word.

But whatever there may be of the future, you may be sure that I shall be very glad if I can work a year at Cormon's, unless there is a better opportunity for drawing at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts or some other studio that I have heard mentioned here.

The ancients will not prevent us from being realistic, on the contrary. Of course I am also longing enormously for the French pictures.

By the way - don't you like this little poem?

Tout le mal est venu de la femme - Raison

Obscurcie, appétit de lucre, trahison

[Translation of the whole poem].

All evil has come from woman - Obscured reason, appetite for lucre, treachery...

Golden cups in which the wine is mixed with lees,

Every crime, every happy lie, every folly

Comes from her. Yet adore her, as the gods

Made her...and it is still the best thing they did.

After all painting has the secret of being able to give one a second youth.

Tell me, have you ever read anything by Carlyle? Perhaps it is not even necessary if you only see the face of that man and know that his work is something like Michelet's; Whistler and Legros have both painted his portrait.

He is also one who dared a great deal, and had a different insight into things than the rest. But always when I study the lives of such men, I find the same story, lack of money, bad health, opposition, isolation - in short, trouble from beginning to end.

Mantz's article on Paul Baudry was very good, and I like this especially: “Il a travaillé au renouvellement du sourire.” [He has worked at the renewal of the smile.]

Could one say of Delacroix, “Il a travaillé au renouvellement de la passion”? Perhaps so.

Well, at all events write soon. Goodbye,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 14 February 1886

Dear Theo,

I write you often these days, and I often write the same thing, but let it prove to you that I have one thing especially in mind - the necessity of entering that period of figure drawing.

And then it may be egoistic if you like, I want my health restored. My impression of the time I have spent here does not change either; in a certain sense I am very much disappointed by what I have made here, but my ideas have been modified and refreshed, and that was the real object of my coming here. But as I have perceived that I relied too much on my health, and that, though the core is still all right, yet I am but a ruin compared to what I might have been, so it would not astonish me at all if you, too, were absolutely in need of that same more hygienic life that was prescribed for me.

If I am not mistaken in this, I think we cannot join each other soon enough, and I keep objecting to a stay in the country. For though the air is bracing, I should miss there the distraction and the pleasant company of the city, which we should enjoy so much more if we were together. And if we were together soon, I should disappoint you in many things, yes, to be sure, but not in everything, and not in my way of looking at things, I suppose.

Now that we are discussing things, I want to tell you to begin with that I wish both of us might find a wife in some way or other before long, for it is high time, and if we should wait too long, we should not be the better for it.

But I say this in all calmness. However, it is one of the first requisites for our more hygienic life. And I mention it because in that respect we may have to overcome an enormous difficulty, on which a great deal depends. And herewith I break the ice on the subject; we shall always have to return to it. And in the intercourse with women one especially learns so much about art.

It is a pity that, as one gradually gains experience, one gradually loses one's youth. If that were not so, life would be too good.

Have you already read that preface to Chérie by de Goncourt? The amount of work those fellows have achieved is enormous when one thinks of it.

It is such a splendid idea, that working and thinking together. And every day I find new proof of the theory that the main reason for much misery among the artists lies in their discord, in their not co-operating, not being good but false to each other. And now, if we were more sensible in that respect, I do not doubt for a moment that within a year's time we should make headway, and be happier. I am not getting on very well with my work, but I do not force things, because in fact I am almost completely forbidden to.

And I want to keep up my strength for that first time in Paris, if that is to follow first, without any other interval than that one month in the country. For should like to go there in good condition.

It was Sunday today, almost a spring day. This morning I took a long walk alone all through the city, in the park, along the boulevards. The weather was such that I think in the country they will have heard the lark sing for the first time.

In short, there was something of resurrection in the atmosphere.

Yet what depression there is in business and among the people. I do not think it exaggerated to be pessimistic about the various strikes, etc., everywhere.

They will certainly prove not to have been useless for the following generations, for *then* they will have proved a success. But now it is of course hard enough for everybody who must earn his bread by his work, the more so because we can foresee that it will get worse and worse from year to year. The labourer against the bourgeois is as justifiable as was the tiers état against the other two a hundred years ago. And the best thing to do is to keep silent, for fate is not on the bourgeois side, and we shall live to see more of it; we are still far from the end. So although it's spring, how many thousands and thousands are wandering about, desolate.

I see the lark soaring in the spring air as well as the greatest optimist; but I also see the young girl of about twenty, who might have been in good health, a victim of consumption, and who will perhaps drown herself before she dies of any illness.

If one is always in respectable company among rather well-to-do bourgeois, one does not notice this so much perhaps, but if one has dined for years on la vache enragée, as I have, one cannot deny that great misery is a fact that weights the scale.

One may not be able to cure or to save, but one can sympathize with and pity them. Corot, who after all had more serenity than anybody else, who felt the spring so deeply, was he not as simple as a workingman all his life, and so sensitive to all the miseries of others? And what struck me in his biography was that when he was already very old in 1870 and 1871, he certainly looked at the bright sky, but at the same time he visited the ambulances where the wounded lay dying.

Illusions may fade, but the sublime *remains*. One may doubt everything, but one does not doubt people like Corot and Millet and Delacroix. And I think that in moments when one does not care for nature any more, one still cares for humanity.

If you can, send me something extra this month, be it more or less, even if it's only 5 francs, do so. If you can't, then it can't be helped.

I am greatly longing to know your decision, if perhaps you would approve of my coming to Paris already about April 1. At all events write soon about it.

Goodbye. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 15-17 February 1886

Dear Theo,
Of course all my attention is concentrated on gaining what I want to gain, namely - freedom of scope for my career. That means overcoming the obstacles instead of being buried under them. I have already told you that my health is very poor and that I shall have to act energetically to rebuild it.

Further, I have told you that there is no reason for me to go and work again in the country for the first year, that it is infinitely better for my whole future to draw from the plaster casts and from the nude in the city. Must one be on one's guard against a general fall in prices, diverse slumps, and consequently the rigidity of business routine these last years, or mustn't one? However, I don't ask you to have a fixed opinion about it. I don't have one either.

One cannot predict anything with certainty in such a large field. So let's leave it at that. But if one analyzes from up close, one sees that the greatest and most energetic people of the century have always worked *against the grain*, and they have always worked out of personal initiative. Both in painting and in literature. (I do not know anything about music, but I suppose it has been the same there.) To begin on a small scale, to persevere quand même, to produce much with small capital, to have character instead of money, more audacity than credit, like Millet and Sensier, Balzac, Zola, de Goncourt, Delacroix. But to start a studio in Paris at once might not be so good as doing it after *a year of study*, both for you and for me.

Let me draw for a year at Cormon's while you thoroughly investigate business conditions once more, and the various opportunities. And then I think we may risk it.

Because in a time of financial crisis like the present, money is what ammunition is to a soldier in a hostile country - don't let's waste our powder.

Further - I have heard several fellows, both painters and ordinary people, complain, “I have taken an expensive room to induce people to come to me, but since then nobody has come, and I myself do not feel at home in it.”

Still, I believe that for portraits it is necessary to have a certain comfort in the studio, otherwise people who come to pose there would get disgusted.

But if one wants to start a studio, one must consider well where to rent it, where one has the greatest chance of getting visitors, and making friends, and getting known.

Because of the primary necessity of drawing for a year, *for the moment* the question of a good studio is quite secondary, and anything will do.

If we do it quietly and intelligently, I don't think that this year of drawing would be a misfortune. On the contrary, we shall have time to consider everything at our ease, and to look before we leap.

If I came to Paris, the most practical thing to do would be to wait for a year before taking a studio. In that year we would get to know each other better and more intimately, which may bring a great change, and then we should be less afraid to undertake bigger things, because meanwhile we should have fortified the weak points.

If we work for another year, if we recover our health, both you and I - *then* we can resist things so much better than *now*.

But what must I do now? Look here, going back to Brabant is really a useless detour, and I shall lose money and time by it. Why can't I go straight to Paris from here, if you like, and go on working here till I leave? I tell you, I am in such a wretched condition that, if there is any money to spare, let me look after my health then, and let the rest go, for at home they can manage just as well with a hired man, even better perhaps.

If I do not take some nourishing food I am sure to get sick. It would not be my fault, and indeed I should not care much, let come what may.

If I go to Brabant, I have the expenses of my journey, I must also pay for my room there, which I have given up, and must find another place to store my things, which would be no less than 50 francs rent, and another 50 francs in advance for a new storage place and for moving. I should also be obliged to pay an outstanding colour bill, and of course I should begin to paint there again.

Now I thought that through force majeure, I am free to declare myself unable to fulfill those obligations for the moment, *i.e.* not to pay my rent there, but say, “Put my furniture in your attic, keep it as a security, I shall pay you when I come to get it”; then I need not rent a new place for storage.

If I am so weak as to spend money all the time, even *though I cannot afford it*, I do myself *too much* harm, and make myself unfit for my work.

I think you will agree with me. If you remember how I have complained lately that I could not go on in that way, you see that there was reason for it.

If I had known beforehand what I have noticed here about opportunities to work in a studio, I should have done it sooner.

Now - as I *must* go on, and as I am ill at the same time, I cannot but ask you to allow me to stay here till I go to Paris, and by all means let me go to Paris no later than when the course here ends - that is March 31.

Then we shall still have the unavoidable expenses of the journey to Paris. You will have to move too, which also brings expenses. So Brabant is a useless detour, a loss of time, *etc*.

The way things are now, I must live from hand to mouth, and what is unpaid must wait.

When I have recovered my health and begin to sell in Paris - all right, then I can pay the rent and the colours.

I *can't* now, I don't have the money, neither do you, that's all.

Besides, I have had so much unpleasantness there that I need not consider any of their feelings.

It would also be a weakness on your part if you tried to change it.

You continually write me that you have no money; all right, so that's a fact. If it is not possible to *make* money for food, it need not be possible for rent either, or for superfluous travelling expenses.

And I know too well that at home Rijke, the gardener, or Husing is much more fit than I to pack things up and send them off. I'd do it if I were there, but to travel there on purpose when there are at least six pairs of hands as good as mine at their disposal, No. After all I don't care, but I tell you only what is right, and I point out to you the urgency of carrying through what will help us on. It would not be pleasant for me to come back sick either; you can't say anything against that.

Let me recover my health first; I am now too far below the mark.

In short - the conclusion of this and the previous letter is: To go on quietly either here or, much better still, at Cormon's; besides, I am sick, though I keep going.

If I saw a possibility of doing it, I should not object to going back to Brabant. I should even do it gladly if I could, but neither you nor I have the means, and they can spare me there better than they can use me.

Goodbye - write me soon,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 15-17 February 1886

Dear Theo,

I am longing very much to hear from you, for the time has come for me to make a decision.

There are only ten days left in the month, and I have to know what I must do. However, for myself, I have come to a decision. I only wish you would see things as I do.

If you approve of the plan of my coming to Paris as soon as possible, then after having been in Brabant for a short time, I shall send you from here the studies and drawings I have here.

But I must hasten to send them, otherwise I shall have to stay here longer again.

I should also like so very much to finish having my teeth fixed. What must I do?

I have a total of one franc fifty centimes left, and as to my food, I paid 5 francs in advance until the end of the month.

In so many ways it would be such a good thing to change soon.

You understand that no money is left to take painting materials from here to Brabant, so I shall be doubly in a fix there, both as to models and colours.

So there is no choice; besides, what need is there to choose? For what is most pressing must come first, and that is the period of drawing from the nude and the works of antiquity.

Perhaps I write you somewhat abruptly, but things must not be put off. For the rest, it is only natural that there cannot be any objection to finding a garret in Paris at once, on the very first day of my arrival, and then I can go and draw at the Louvre or the Ecole des Beaux-Arts so that I shall be quite prepared for Cormon. So don't let's hesitate or take too long to decide.

We must put our shoulders to the wheel. Well, let's do it.

If ever we want to do some good, you may be sure that more and more things will depend on quickness and resoluteness of action, and as, notwithstanding all the trouble one may take, nobody can be sure of the result of his undertaking, there can be no harm in some daring and energy.

So if it were at all possible, I should like to have that job on my teeth finished this month. I should like to pack up my studies and send them to you, and then leave here on the last of this month, or even a few days sooner.

But not stay on into March, on account of the rent.

Would this be possible? Then I can help them to pack up at home, if it should be of any use to them. And if I can paint or draw a little there, so much the better. But the sooner and the more energetically we go through that period of drawing in Paris, the better it will be for the whole future; I feel even the little I did of it these last few weeks here has been of use to me. And if I did not do so, and tried another way, direct from nature, I should always have trouble with people who had been at some academy, who would say that according to them I cannot draw.

I do not know definitely yet how things will go with me here at the academy. I think I wrote you recently, didn't I, that they absolutely *picked* a fight with me?

Yesterday I heard that Sibert, the teacher, had said to somebody that I had a good idea of drawing, and that he had been rather too hasty.

As he does not come into the class often, I have not seen him for a few days.

At the moment I am working on a woman's torso.

Goodbye, do write as soon as you can. My health remains pretty much the same, yet I believe it is beginning to improve.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

If I did not insist on it, *i.e.* going to Paris, I should not recover, for I must try to earn more. I am living too wretchedly now. If one didn't have to pay for so many other things, one could live very well on 150 fr., but now there are too many things to pay for.

But after all, my health is improving, and it will come out all right.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, c. 18 February 1886

Dear Theo,

At the moment that all my money is gone, absolutely gone, I write you once again.

If you can send anything, even if it's only 5 fr., do so. There are still ten days left in the month, and how am I to get through them? For I have absolutely *nothing* left. Even at the baker's, *nothing*.

I know only one thing, that everything decidedly points to my not acting otherwise than as I wrote you - namely - to my not postponing going to Paris.

For the rest, you will notice from the last work, which you have not seen, that when I let painting rest for a short while, I do this in all confidence, for I shall not easily get out of the practice of working with the brush. I will also send you the drawings from the works of the ancients; that is unusual work for me, and I shall improve.

Like the torso of a woman that I finished today; it is more distinguished in modelling and less brusque than the first ones, in which the figures remind one involuntarily of peasants or woodcutters.

If I had not been sick, I should have been able to do more here.

What we have to do is to go quietly on, but that period of drawing cannot be avoided, and it is most pressing.

And I am so sure that my spending the time between on nothing but drawing will help me at Cormon's. Whatever sort of man Cormon may be, he will be like the rest in that he will not have much time.

And whoever wants to learn from those people must start by bringing along as much positive knowledge as possible. And it is almost certain that all those who are at his studio have drawn a good deal from the plaster casts, and that no matter how free and liberal the studio may be otherwise, this is the basis of everything.

So let's act wisely. They care a little for outdoor studies, but not much. And the people who have been in Paris all say the same thing.

At Cormon's I suppose I shall have to paint a nude figure from nature, as a test, and the better I know the structure by heart, the more and the better he will be able and willing to tell me things.

For the rest, we must see how we can get along together. I hope we shall, but if not, then we should know something more about it if we had had a few months' trial.

And as to my going straight to Paris, I tell you it will be less expensive for you, for what with traveling to and from, and starting relatively expensive work in Brabant, we should not be able to manage with the usual allowance, and in Paris we can.

And if we can manage with the money, so much the better, then we shall not be so hard up and might stock up on painting materials before summer, so that everything will not come at once.

Don't be offended if I too calculate for once what is possible and what is not.

I am rereading Bracquemond's book, and I find it more beautiful each time.

I feel that you do not approve of my going straight to Paris, otherwise you would already have answered me. And yet it is better to do it at once. Here I have the opportunity to consult people who work quite seriously, and I am fully convinced it will be the best thing to do. In fact, we ought to have done it long ago.

But don't worry too much about it, we shall not fail, but what I tell you is true - from the moment that I send this letter off till I get your answer, which I hope, however, will cross mine, I shall be without a cent, and it will mean fasting again.

Well, let's hope we shall be together soon, and that the worst will be over. Goodbye, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I do not trust the people whom I live with, so if you send a letter with money in it, as you did recently, it is safer to have the letter registered.

I have just read La Dame aux Camelias by Dumas. It is very good. Do you know it?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 19 or 20 February 1886

Dear Theo,
I tore up a letter I had first written you, that's why you will get my answer somewhat later. I begin by thanking you for the 50 fr., which I appreciate, as I do everything you do for me. But as I began to say, your letter disappoints me, as you do not comply with my request, for I stick to my opinion that the reasons I gave you in my last letter for coming sooner were quite logical. But as I will not quarrel about it after all, I only beg you to reconsider it.

With regard to Cormon, it is decidedly better for me to go on drawing from the plaster casts than to work out-of-doors, because the better I memorize the structure of the figure the better I shall be able to follow the course. I shall have to do with people who have drawn from the casts for *years*; if I do it for *months* it will not be too long. I am perhaps more daring in dashing things off, and in grasping the whole, than many others, because I have always worked from nature.

But the others may have more knowledge of the nude, for which I haven't had the opportunity. The sooner I make up for that the better, the more I shall be able to profit from working at Cormon's.

Then my health, I do not eat when I'm working outdoors, and I cannot get well. For I frequently relapse; my health is far from being what it ought to be.

Now as to the expenses, I believe it will be pretty much the same. So just think it over again - we must act, for we must put our shoulders to the wheel.

All the time I have been here, I have had a comrade, an old Frenchman, and I have painted his portrait, which Verlat approved of, and which you will see. The winter was even worse for him than for me, and the poor devil is much worse off than I am because his age makes it very critical. Today I went with him to the same doctor whom I had been to myself, and probably he will have to go to the hospital and undergo an operation, which will be decided tomorrow. At last I had persuaded him to do it, but he was so nervous about it that it took a long time to persuade him to go and hear his sentence.

He knew that it was going to be rather serious, and he dared not entrust himself to the hospital doctor.

I wonder what will be decided. It is possible that for his sake I shall stay here a few days longer in March. After all, there is nothing in the world as interesting as people, and one can never study them enough. And that's why people like Turgenev are such great masters, because they teach us to observe.

The books of today since Balzac, for instance, are different from all that was written in the preceding centuries, and perhaps more beautiful.

I am longing especially for Turgenev, because I have read an article by Daudet about him, in which both his character and his work were analyzed - very beautifully.

For he is exemplary as a man, and in his old age he was as young as ever as far as *working on* was concerned, for he was dissatisfied with himself and always trying to do better and better.

Goodbye, but think it over carefully - it would be such a relief if you could see this matter the way I do.

And I should not insist so much if I did not think it necessary to continue drawing from the casts without interruption, especially with regard to June. Well, write soon. I would much rather paint something else, but as a practical matter it cannot be avoided.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Because I think that after all my stay in Antwerp has been useful to me I believe that we must go straight on.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Antwerp, 20-28 February 1886

Dear Theo,
I write you once more because at all events my time here has almost come to an end, and I have to go back one of these days. The time of working out-of-doors will be there at the slightest change in the weather, so if it must be, and if you wish it, my being in Brabant would not be quite futile. But however this may be, I continue to try to induce you to carry out the Cormon plan, and I personally would so much prefer to go on drawing from the casts for a time.

I guess my health is improving a little, at least in that I can digest my food a little better. But it always remains unsteady, and it varies from one day to the next. I have finished another drawing from a cast, and since I wrote you that the teacher had let me know indirectly that it had not been his intention to offend me, there has been no further trouble between us, and he even said that today's drawing hardly needed any correction of the proportions, and none at all of the tone. So I almost dare to hope that I shall also manage to get along with Cormon, whatever he may be like, and that makes me long the more to be there. Well, if I may have some luck with my health, I hope to make some progress this year.

I also continue to believe that I shall be able to find some work, though I have not been lucky in that respect.

But my time has been taken up almost completely by my work at the academy.

From what I hear, I infer that what the fellows happen to sell is always portraits. There is said to be a fine exhibition of impressionists in Brussels.

You see, since I have heard and seen here how the other fellows who concentrate on the figure manage - and you see they all have more to spend than I - they have always made use of models at some studio in the city, just to save expenses. And at the same time one has some intercourse with other fellows, and can see how they work.

And I can't help thinking all the time that perhaps we ought to have taken that measure two or two and a half years ago - that much more reason not to put it off any longer now.

After all Antwerp has pleased me very much. Of course I wish I had arrived here with the experience I have now, at the moment I leave. But if that were possible, things would be easier, and one always begins everywhere by being a greenhorn. But I hope to come back to Antwerp some time, for life is rather free and artistic here, if only one looks for it, more than anywhere else perhaps.

Then one sees all kinds of people, English, French, German and Belgian, and that gives variation.

If there is one city that resembles Paris, it is Antwerp rather than Brussels, in the first place because it is a centre for people of all nationalities, secondly, with regard to business, and in the third place because of its liveliness, and of the fact that one can amuse oneself there.

If the course at the academy continues, I should like to stay, but unfortunately from May on there is nothing but competitions, and the day class for the works of the ancients, and these are also almost over.

And now I have not seen Antwerp in a flourishing condition, for one generally hears that it used to be much livelier, and that now it is depressed by two crises at the same time - in the first place the general one, and then in addition, the afterpains of the exhibition in the shape of numbers of fraudulent or common bankruptcies.

Think it over carefully again, whether we can't find a combination that would render it possible for me to come to Paris before June. I should like it so much, because I believe it would be better for so many reasons, which I have already mentioned to you. To which I may add that I think we can discuss taking a studio by June so much better if we are both in Paris beforehand, and can investigate the pros and cons.

Well, write me soon. With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, c. 1 March 1886

My dear Theo,

Don't be angry with me for arriving out of the blue. I've given it so much thought and I'm sure we'll gain time this way. Shall be at the Louvre from midday onwards, or earlier if you like.

Please let me know what time you can get to the Salle Carrée. As far as expenses are concerned, I repeat that it won't make much difference. I still have some money left, of course, and I want to talk to you before spending any of it. We'll sort everything out, you'll see.

So come as soon as you can. I shake your hand,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Andreis Bonger to His Parents

Paris, 1886

[Extracts from letters written by A. Bonger in Paris to his parents in Amsterdam.]

March 17th 1886

Some days ago De Meester paid Van Gogh a visit. We were not mistaken; he was the man who nearly went into hysterics when he had to pass the Ambassador…V. G. let him speak freely; I think there is no better way to form an opinion of a man whom one has never met than by letting him talk…

Did I write you that Van Gogh's brother, who is studying to be a painter, has arrived here? The consequences will be that we shall not see much of V. G. in the future, for they are having their meals together in their neighbourhood. His mother and sisters are leaving Nuenen for Breda shortly.

June 23rd 1886

Did I tell you that Van Gogh has moved to Montmartre? They now have a big, spacious apartment (by Parisian standards) and their own household. They are now keeping their own cook in optima forma. Theo is still looking frightfully ill; he literally has no face left at all. That poor fellow has many cares. Moreover, his brother is making life rather a burden to him, and reproaches him with all kinds of things of which he is quite innocent. For a long time he has had no news of his sister Lize.

1886

It now appears that Theo's brother has come to stay; for the next three years at least he is going to work in the painter Cormon's studio. I think I told you last summer what a queer life this brother has led. The man hasn't the slightest notion of social conditions. He is always quarreling with everybody. Consequently Theo has a lot of trouble getting along with him.

August 27th 1886

My patients (during Theo's absence Vincent van Gogh was taken ill too) prevented me from writing you. Otherwise I should have sought an earlier opportunity to thank you for the cordiality with which you received Theo. He is quite elated with his stay with you. Thursday morning he came back. It gives me a lot of pleasure too that you like him. The better one gets to know him, the more one learns to appreciate the refinement of his mind. His company is always entertaining. During his absence I slept in his apartment, for Vincent was alone…

It is settled that in the future I am going to have my dinners at Van Gogh's. It is true that it takes a lot of time, for he is living in Montmartre, and consequently the evenings will be quite lost, but it is more pleasant for both of us. We always have subjects enough o discuss, the three of us.

February 18th 1887

Van Gogh too stands in great need of being renovated. He continues to look sick and emaciated, and he is feeling weak. If he were not such a desperately pig-headed fellow, he would have gone and consulted Gruby long ago.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, August 1886

Dear Theo,
This morning we got your letter. We think that it is already something that you have broached the subject - and broken the ice as you have spoken about it with the Hollandsche heeren [Dutch gentlemen], *etc.* And I do not think that my “elle sera à la vapeur” was wrong; I myself see that à la vapeur in the future. And as to the immediate present, you will remember that I said to you: meet with a refusal this time if necessary, but then in any case the subject is broached - and then there will have to follow a second trip to Holland by Bonger and you together. For the time being there is every reason to say with Father Pangloss: tout est pour le miex dans le meilleur des mondes. [Everything is for the best in the best of worlds.]

But, old fellow, the solution to the S. problem which you mention in today's letter, namely “either she gets out or I get out,” would be very succinct and efficacious - if it were practical. But you will run your head against the same difficulties Bonger and I had to face the last few days, and which we are taking the utmost trouble to clear away. These difficulties are of a nature other than you suppose, but this is not the moment to discuss details; we shall tell you all about it as soon as you get back.

That you are not suited to S. and S. is not suited to you is, I think, incontrovertible, as well as that you must part company - but how? It would be a good thing if you accepted the idea that the affair cannot be settled in the way you propose, by treating her harshly you would immediately drive her to suicide or insanity, and the repercussions on you would be sad indeed and leave you a broken man.

So no catastrophes, please! Well, I told Bonger what I told you, namely that you should try and pass her on to somebody else, and I told him more explicitly what my feelings on the subject are that an amicable arrangement, which would seem obvious, could be reached by your passing her on to me. So it is certain that, if you could reconcile yourself to it, and S. too, I am ready to take S. off your bands, preferably *without* having to marry her, but if the worst comes to the worst *even* agreeing to a marriage de raison.

I am writing this in a few short words in order that you may have time to think things over before your return. As in this way she could keep house for you, and as she would live on what she earns by working, it would be rather a saving of expense than the reverse. Lucie has been given notice; I told her that you could not continue paying her, as it was too expensive, but I have kept her on until your return, so that you may be able to decide what you will do about the housekeeping, and in case the decision cannot be arrived at on the first day, it may be desirable to let the housekeeping go on on the same footing, as far as Lucie is concerned, until you have decided about what to do with S.

If you could agree with this arrangement, the first consequence, as I see it, would be that you would feel a free man, and your own engagement would become à la vapeur. Keep courage and be calm!

As for my work, I painted the pendant of those flowers which you have. A branch of white lilies - white, pink, green - against black, something like black Japanese lacquer inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which you know - then a bunch of orange tiger lilies against a blue background, then a bunch of dahlias, violet against a yellow background, and red gladioli in a blue vase against light yellow.

I have read Bel Ami by Guy de Maupassant.

Do you know that Bonger is sleeping here as well as S., and these are queer days; at times we are afraid of her, and at other times we are almighty gay and lighthearted. But S. is seriously deranged, and she is not cured yet by a long shot.

However, the moment you meet again, you will both feel that the liaison between S. and you is definitely *off* and so you need not be afraid of getting tied to her again. But you must talk a lot with her, and try to get her settled down. Please think it over in the interval between now and your return, and remember: aux grand maux les grands remèdes.

Bonger is sure to add something to this letter, if he does not write to you directly from his office.

I quite agree to the exchange for two watercolours by Isabey, especially if they are figures. Try to make an exchange for the pendant that I have here, and to get something else with it. I say, would it not be possible to get the Otto Weber from Prinsenhage, that beautiful autumn? I would give them a series of four in exchange. We need pictures more than drawings, but do what seems best. Love to all at home.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

[Andreis Bonger]

The basis of V.'s reasoning corresponds with my own conviction. The problem is that S.'s eyes must be opened. She is not the least bit in love with you, but it is as if you have cast a spell on her. Morally she is seriously ill. It goes without saying that we could not leave her to her fate in this condition. On the contrary, we have been as kind as possible to her. If we hadn't, she would have gone mad. What makes me optimistic about her recovery is something she said last night: “que je suis bête de ne pouvoir me faire un raisonnement.” [how stupid I am not to be reasonable.] So it seems she feels what is the matter with her. The great difficulty is her obstinacy, which we have repeatedly bumped our heads against, as against a stone wall. Nothing is to be gained by harsh treatment. For the time being it is extremely difficult to make a plan, (Vincent's is impractical, as far as I can see), but I hope you are fully convinced that your handling of her has been wrong; during the past year your relations have had no other result than getting her hopelessly muddled. Perhaps it would have been better to live together completely; then she would have seen of her own accord that you are not at all well matched. If she could live a month with somebody else who would be able to satisfy her sensuality and take care of her (for she requires a lot of care) so that she may recover her health, you would be forgotten. Her condition greatly resembles the nervous overexcitement of most girls in Holland. It will prove no less difficult to convince S. of hers than it would be to give rest to those minds at home.

I don't suppose you have met my sisters Jo and Annie; as far as I know, both of them are out of town. We are both anxious to know how things are in Amsterdam. It gave me great pleasure to hear that V. is appreciated now. What a satisfaction for you, because of the firm confidence you have always had in him! He has made a number of very beautiful things; those on a yellow background are quite striking. The flower pieces are most gay and colourful as a whole; but some pictures are flat, a thing I am unable to convince him of. He persists in replying, But I wanted to introduce this or that colour contrast. As if I give a damn about what he *wanted* to do!

Write soon when you will come back. Try to come back with a renewed physical strength, and a clear mind, and an inflexible will. You will need all three of them.

For the matter, the situation is not at all hopeless, though it is precarious. Spijker is recovering only very slowly. Remember me to your family, and believe that I am with all my heart

Your friend, Bonger

Letter from Wilhelmina van Gogh to Line Kruysse

Nuenen, 26 August 1886

Extract from a letter from Wilhelmina van Gogh to Line Kruysse, a Dutch girlfriend.
Nuenen, 26 August 1886

…

My second brother, Theo, from Paris, left yesterday; he really is a dear boy. He told us so many good things about Vincent, the eldest, who is living with him. His paintings are getting so much better and he is beginning to exchange them for those of other painters, so everything's sure to come right in time. According to Theo, he is definitely making a name for himself. But we are under no illusions, and are only too grateful that he is having some slight success. You don't know what a hard life he has had, and who can say what is still in store for him. His disappointments have often made him fell bitter and have turned him into an unusual person. That was difficult for my parents, who could not always follow him and often misunderstood him. My father was strict, and attached to all sorts of conventions of which my brother never took any particular notice; needless to say, that often led to clashes and to words spoken in anger, which neither party was quick to forget. So during the past eight years Vincent has been a bone of contention with many, and all too often one tended to forget all the good there was in him, the appearances to the contrary. During the past few years he has been working at home with us; after my father's death, Anna thought it would be more peaceful for Mother if he stopped living at home, and saw to it that he left us. He took that so badly that from then on he has not been in touch with us, and it is only through Theo that we have news of him.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Horace M. Livens

Paris, August/Oct 1886

[Letter written in English by Vincent van Gogh to the English painter Horace M. Livens, whom he had met in Antwerp. The text is reproduced without alterations.]

Paris, Aug-Oct. 1887

My dear Mr. Levens,

Since I am here in Paris I have very often thought of yourself and work. You will remember that I liked your colour, your ideas on art and literature and I add, most of all your personality. I have already before now thought that I ought to let you know what I was doing, where I was. But what refrained me was that I find living in Paris is much dearer than in Antwerp and not knowing what your circumstances are I dare not say, come over to Paris from Antwerp without warning you that it costs one dearer, and that if poor, one has to suffer many things - as you may imagine - . But on the other hand there is more chance of selling. There is also a good chance of exchanging pictures with other artists. In one word, with much energy, with a sincere personal feeling of colour in nature I would say an artist can get on here notwithstanding the many obstructions. And I intend remaining here still longer.

There is much to be seen here - for instance Delacroix, to name only one master. In Antwerp I did not even know what the impressionists were, now I have seen them and though *not* being one of the club yet I have much admired certain impressionists' pictures - *Degas* nude figure - *Claude Monet* landscape.

And now for what regards what I myself have been doing, I have lacked money for paying models else I had entirely given myself to figure painting. But I have made a series of colour studies in painting, simply flowers, red poppies, blue corn flowers and myosotys, white and rose roses, yellow chrysanthemums-seeking oppositions of blue with orange, red and green, yellow and violet seeking *les tons rompus et neutres* to harmonize brutal extremes. Trying to render intense colour and not a grey harmony. Now alter these gymnastics I lately did two heads which I dare say are better in light and colour than those I did before.

So as we said at the time: in *colour* seeking *life* the true drawing is modelling with colour.

I did a dozen landscapes too, frankly *green* frankly *blue*.

And so I am struggling for life and progress in art.

Now I would very much like to know what you are doing and whether you ever think of going to Paris.

If ever you did come here, write to me before and I will, if you like, share my lodgings and studio with you so long as I have any. In spring - say February or even sooner I may be going to the South of France, the land of the *blue* tones and gay colours.

And look here, if I knew you had longings for the same we might combine.

I felt sure at the time that you are a thorough colourist and since I saw the impressionists I assure you that neither your colour nor mine as it is developping itself, is *exactly* the same as their theories. But so much dare I say we have a chance and a good one finding friends. I hope your health is all-right. I was rather low down in health when in Antwerp but got better here.

Write to me in any case. Remember me to Allen, Briet, Rink, Durant but I have not often thought of them as I did think of you - almost daily.

Shaking hands cordially. Yours truly Vincent

My present address is

Mr. Vincent van Gogh

54 Rue Lepic, Paris.

With regard my chances of sale look here, they are certainly not much but still *I do have* a beginning.

At the present moment I have found four dealers who have exhibited studies of mine. And I have exchanged studies with many artists.

Now the prices are 50 francs. Certainly not much - but - as far as I can see one must sell cheap to rise and even at costing price. And mind my dear fellow, Paris is Paris. There is but one Paris and however hard living may be here, and if it became worse and harder even - the french air clears up the brain and does good - a world of good. I have been in Cormons studio for three or four months but I did not find that so useful as I had expected it to be. It may be my fault however, anyhow I left there too as I left Antwerp and since I worked alone, and fancy that since I feel my own self more.

Trade is slow here. The great dealers sell Millet, Delacroix, Corot, Daubigny, Dupré, a few other masters at exorbitant prices. They do little or nothing for young artists. The second class dealers contrariwise sell those at very low prices. If I asked more I would do nothing, I fancy. However I have faith in colour. Even with regards the price the public will pay for it in the long run. But for the present things are awfully hard. Therefore let anyone who risks to go over here consider there is no laying on roses at all.

What is to be gained is *progress* and what the deuce that is, it is to be found here. I dare say as certain anyone who has a solid position elsewhere let him stay where he is. But for adventurers as myself, I think they lose nothing in risking more. Especially as in my case I am not an adventurer by choice but by fate, and feeling nowhere so much myself a stranger as in my family and country. - Kindly remember me to your landlady Mrs. Roosmalen and say her that if she will exhibit something of my work I will send her a small picture of mine.

1887

Letter from Theo van Gogh to His Family

Paris, 1885 - 1887

Extracts from family letters 1885 - 1887, Paris
Theo to Lies.
13the October 1885

The more people one meets, the more one sees that they hide behind conventional forms of conversation, and that what they say when they pretend to be honest, is often so empty and so false. Bonger, who is a good friend, is different, and we often say to each other that although we meet many people, we meet so few people who we find sympathetic.

You ask me about Vincent. He is one of those people who has seen the world from nearby and has retreated from it. We shall now have to wait and see whether he has genius. I do believe it, and a few others with me, amongst them Bonger. Once his work becomes good he will become a great man. As to success, it may go with him as with Heyerdahl, valued by some but not understood by the masses. Those, however, who really care whether there is actually something in an artist or whether it is just tinsel will respect him, and in my opinion, that will be sufficient revenge for the displeasure expressed by so many.

Theo to mother
2nd half June 1886

Fortunately we're doing well in our new apartment. You would not recognize Vincent, he has changed so much, and it strikes other people even more than it does me. He has undergone an important operation in his mouth, for he had lost almost all his teeth through the bad condition of his stomach. The doctor says that he has now quite recovered.

Theo to mother
July 1886

He is progressing tremendously in his work and this is proved by the fact that he is becoming successful. He has not yet sold paintings for money, but is exchanging his work for other pictures. In that way we obtain a fine collection, which, of course, also has a certain value. There is a picture dealer who has now taken four of his paintings and has promised to arrange for an exhibition of his work next year. He is mainly painting flowers - with the object to put a more lively colour into his next set of pictures. He is also more cheerful than in the past and people here like him. To give you proof: hardly a day passes that he is not asked to go to the studios of well-known painters, or they come to see him. He also has acquaintances who give him a bunch of flowers every week which may serve him as models. If we are able to keep it up, I think his difficult times are over and he will be able to make it by himself.

Theo to mother

February 1887

He has painted a few portraits which have turned out well, but he always does them for no payment. It is a pity that he does not seem to want to earn something, for if he did he could make some money here; well, you can't change a person.

Theo to brother Cor

11 March 1887

Vincent continues his studies and he works with talent. But it is a pity that he has so much difficulty with his character, for in the long run it is quite impossible to get on with him. When he came here last year he was difficult, it is true, but I thought I could see some progress. But now he is his old self again and he won't listen to reason. That does not make it too pleasant here at home and I hope for a change. That change will come, but it is a pity for him, for if we had worked together it would have been better for both of us.

[…] Have you heard they are going to make an iron tower 300 meters high here? That must mean a lot of work. It seems it has been terribly difficult to figure out in what way it would be possible to keep it standing, and the designer [Eiffel] tells us that ten years ago it would have not been possible to make that calculation.

Theo to Wil

14 March 1887

I cannot tell you how much good your latest letter has done me. In difficult days it is so much to know that there is someone who wants to help bring things to a good end and I am often ungrateful enough to imagine that I stand all alone and then the difficulties seem insurmountable and it seems there is no way out. Your letter proves to me that I am wrong. This is such a special case. If he was someone who had a different kind of job, I would certainly have done what you advised me a long time ago, and I have often asked myself whether it was not wrong always to help him; I have often been on the verge of letting him muddle along by himself.

After getting your letter I again seriously thought about it and I feel that in the circumstances I cannot do anything but continue. It is certain that he is an artist and what he makes now may sometimes not be beautiful, but it will surely be of use to him later and then it may possibly be sublime, and it would be a shame if one kept him from his regular studies. However impractical he may be, when he becomes more skilful the day will undoubtedly come when he will start selling.

You should not think that it is the money side that worries me the most. It is mostly the idea that we sympathize so little any more. There was a time when I loved Vincent a lot and he was my best friend but that is over now. It seems to be even worse from his side, for he never loses an opportunity to show me that he despises me and that I revolt him. That makes the situation at home almost unbearable. Nobody wants to come and see me, for that always leads to reproaches and he is also so dirty and untidy that the household looks far from attractive. All I hope is that he will go and live by himself, and he has talked about this for a long time, but if I told him to leave that would only give him a reason to stay on. Since I cannot do any good for him I only ask for one thing and that is that he won't do any harm to me and that is what he does by staying, for it weighs heavily on me.

It appears as if there are two different beings in him, the one marvellously gifted, fine and delicate, and the other selfish and heartless. They appear alternately so that one hears him talk now this way and then that way and always with arguments to prove pro and contra. It is a pity he is his own enemy, for he makes life difficult not only for others but also for himself.

I have firmly decided to continue as I have done up to now, but I hope that for some reason or another he will move to other quarters, and I will do my best for that.

Theo to Lies

19 April 1887

I don't remember when I wrote you last and if I have already told you my secret. To get straight to the point, if you don't know yet; I am planning at one time or another to ask for Jo Bonger's hand. I surely don't know her enough to be able to tell you much about her. As you know, I have only seen her a few times, but the things I know about her appeal to me. She gives me the impression that I could trust her in a completely undefinable way, more than anyone else. I think I could talk with her about anything and I believe that if she wanted it, she could mean very much to me.

It is extremely doubtful whether Johanna would want me. However, I can't stop thinking of her. She is always with me, and very often I curse the terrible distance that lies between us. Why can't I see her more often and get to know her better, in order to know what she would wish and what she thinks of all kinds of things? How could I possibly get in contact with her in another way than I do now, being in Amsterdam once a year for one or two days, and then: *finished*? I have thought of beginning to write to her, but that is not possible either at the moment, since I was stupid enough last year not to ask her if she wanted to correspond with me.

[…] Don't think that when I don't go into details it is all other people's fault. No, the main reason was that I was ill, especially mentally, and that I had a hard struggle with myself.

Theo to Wil

26 April 1887

A lot has changed since I last wrote you. We have made peace, for it did not do anybody any good to continue in that way, I hope it will last. So there will be no change and I am glad. It would have been strange for me to live alone again and he would not have gained anything either. I asked him to stay. That will seem strange after all I wrote you recently, but it is no weakness on my side and as I feel much stronger than this winter, I am confident that I will be able to create an improvement in our relationship. We have drifted apart enough than that it would not serve any purpose to make the rift any larger.

Theo to Lies

15 May 1887

Vincent is working hard as always and keeps progressing. His paintings are becoming lighter and he is trying very hard to put more sunlight into them. He is a curious chap, but what a head he has got, most enviable.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, Summer 1887

My dear friend,

Enclosed is a letter which arrived yesterday, but which the concierge didn't give me straight away.

I've been to the Tambourin, since if I hadn't gone, they would have thought I was afraid.

And I told la Segatori that I wouldn't pass judgement on her in this matter, but that it was for her to judge herself.

That I had torn up the receipt for the pictures - but that she had to return *everything*.

That if she had not had a hand in what had happened to me, she would have seen me the next day.

That as she didn't come to see me, my feeling was that she knew they were trying to pick a quarrel with me, but that she had tried to warn me by saying, “Go away,” which I hadn't understood, and furthermore, perhaps didn't want to understand.

To which she replied that the pictures, & all the rest, were at my disposal. She maintained that it was I who had tried to pick a quarrel - which doesn't surprise me - knowing that if she sided with me they would take it out on her. I also saw the waiter when I went in, but he made himself scarce. I didn't want to take the pictures immediately, but I said that when you returned we would discuss the matter because these pictures belong to you as much as to me, and in the meantime I advised her to think about what had happened again. She didn't look well and was white as a sheet, which isn't a good sign. She didn't know that the waiter had gone up to your place. If that's true, I would be more inclined to believe she had tried to warn me they were trying to pick a quarrel with me than that she had plotted the whole thing herself. She cannot do as she likes. I'm awaiting your return now before taking any action.

I've done two pictures since you left. Have only got two louis left and I'm afraid I don't know how I'm going to manage from now until your return.

Don't forget that when I started working at Asnières I had plenty of canvases and Tanguy was very good to me. In fact he still is, but his old witch of a wife realized what was going on and complained. So I gave Tanguy's wife a piece of my mind and told her that it was her fault if I didn't buy anything more from them. Old man Tanguy is sensible enough to keep quiet, and will do whatever I want anyway. But with all this, work isn't easy.

I saw Lautrec today, he's sold a picture, through Portier I think. A watercolour of *Mme*. Mesdag's has arrived which I find very beautiful.

Now I hope you'll enjoy your trip over there, remember me to my mother, to Cor & to Wil. And if you could manage, by sending me something again, to ensure that I don't have too hard a time from now until you get back, then I shall try to do some more pictures for you - as I'm really very happy as far as my work goes. What worried me a little about this business was that it looked a little cowardly not going there, to the Tambourin. And my peace of mind has been restored by my going there.

I shake your hand,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Paris, Summer 1887

My dear friend,
Thank you for your letter, and for that which it contained. I feel sad that even successful paintings do not cover their costs.

I was touched by what you wrote about home, “They are fairly well but yet it is sad to see them.” A dozen years ago one would have sworn that, come what may, the family would always prosper and do well. It would give Mother much pleasure if your marriage came off; and you also ought not to stay single for the sake of your health and business.

As for me, I feel the desire for marriage and children leaving me, and now and then I'm rather depressed that I should be like this at 35, when I ought to be feeling quite the opposite. And sometimes I blame it all on this rotten painting. It was Richepin who said somewhere: the love of art is the undoing of true love. I think that's absolutely right, but on the other hand true love makes one weary of art.

And although I already feel old and broken, I can still be amorous enough at times to feel less passionate about painting. One must have ambition to succeed, and ambition seems to me absurd. I wish above all I were less of a burden to you - and that needn't be impossible from now on, for I hope to make such progress that you'll be able to show what I do in full confidence without compromising yourself. And then I'll retire somewhere in the Midi so as not to see so many painters who fill me with disgust as men.

You can be sure of one thing - I shan't be trying to do any more work for the Tambourin - I think it's about to change hands anyway, and I most certainly don't object to that. As for la Segatori, that is quite a different matter. I still feel affection for her and I hope that she, too, still feels some for me. But at the moment she is in a difficult situation, she is neither a free agent nor mistress in her own house, on top of which she's suffering and sick. Although I wouldn't say so in public - I'm convinced she's had an abortion (unless, that is, she did have a miscarriage) - whatever, in her case I don't hold it against her.

She'll be better in about two months' time, I hope, and then she may well be grateful to me for not having bothered her. Mind you, once she's well again, if she refuses in cold blood to return what is mine, or does me down in any way, I shan't pull my punches - but it won't come to that. After all, I know her well enough to still have confidence in her. And mind you, if she does manage to hang on to her establishment, then from a business point of view I shouldn't blame her for choosing to eat rather than be eaten. If that means she has to tread on my toes a bit - all right - she can do so. When I saw her last, she didn't tread all over my heart, which she would have done had she been as mean as people say she is.

I saw Tanguy yesterday and he has put a canvas I've just done in the window. I've done four since you left and I've got a big one under way. I realize that these big, long canvases are hard to sell, but later on people will see that there's fresh air and good humour in them. The whole lot would do well as decoration for a dining room or a country house. And if you were to fall properly in love and then got married, it doesn't seem impossible to me that you might manage to acquire a country house like so many other art dealers. If one lives well, one spends more, but also gains more ground, and perhaps nowadays one does better looking rich than looking hard up. It's better to enjoy life than to commit suicide.

Regards to all at home.

Ever yours,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Paris, Summer/fall 1887

My dear little sister,
I thank you very much for your letter, but for my part I hate writing these days. Still, there are some questions in your letter which I should like to answer.

To begin with, I must disagree with you when you say you thought Theo looked “so wretched” this summer. Personally, I think that on the contrary Theo's appearance has become a great deal more distinguished during the past year. One has to be strong to stand life in Paris for as many years as he has done.

But might it have been that Theo's family and friends in Amsterdam and The Hague didn't treat him, or even receive him, with the cordiality he deserved from them and was entitled to expect? On that score, I can tell you that he may have felt hurt but is otherwise not at all bothered; after all, he is doing business even in these particularly bad times for the picture trade, so may it not be that his Dutch friends were somewhat affected by jalousie de métier? [Professional jealousy]

Now, what shall I say about your little piece on the plants and the rain? You can see yourself that in nature many flowers are trampled underfoot, frozen or scorched, and for that matter not every grain of corn returns to the soil after ripening to germinate and grow into a blade of corn - indeed, that by far the greatest number of grains of corn do *not* develop fully but end up at the mill - isn't this so? To compare human beings with grains of corn, now - in every human being who is healthy and natural there is a *germinating force*, just as there is in a grain of corn. And so natural life is *germination*. What the germinating force is to the grain, love is to us.

Now we tend to stand about pulling a long face and at a loss for words, I think, when, thwarted in our natural development, we find that germination has been foiled and we ourselves placed in circumstances as hopeless as they must be for a grain between the millstones.

When that happens to us and we are utterly bewildered by the loss of our natural life, there are some amongst us who, though ready to submit to the inevitable, are yet unwilling to relinquish their self-confidence, and determine to discover what is the matter with them and what is really happening.

And if, full of good intentions, we search in the books of which it is said that they illuminate the darkness, with the best will in the world we find precious little that is certain, and not always the satisfaction of personal consolation.

And the diseases from which we civilized people suffer most are melancholy and pessimism. So I, for instance, who can count so many years of my life during which I lost any inclination to laugh - leaving aside whether or not this was my own fault - I, for one, feel the need for a really good laugh above all else. I've found it in Guy de Maupassant, and there are others - Rabelais among the older writers, Henri Rochefort among the present-day ones - who provide it as well - and Voltaire in *Candide*.

If, on the other hand, one wants the truth, life as it is, then there are, for instance, de Goncourt in Germinie Lacerteux, La Fille Eliza, Zola in La Joie de Vivre and L'assommoire, and so many other masterpieces, all portraying life as we feel it themselves, thus satisfying our need for being told the truth.

The work of the French naturalists, Zola, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, de Goncourt, Richepin, Daudet, Huysmans, is magnificent, and one can scarcely be said to belong to one's time if one is not acquainted with them. Maupassant's masterpiece is Bel Ami. I hope to be able to get it for you.

Is the Bible enough for us? These days I think Jesus himself would say again to those who sit down in melancholy, “It is not here, it is risen. Why seek ye the living among the dead?” If the spoken or written word is to remain the light of the world, then we have the right and duty to acknowledge that we live in an age when it should be spoken and written in such a way that, if it is to be just as great and just as good and just as origional and just as potent as ever to transform the whole of society, then its effect must be comparable to that of the revolution wrought by the old Kristians.

I, for my part, am always glad that I have read the Bible more carefully than many people do nowadays, just because it gives me some peace of mind to know that there used to be such lofty ideals.

But precisely because I find the old beautiful, I find the news beautiful à plus forte raison because we are able to take action in our own time while the past and the future concern us only indirectly.

My own adventures are confined chiefly to making swift progress toward growing into a little old man - you know, with wrinkles, a tough beard and a number of false teeth, and so on. But what does all that matter? I have a dirty and difficult trade - painting, and if I were not as I am, I should not paint; but being as I am, I often work with pleasure and can visualize the vague possibility of one day doing paintings with some youth and freshness in them, even though my own youth is one of the things I have lost.

If I didn't have Theo, I should not be able to do justice to my work, but having him for a friend, I'm sure I shall make progress and things will fall into place. As soon as possible I plan to spend some time in the south, where there is even more colour and even more sun.

But what I really hope to do is to paint a good portrait. So there.

To get back to your little piece of literature, I have qualms about adopting for my own use, or about advising others to do so for theirs, the belief that there are powers above us that interfere personally in order to help or console us. Providence is such a strange thing, and I must confess that I haven't the slightest idea what to make of it. And well, there is still a degree of sentimentality in your little piece, and its form is reminiscent above all of tales about the above-mentioned providence, or let's say the providence in question. Tales that so often don't hold water, and to which a great many objections might be made.

And above all I find it alarming that you believe you must study in order to write. No, my dear little sister, learn how to dance, or fall in love with one or more of the notary's clerks, officers, in short, any who are within your reach - rather, much rather commit any number of follies than study in Holland. It serves absolutely no other purpose than to make people slow-witted, and I won't hear of it.

For my part, I still continue to have the most impossible and highly unsuitable love affairs, from which as a rule I come away with little more than shame and disgrace. And in my own opinion I am absolutely right to do this, since, as I keep telling myself, in years gone by, when I ought to have been in love, I gave myself up to religious and socialist affairs, and considered art holier than I do now.

Why are religion or justice or art so sacred? People who do nothing but fall in love are perhaps more serious and saintly than those who sacrifice their love and their hearts to an idea. Be that as it may, in order to write a book, do a deed, paint a picture with some life in it, one has to be alive oneself. And so, unless you never want to progress, study is a matter of very secondary importance for you. Enjoy yourself as much as you can, have as many diversions as you can, and remember that what people demand in art nowadays is something very much alive, with strong colour and great intensity. So intensify your own health and strength and life a little; that is the best study.

I should be most obliged if you could let me know how Margot Begemann is and how things are with the De Groots, how did that business turn out? Did Sien de Groot marry her cousin? And did her child live?

Of my own work I think that the picture of peasants eating potatoes I did in Nuenen is après tout the best I've done. But since then I've had no chance of getting models, though on the other hand I did have the chance to study the colour question. And if I should find models again for my figures later, then I would hope to be able to show that I am after something other than little green landscapes or flowers.

Last year I painted almost nothing but flowers so as to get used to colours other than grey, vis. pink, soft or bright green, light blue, violet, yellow, orange, glorious red.

And when I was painting landscapes at Asnières this summer, I saw more colour in them than I did before. Now I'm going to try it with a portrait. And I must say that I'm not painting any the worse for it, perhaps because I could tell you of a very great deal that's wrong with both painters and paintings if I wanted to, quite as easily as I could tell you something that's good about them.

I don't want to be included among the melancholy or those who turn sour and bitter or ill-tempered. “Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner” [to understand everything is to forgive everything], and I believe that if we knew everything we should attain some serenity. Now, having as much of that serenity as possible, even when one knows little or nothing for certain, is perhaps a better remedy for all ills than what is sold in the pharmacy. Much of it comes by itself, one grows and develops of one's own accord.

So don't study and grind away too much, for that makes one sterile. Enjoy yourself too much rather than too little, and don't take art and love too seriously - there is very little one can do about it, it is mainly a question of temperament.

If I were living near you, I should try to make you understand that it might perhaps be more practical for you to paint with me than to write, and that you might be able to express your feelings more easily that way. In any case I can do something personally about your painting, but I am not in the writing profession.

Anyway, it's not a bad idea for you to become an artist, for when one has fire within oneself and a soul, one cannot keep bottling them up - better to burn than to burst, what is in will out. For me, for instance, it is a relief to do a painting, and without that I should be more miserable than I am.

Give Mother much love from me,

Vincent

I was deeply moved by A la recherche du bonheur. I have just finished Mont-Oriol by Guy de Maupassant.

Art often seems very exalted and, as you say, sacred. But the same can be said of love. And the only problem is that not everybody thinks about it in this way, and that those who do feel something of it, and let themselves be carried away by it, have to suffer so much, firstly because they are misunderstood, but quite as often because their inspiration is so often inadequate, or their work is frustrated by circumstances. One ought to be able to do two or even more things at once. And there are certainly times when it is far from clear to us that art should be something sacred or good.

Anyway, do weigh up carefully if those with a feeling for art, and trying to work at it, wouldn't do better to declare that they are doing it because they were born with that feeling, cannot help themselves and are following their nature, than make out they are doing it for some noble purpose. Doesn't it say in A la recherche du bonheur that evil lies in our own nature - which we have not created ourselves? I think it so admirable of the moderns that they do not moralize like the old ones. Thus many people are appalled and scandalized by “Le vice et la vertu sont des produits chimiques, comme le sucre et le vitrol.”

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Paris, Fall 1887

My dear Bernard,

I feel impelled to apologize to you for having left you so abruptly the other day. So I do so herewith without delay. I recommend to you to read Tolstoi's Russian Legends, and I shall also let you have the article on Eug. Delacroix I spoke of.

All the same, I myself went to see Guillaumin, but in the evening, and I thought that perhaps you did not know his address, which is 13 Quai d'Anjou. I believe that Guillaumin as a human being has sounder ideas than the others, and if all were like him they would produce more good things, and would have less time and inclination to fight each other so furiously.

I persist in believing, not because I have given you a piece of my mind, but because it will become your own conviction too - I persist in believing that you will discover that in the studios one not only does not learn much about painting, but not even much good about the art of living; and that one finds oneself forced to learn how to live in the same way one must learn to paint, without having recourse to the old tricks and eye-deceiving devices of intriguers.

I do not think your self-portrait will be either your last or your best, although on the whole it is terribly *you*.

Listen now, what I tried to explain to you the other day amounts roughly to this. In order to avoid generalizations, allow me to take an example borrowed from reality. If you have quarreled with a painter, and consequently say, “If Signac exhibits in the place where I exhibit, I shall withdraw my pictures,” and if you slander him, then it seems to me that you are not acting as well as you might. For it is better to look at things for a long time before judging so categorically, and to think things over; for in case of a quarrel, reflection shows us as many wrongs on our own part as on the other's - and that the latter has as much raison d'être as we would claim for our own.

So if you have already thought that Signac and others who use pointillism quite often do very fine things for all that, instead of slandering them you must respect them and speak sympathetically of them, especially if there has been a quarrel. Otherwise one becomes a sectarian, narrow-minded oneself, and the equal of those who utterly despise all others and believe themselves to be the only just ones.

This even extends as far as the academicians; take, for example, a picture by

Fantin-Latour, especially his work as a whole. Well, here is one who never revolted, but does this prevent him from having that something, whatever it may be, of calm and fairness that makes him one of the most independent char-acters alive?

Furthermore I wanted to say a few words about the military service which you will have to perform. From now on you must absolutely attend to that - directly in order to find out in the first place what steps can be taken in such a case to safeguard your right to work, to be able to choose your garrison, etc., but indirectly in order to take care of your health. You must not go there in too anemic or enervated a condition, if you set a value on coming out of it stronger.

I do not consider it a great misfortune for you to be obliged to be a soldier, but rather as a very serious trial from which you will emerge - if you emerge at all - a very great artist.

Until then do your utmost to fortify yourself, for you will need plenty of vigour. If you work a lot during that year, I think you might end up by having a certain stock of pictures, some of which we shall try to sell for you, as we know you will need ready money to pay for models.

I shall be glad to do all I can to make a success of what we began in the café, but I think that the primary condition on which success depends is to set aside all petty jealousies, for only union is strength. Surely the common interest is worth the sacrifice of that selfishness of every man for himself.

With a hearty handshake,

Vincent

1888

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 21 February 1888

My dear Theo,

During the journey I thought of you at least as much as I did of the new country that I was seeing.

Only I told myself that maybe later on you will often come here yourself. It seems to me almost impossible to be able to work in Paris unless one has a refuge where one can recuperate and regain one's tranquillity and poise. Without that, one would get hopelessly exhausted.

Now I'll begin by telling you that there's at least 60 centimeters of fallen snow everywhere, and it is still falling.

Arles doesn't seem any bigger than Breda or *Mons*.

Before arriving at Tarascon I noticed a magnificent landscape of immense yellow rocks, strangely intricate with the most imposing shapes.

In the tiny valleys between these rocks were rows of small round trees with foliage of olive-green or grey-green, which could well be lemon trees.

But here in Arles the country appears flat. I saw some magnificant red terrain planted with grapevines, with a background of mountains of the most delicate lilac. And the landscapes in the snow, with the summits white against a sky as luminous as the snow, were just like winter landscapes done by the Japanese.

Here is my address:

Restaurant Carrel,

30 Rue Cavalerie,

(Departement Bouches du Rhône) Arles.

I have only taken a little trip into the town so far, since I was more or less dog-tired last night.

I'll write soon. In an antique shop on the same street that I went into yesterday, the man told me he knew of a Monticelli.

With a good handshake to you and our comrades.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Paul Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh

Pont-Aven, end February 1888

My dear Vincent,
I wanted to write to your brother but I know than you see him every day and I am afraid of boring him, occupied as he is from morning to night by business.
I left to work in Brittany, (still a rage to paint), and I had good hopes to have funds for that.

The little that I sold served to pay for the few pressing debts and in one month I am going to be without anything. Zero is a negative strength.

I don't want to press your brother, but a little word from you on this topic would calm me, or at least would make me be patient. My god, these questions of money are terrifying for an artist!

And if it is necessary to give some *discounts* don't worry, as long as I find some funds. I have just spent 15 days in bed with a fever and I am starting to work again. If I can last 5 to 6 months I believe that I will do some good canvases.

An encouraging word in answer if it is possible.

Ever Yours,
Paul Gauguin.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 25 February 1888

Arles, c. 25th February 1888

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your nice letter, also the 50-franc note.

So far I haven't found life here as cheap as I'd hoped, but still I have three studies done, which probably I would not have been able to do in Paris these days.

I am glad the news from Holland was pretty satisfactory. As for Reid, I am not very surprised - though he is wrong - that he has taken it badly that I got to the Midi before him. It would be rather unfair for us to say on our part that we would never have taken advantage of his acquaintance since (1) he made us the present of a very beautiful painting (a painting which, parenthetically, we meant to get hold of); (2) Reid has made the price of the Monticellis go up, and since we own 5 of them, it follows that these have gone up in value; (3) he was good and pleasant company for the first few months.

For our part we wanted to make a far more important business arrangement with him than the Monticellis, and he pretended not to understand much about it.

It seems to me that if we are to maintain the right to be masters on our own territory where the impressionists are concerned, so that there can be no doubt as to our good faith towards Reid - we might let him do as he likes, without interference from us, with the Monticellis of Marseilles. Insisting that our interest in the dead painters is only indirectly financial.

And if you agree in this, you can, if necessary, tell him from me too that if he intends to come to Marseilles to buy Monticellis, he has nothing to fear from us, but that we have the right to ask what he intends to do, seeing that we have got the start on him on this territory.

As for the impressionists, it seems only right to me that they should be introduced into England through your intermediary, rather than directly by you. And if Reid should get in first, we should be justified in maintaining that he had acted in bad faith towards us, more especially since we gave him a free hand with the Marseilles Monticellis.

You are certainly helping our friend Koning by letting him stay with you - his visit to Rivet must have proved to him that we did not give him bad advice. If you want to take him in, I think that it would be a way out of the difficulty for him, only he must explain everything to his father so that you will not have any even indirect responsibilities.

If you see Bernard, tell him that so far I have had to pay more than at Pont-Aven, but that I think if one got private lodgings here, one could economize; that is what I am trying to find, and as soon as I have verified it, I will write to him what I think the average expenses come to.

It seems to me at times that my blood is more or less actually beginning to think of circulating, which was not the case during the last days in Paris. Honestly, I could not have stood it much longer.

I have to get my paints and canvases either at a grocer's or at a booksellers, and they haven't got everything I need. I shall have to go to Marseilles to see what the state of this sort of thing is there. I had hoped to find some good blue, etc., and I still think I may, since one must be able to buy the raw material at first hand in Marseilles.

And I wish I could make blues like Zeim - they don't fade so much as the others - one day we shall see.

Don't worry, and give a handshake to the comrades from me.

Ever yours, Vincent

The studies I've done are - an old Arlésienne woman, a landscape with snow, a view of a bit of a pavement with a charcuterie [pork-butcher's shop]. The women are quite beautiful here, that is no lie - but on the other hand the museum in Arles is atrocious and a joke, and ought to be in Tarascon. There is also a museum of genuine antiques here.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 26-28 February 1888

My dear Theo,
Will you read the letter I have written to Mr. Tersteeg, and will you send it to him with a letter of your own if you think it is a good move? You see, my idea was that we must try something in this direction, because we shall have a hold over Reid through v. Wisselingh, and over v. Wisselingh through Tersteeg. And this you will explain to Tersteeg yourself. Since I am dependent on you, and you yourself get your own income from the Boussod Valadon people, I do not want to do anything against that firm. On the contrary, I ask nothing better than that the business you began in the shop on the boulevard should go on and increase in importance.

But you need the support of other employees of the firm. If Tersteeg refuses to have anything to do with it, we still have Reid and Wisselingh as English agents. You know that v. W. married a daughter of a picture dealer in Glasgow, a business rival of Reid's. *If* Reid takes up the impressionists, if he finds a jumping-off ground there, and if he tries to do this in opposition to *us*, from that moment we have the right to put his rival up to it. But if Wisselingh ever takes it up, and above all if now or later you have a chat with Wisselingh about it, then Tersteeg could at once reproach you - “And why, sir, when you took up the impressionists, did you keep the firm that employs you in the dark?”

So you must speak to Tersteeg about it at once, and to save you the trouble of writing a long letter, this time I have done it myself. You can make it all complete by adding a vague remark about Reid and the impressionists, and the interest that Wisselingh may come to have in the final outcome of this affair.

And I have said in the postscript that in view of the low prices compared with the interest the pictures offer, Tersteeg could easily dispose of fifty or so for us in Holland; besides, he will be obliged to have some of them, because if they are already being talked about in Antwerp and Brussels, they will likewise be talked about in Amsterdam and The Hague before long.

Finally, what I propose in the letter should not be very disagreeable either to Tersteeg or yourself; you will pilot him round the studios, and he will see for himself that next year people will start talking, and will go on talking about the new school long enough. If, however, you think my letter ill timed, you have my full permission to burn it. Only if you send it, suggest the same thing to him yourself.

You know very well, however, that Tersteeg is as much at home in the English business as a fish out of water, so that it is perfectly possible that he might be the person to direct the sale of these new pictures over there. As a matter of fact, in this way Tersteeg and the London agent would have a permanent exhibition of the impressionists in London, you in Paris, and I should begin in Marseilles; but Tersteeg must see plenty of them for himself first, and that is why it is desirable that you should take him on a grand tour of the studios, and explain to him the whole importance of the business as you go.

The association of the artists will come about all the more easily since Tersteeg will have no objection to our having the artist's interests at heart, especially not to our wanting to raise the net price of the picture; after all, there would be no market for it if it cost nothing.

In any case we must speak out boldly now, don't you think? And Mesdag and the rest must give up *ridiculing* the impressionists. In any case it will be a good thing to have Tersteeg interviewed on the subject.

You see, in my opinion the whole crux of the matter in England is this: either the artists give their work away at a wretched price to the dealers there, or else they combine, and choose for themselves intelligent agents who won't fleece them. Now think it over and send the letter or burn it as you think best. I am not absolutely set on its being sent, but should very much like to see Tersteeg in this, because he has the necessary assurance.

With a good handshake, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, c. 28 February 1888

Dear Sister,

I for my part might say just as well that I shall stop writing at the very moment you reply. The simplest thing is not to write if it causes too much trouble and the inclination is not always there.

But, however this may be, it is an excellent thing that you are beginning to acquaint yourself with all the mischief brewed by that villain Voltaire, and you will surely find that in Candide Voltaire already had the impertinence to laugh at the “highly serious life, which we ought only to use for, and devote to, the best ends.” And I need not tell you that this crime is something horrible in itself.

I cannot write very well about Mauve; I think of him every day, but that's all. It was a great shock to me; but personally, as a human being, he may have been quite different from what people said of him once in a while - that is, more deeply engrossed in life itself than in art perhaps; and I loved him as a human being. Now it is so hard for me to imagine that those who penetrate to the core of life, who for the rest judge themselves as if they were dealing with somebody else, and who treat others as unceremoniously as though they were taking themselves to task - I find it so hard to imagine that such can cease to exist.

Now I know that it is hardly to be supposed that the white potato and salad grubs which later change into cockchafers should be able to form tenable ideas about their supernatural existence in the hereafter. And that it would be premature of them to enter upon supernatural researches for enlightenment about this problem, seeing that the gardener or other persons interested in salad and vegetables would crush them underfoot, considering them harmful insects.

But for parallel reasons I have little confidence in the correctness of our human concepts of a future life. We are as little able to judge of our own metamorphoses without bias and prematureness as the white salad grubs can of theirs, for the very cogent reason that the salad worms ought to eat salad roots in the very interest of their higher development.

In the same way I think that a painter ought to paint pictures; possibly something else may come after that.

You see that I have penetrated some greater distance into the South - I have observed too often that neither my work nor my health is in very good condition during the winter. Besides, what they want in pictures nowadays is a contrast of colours, and these colours highly intensified and variegated, rather than subdued gray tones. So for one reason or another I thought I should do nobody harm if I went to the spot that attracted me.

Give my love to Mother, and for the time being there will not be much chance of my going back to Holland. Goodbye,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 3 March 1888

My dear Theo,

With great pleasure I received your letter and the rough draft of the letter to Tersteeg and the 50-fr. note.

Your letter to Tersteeg was just right in the draft; I hope you won't have to chop it about too much when you make the fair copy.

It seems to me that your letter to Tersteeg complements mine, I regretted the state in which I posted it. For you will have seen that the idea of making Tersteeg take the initiative in introducing the impressionists into England only came to me while I was actually writing the letter, and it was only inadequately expressed in a P. S. in hindsight. Whereas you explain to him this idea in detail in your letter. Will he understand? Hang it, that's his own lookout.

I have had a letter from Gauguin which says that he has been sick in bed for a fortnight [GAC 28]. That he is on the rocks since he has had to pay some noisy creditors. That he wants to know if you have sold anything for him, but he can't write to you for fear of bothering you. He is so pressed for a little money that he would be ready to reduce the price of his paintings even more.

The only thing I can do in this business is to write to Russell, and I am going to do this today.

And after all we have already tried to make Tersteeg buy one. But what is to be done? He must be hard pressed. I send you a line for him in case you have anything to write him about, only you must open any letters that come from him for me, because in that way you will know the contents sooner, and save me the trouble of repeating them to you. I'm telling you this once and for all.

Would you risk taking his marine for the firm? If that were possible, he would be safe for the moment.

It is a very good thing that you have taken in young Koning, I am so glad that you are not going to be alone in your apartment. In Paris one is always as down in the mouth as a cab horse, and if on top of that one has to stay all alone in the stable, it's too much.

For the exhibition of the Independents, do as you think best. What do you say to showing the two big landscapes of the butte Montmartre? It is all more or less the same to me. I am counting rather more on the work from this year.

Down here it is freezing hard and there is still snow in the countryside. I have a study of a white landscape with the town in the background. Then 2 small studies of an almond-tree branch already in flower in spite of it.

So much for today. I am also going to write a note to Koning.

Indeed I am very glad that you wrote to Tersteeg, and I hope that this will mean a revival of your business relations with Holland.

With a handshake to you and to the comrades you happen to meet.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 9 March 1888

My dear Theo,

This morning, at long last, the weather changed and turned milder - and likewise I have already had an opportunity to learn what a mistral is: I have been for several walks in the country hereabouts but it is quite impossible to do anything in this wind. The sky is a hard blue with a great bright sun which has melted almost all the snow, but the wind is cold and so dry that it gives you gooseflesh.

But all the same I have seen lots of beautiful things - a ruined abbey on a hill covered with holly, pines, and grey olives.

We'll have a try at that soon, I hope.

I have just finished a study like the one Lucien Pissarro has of mine, but this time it is oranges. That makes eight studies so far. But this doesn't really count, because I haven't yet been able to work in any comfort or warmth.

The letter from Gauguin which I meant to send you, and which I thought for the moment had got burned with other papers, I have since found, and am enclosing it. But I have already written direct to him, and sent him Russell's address, also Gauguin's to Russell, so that if they like, they can deal with each other direct.

But how difficult for many of us - and assuredly we ourselves are among the number - the future is! I firmly believe in the ultimate victory, but will the artists themselves gain any advantage from it, and will they see less troubled days?

I have bought some coarse canvas here, and had it prepared for mat effects. I can get everything now almost at the same prices as in Paris. Saturday evening I had a visit from two amateur artists, a grocer who sells painting materials as well, and a magistrate who seems a nice fellow, and intelligent.

Worse luck, I can hardly manage to live any cheaper than in Paris, I must figure it at 5 Fr. a day.

I have not yet found any sort of small place where I could have private board and lodging, but all the same something of the kind must exist.

If the weather is milder in Paris too, it will do you good. What a winter! I dare not roll up my studies yet because they are hardly dry and there are some bits of impasto which will take some time to dry.

I have just finished reading Tartarin on the Alps, which amused me hugely.

Has that confounded Tersteeg written you yet? All to the good if he has. If he doesn't answer, he will hear of us all the same, and we shall see to it that he can find no fault with our actions. For instance, we will send a picture to Mrs. Mauve in memory of Mauve, with a letter from both of us, in which, supposing Tersteeg does not reply, we shall not say a word against him, but we will manage to convey that we do not deserve to be treated as if we were dead. But indeed, it is not likely that Tersteeg will have any prejudice against us on the whole.

Poor Gauguin has no luck. I am very much afraid that in his case convalescence will last even longer than the fortnight which he has had to spend in bed.

My God! Shall we ever see a generation of artists with healthy bodies! Sometimes I am perfectly furious with myself, for it isn't good enough to be either more or less ill than the rest; the ideal would be a constitution tough enough to live till eighty, and besides that, blood in one's veins that would be right good blood.

It would be some comfort, however, if one could think that a generation of more fortunate artists was to come.

I wanted to write you at once that I am in hopes winter is really over, and I hope that it is the same in Paris.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 10 March 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the 100-Fr. note enclosed. I very much hope that you are right in thinking Tersteeg will come to Paris shortly. It's very much to be desired with things in the state you say they are in - everyone on the rocks and hard up. I was very much interested in what you write on the Lançon sale, and about the painter's mistress. He did some work of very great character; his drawing often reminded me very much of Mauve. I am sorry I did not see the exhibition of his studies and very sorry not to have seen the Willette exhibition as well.

What do you think of the news that Kaiser Wilhelm is dead? Will this precipitate events in France, and is Paris going to remain quiet? It's doubtful; and what will the effect of all this be on the trade in paintings? I read that there seems to be some question of abolishing the import duties on paintings into America; is this true?

Perhaps it would be easier to get a few dealers and collectors to agree to buy the impressionist paintings than to get the artists to agree to share the price of their paintings.

Nevertheless, the artists couldn't do better than to get together, and give over to the association, and share the proceeds of the sales, so that the society could at least guarantee its members a chance to live and to work.

If de Gas [Degas], Claude Monet, Renoir, Sisley and C. Pissarro took the initiative, saying, “Look here, we 5 give 10 paintings each (or rather we each give to the value of 10,000 Frs. to be estimated by expert members such as Tersteeg and yourself, co-opted by the Society, said experts likewise to put in capital in the form of paintings) and we further undertake to hand over every year pictures to the value of…

“And we invite you others, Guillaumin, Seurat, Gauguin, etc., etc., to join with us (your paintings to undergo the same expert evaluation).”

Thus the great impressionists of the Grand Boulevard, while giving pictures which would become general property, would keep their prestige, and the others could no longer reproach them with keeping to themselves the advantages of a reputation no doubt acquired primarily through their personal efforts and individual genius, but all the same a reputation that is growing, buttressed and actually maintained by the paintings of a whole battalion of artists who have been working in perpetual poverty.

Anyway, it is to be hoped that it will come off, and that Tersteeg and you will become expert members (with Portier, perhaps?).

I have two more studies of landscapes. I hope that the work will go on steadily now, and that in a month I shall be able to send you a first consignment. I say in a month, because I want to send you only the best, and because I want them to be dry, and because I want to send at least a dozen at a time, owing to the expense of carriage.

I congratulate you on purchasing the Seurat; with what I will be sending you, you must try to arrange another exchange with Seurat as well.

You realize that if Tersteeg joins you in this business, between you two you could easily persuade Boussod Valadon to grant a regular credit for the necessary purchases. But it is urgent, since failing that, the dealers will cut the ground from under your feet.

I have made the acquaintance of a Danish artist [Mourier Peterson] who talks about Heyerdahl and other Northerners, Kroyer, *etc*. His work is dry, but very conscientious, and he is still young. Some time ago he saw the exhibition of the impressionists in the Rue Lafitte. He is probably going to Paris for the Salon, and wants to make a tour in Holland to see the museums.

I quite approve of your exhibiting the “Livres” with the Independents; its title ought to be “Romans Parisiens.”

I should be so glad to hear that you had managed to persuade Tersteeg - but we must be patient.

I had to get 50 francs worth of stuff when your letter arrived.This week I shall set four or five things going.

I am daily thinking about this association of artists, and the plan has developed further in my mind; but Tersteeg must be in it, a lot depends on that. As a matter of fact, the artists would have Tersteeg's help. Without that we should be left listening from morning till night to the lamentations of them all as a whole, and each man in particular would be everlastingly coming to ask for explanations, axioms and so forth. I should not be surprised if Tersteeg's view will be that we cannot do without the artists of the Grand Boulevard, and that he will try to persuade them to take the initiative towards our association by giving paintings which would become common property, no longer individual. If they were to make the proposal, the Petit Boulevard, in my opinion, would be morally obliged to join.

And these gentlemen of the Grand Boulevard will keep their present reputation only if they can forestall the not unfounded criticisms of the lesser impressionists, who will say, “Everything goes into *your* pockets.”

To which they might well make reply, “Not at all, on the contrary, we are the first to say that *our* pictures belong *to the artists*!” If de Gas, Monet, Renoir and Pissarro were to say that, even allowing plenty of margin for their individual ideas when it comes to putting it into practice, they could do worse, if only by saying nothing at all and letting things slide.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 14 March 1888

My dear Theo,

I thank you very much for your letter, which I had not dared to expect so soon, as far as the 50-fr. note which you added was concerned.

I see that you have not yet had an answer from Tersteeg. I don't think that we need press him with a new letter. However, if you have any official business to transact with B. V. & Co. in The Hague, you might mention in a P. S. that you are rather surprised that he has in no way acknowledged the receipt of the letter in question.

As for my work, I brought back a size 15 canvas today. It is a drawbridge over which passes a little cart, standing out against a blue sky - the river blue as well, the banks orange coloured with grass and a group of women washing linen in smocks and multicoloured caps. And another landscape with a little rustic bridge and washerwomen also.

Finally an avenue of plane trees close to the station. Altogether 12 studies since I've been here.

The weather here is changeable, often windy with turbulent skies, but the almond trees are beginning to flower everywhere. I am very happy that the paintings are going to the Independents. You are right to go to see Signac at his house. I was very glad to read in today's letter that he made a more favourable impression on you than the first time. In any case I am glad to know that after today you will not be alone in the apartment.

Remember me kindly to Koning. Are you well? I am better myself, except that eating is a real ordeal, since I have a touch of fever and no appetite, but it's only a question of time and patience.

I have company in the evening, for the young Danish painter who is here is a decent soul: his work is dry, correct and timid, but I do not object to that when the painter is young and intelligent. He originally began studying medicine: he knows Zola, de Goncourt, Guy de Maupassant, and he has enough money to do himself well. And with all this, a very genuine desire to do very different work than what he is producing now.

I think he would be wise to delay his return home for a year, or to come back here after a short visit to his friends.

But, my dear brother, you know that I feel as though I am in Japan - I say no more than that, and I still haven't seen anything in its usual splendour yet.

That's why (even though I'm vexed that just now expenses are heavy and the paintings worthless), that's why I don't despair of the future success of this idea of a long sojourn in the Midi.

Here I am seeing new things, I am learning, and if I take it easy, my body doesn't refuse to function.

For many reasons I should like to establish some sort of little retreat, where the poor cab horses of Paris - that is yourself and several of our friends, the poor impressionists - could go out to pasture when they get too exhausted.

I was present at the Inquiry into a crime committed at the door of a brothel here; two Italians killed two Zouaves. I took advantage of the opportunity to go into one of the brothels in a little street called “des ricolettes.”

That is the extent of my amorous adventures among the Arlésiennes. The mob all but (the Southerner, like Tartarin, being more energetic in good intentions than in action) - the mob, I repeat, all but lynched the murderers locked up in the town hall, but in retaliation all the Italians - men and women, the Savoyard monkeys included - have been forced to leave town.

I should not have told you about this, except that it means I've seen the streets of this town full of excited crowds. And it was indeed a fine sight.

I made my last three studies with the perspective frame which you know I use. I attach some importance to the use of the frame because it seems not unlikely to me that in the near future many artists will make use of it, just as the old German and Italian painters certainly did, and, as I am inclined to think, the Flemish too. The modern use of it may differ from the ancient practice, but in the same way isn't it true that in the process of painting in oils one gets very different effects today from those of the men who invented the process, Jan and Hubert van Eyck? And the moral of this is that it's my constant hope that I am not working for myself alone. I believe in the absolute necessity of a new art of colour, of design, and - of the artistic life. And if we work in that faith, it seems to me that there is a chance that we do not hope in vain.

You must know that I am actually ready to send some studies off to you, only it is impossible to roll them up yet. A hearty handshake. On Sunday I shall write to Bernard and de Lautrec, because I solemnly promised to, and shall send you those letters as well. I am deeply sorry for Gauguin's plight, especially because his health is shaken: he no longer has the kind of temperament that profits from hardships - on the contrary, this will only exhaust him from here on, and that will spoil him for his work. Goodbye for the present.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 18 March 1888

Arles, 18th March 1888
My dear Bernard,

Having promised to write, I want to begin by telling you that the country struck me as being as beautiful as Japan for the limpidity of the atmosphere and gay colour effects. The water makes patches of a beautiful emerald and a rich blue in the landscapes, such as we see in crepons [Japanese prints]. The pale orange setting sun making the land appear blue. Splendid yellow suns.

Meanwhile I haven't really seen the country in its normal summer splendor.

The costumes of the women are pretty and especially on Sunday one sees on the boulevard very naive and well-found colour arrangements. And that without doubt will become even brighter in summer.

I regret that life here is not as cheap as I had hoped it would be, and up to now I have not found better bargains than you would find in Pont Aven.

I started out by paying 5 Fr. and now I am down to 4 Francs a day. It would be necessary to know the locals here and to know how to eat bouillabaisse and aïoli [garlic paté] and also one needs to find an inexpensive little bourgeois pension. If there were several of us, I am given to believe, conditions would be more advantageous. There would be perhaps a real advantage as well for artists who love the sun and colour that exist in the Midi. If the Japanese are not working in their country it is certain that their art continues in France. At the top of this letter I am sending you a small sketch of a study that I am trying to make something of - sailors with their sweethearts going up to the town, which is profiled by the strange silhouette of its drawbridge on a huge yellow sun. I have another study of the same drawbridge with a group of washerwomen. I will be happy with a word from you to know what you are doing and where you are going. A good cordial handshake to you and to our friends,

The best to you,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 18 March 1888

My dear Theo,
Here is a short note for Bernard and for Lautrec, to whom I expressly promised to write. I send them to you so you can hand them over when you have a chance, but there is absolutely no hurry whatever, and it will be an excuse for you to see what they are doing and hear what they have to say, if you want to.

But what is Tersteeg doing? Nothing? If you have had no reply, if I were you I should write him a very short and very cool note, but conveying that you are amazed at not getting a reply from him. (+)

I do not think that we should press him in a fresh letter, explaining the business all over again. One must be careful when dealing with him, but what must be avoided is letting oneself be treated as if one were dead or outlawed. That's all.

Let's hope that meanwhile you have had an answer from him.

I had a note from Gauguin, who complains about the bad weather, is still ailing, and says that of all the various miseries that afflict humanity, nothing maddens him more than the lack of money, and yet he feels doomed to perpetual poverty.

Wind and rain these last few days. I've worked at home on the study which I made a sketch of in Bernard's letter [B2]. I wanted to manage to get colours into it like stained glass windows, and a good, firm drawing.

I am in the middle of Pierre et Jean by Guy de Maupassant. It's good. Have you read the preface, where he explains the artist's liberty to exaggerate, to create in his novel a world more beautiful, more simple, more consoling than ours, and goes on to explain what Flaubert may have meant when he said that “Talent is long patience, and originality an effort of will and of intense observation”?

There is a Gothic portico here, which I am beginning to think admirable, the porch of St. Trophime.

But it is so cruel, so monstrous, like a Chinese nightmare, that even this beautiful monument of so grand a style seems to me of another world, and I am as glad not to belong to it as to that glorious world of the Roman Nero.

Must I tell the truth and add that the Zouaves, the brothels, the adorable little Arlésiennes going to their first Communion, the priest in his surplice, who looks like a dangerous rhinoceros, the absinthe drinkers, all seem to me to be beings of another world? That doesn't mean that I'd feel at home in an artistic world, but that I would rather fool myself than feel alone. And I think I should feel depressed if I did not fool myself about everything.

You have already had heavy snow in Paris according to our friend L'Intransigeant. It wasn't a bad idea, that journalist advising General Boulanger to wear rose-coloured spectacles, so as to put the secret police on the wrong scent: according to him they'd match his beard better. It might have a favourable influence on the picture trade - it's been wanted for long enough.

But we really must get some idea of what our excellent Mr. Tersteeg is up to. He must declare himself! In the interest of our comrades it seems to me it's almost our business not to allow them to think of us as dead. It is not about us, but the whole question of the impressionists is at stake, and having been challenged by us, he must give us an answer.

Like myself you will feel that we cannot proceed without being categorically informed of his intentions.

If we consider it desirable to hold a permanent exhibition of the impressionists in London and Marseilles, it goes without saying that we'll try to set them up.

And if not, what are his intentions with regard to the offensive, do they exist or not?

The question remains, will Tersteeg be in it? Yes or no?

And has he taken into account, as we have, the resulting depreciation of the value of pictures now highly priced, a depreciation that will, I think, probably set in as soon as the impressionist's stock rises. You observe that the dealers in expensive pictures ruin themselves by opposing for policy reasons the advent of a school which for years has shown an energy and perseverance worthy of Millet, Daubigny and others.

But let me know if Tersteeg has written you, and what he may have said. *I will do nothing in this without you.* Good luck and a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Paul Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh

Pont-Aven, c.19 March 1888

My dear Vincent,

Thank you for having replied; I see that you are in good place to study the sun that charms you, and you work so much better when you grasp the subject. Thank you again for your good intentions in my regard; the painting trade is so hard these days.

Because of it I am in a perpetual trance here; money problems are the only ones that have any effect on me and unfortunately I believe I am always destined to suffer them.

At the moment Pont-Aven is very miserable due to bad weather, winds and continual rains, and I wait for the good weather to put me back to work, which I have abandoned a little due to illness.

A cordial handshake,

Paul Gauguin.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 24 March 1888

My dear Theo,
I was tremendously glad to get your letter, thank you for it, and for the 50-Fr. note.

Congratulations on Tersteeg's letter, I think it is absolutely satisfactory.

I am certain there is nothing to be hurt about in his silence with regard to me; besides, he could count on your giving me his letter to read. Then too, it is much simpler for him to have only you to write to, and as far as I am concerned, unless he thinks my stuff hopelessly bad, you'll see that he'll write me a line as soon as he has seen what I've done, I tell you again, I am more pleased with this simple and well meaning answer of his than I can say. You will have noticed that he says he is prepared to buy a good Monticelli for his own collection.

What if you were to say to him that in our collection we have a bunch of flowers which is a better piece of painting and more beautiful than one by Diaz? That Monticelli sometimes made a bunch of flowers an excuse for gathering together in a single panel the whole range of his richest and most perfectly balanced tones. And that you must go straight to Delacroix to find anything equal to his orchestration of colours.

Also that - I am speaking of picture in the Delarebeyrettes - we actually know of another flower-piece, very good in quality and reasonable in price, and that we think it altogether superior to the Monticelli figure paintings which are to be seen everywhere now, and which belong to his period of decadence.

I hope that you will send him Gauguin's fine marine. But how glad I am that Tersteeg should have written like this!

When you are writing him, you might mention Russell. When I write Russell myself, I shall talk to him about his pictures and ask him to exchange one with me, because we shall want to mention his name and show his pictures as soon as the question of the modern renaissance school comes up.

I have just finished a group of apricot trees in bloom in a little orchard of fresh green. I've had a setback with the sunset with figures and a bridge that I spoke of to Bernard. The bad weather prevented my working on the spot, and I've completely ruined it by trying to finish it at home. However, I at once began the same subject again on another canvas, but, as the weather was quite different, in gray tones and without figures.

It would not be a bad idea for you to send Tersteeg one of my studies: would you say the bridge at Clichy with the yellow sky and two houses reflected in the water? - or the butterflies or the field of poppies, for that matter, though I hope to do better here.

.

If you think so too, you might tell Tersteeg that I myself thought I should have a greater chance of selling in Holland with nature studies of the Midi, and that when Tersteeg comes to Paris in May, he will find a consignment of several subjects from here.

Thank you very much too for all the steps you have taken toward the exhibition of the Independents. On the whole I'm very glad that they've been put with the other impressionists.

But though it doesn't matter in the least this time, in the future my name ought to be put in the catalogue as I sign it on the canvas, namely Vincent and not Van Gogh, for the simple reason that they do not know how to pronounce the latter name here.

I return to you enclosed Tersteeg's and Russell's letters. It might perhaps be interesting to keep the artists' correspondence. It would not be a bad idea to add the little head of the Breton woman by friend Bernard to your consignment. He must be shown that all the impressionists are good, and their work very varied.

I think our friend Reid regrets having fallen out with us, but unfortunately it's quite impossible to offer him the same advantages again, or to try to let him have the pictures on commission. It is not enough to be fond of pictures, and he seems to me to have no feeling for artists. If he changes as much as all that, it will not be overnight.

Tersteeg was a personal friend of Mauve's and of many others, and there is something about him which convinces collectors. You will find that knowing people is what gives conviction.

I'll write again in a few days, but I wanted to congratulate you at once on the rebirth of your business relations in Holland.

With a handshake,

Ever yours,

Vincent

Paris doesn't pay: I'd be sorry to see the Seurats in a provincial museum or in a cellar, those pictures ought to stay in living hands - if only Tersteeg would…If three permanent exhibitions are started, there must be one great Seurat in Paris, one in London, and one in Marseilles.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 30 March 1888

My dear Theo,
Thank you for your letter and for the 50-Fr. note enclosed. I should have liked to write you at leisure, but must do it in great haste. First, Tersteeg as usual. I'm very glad that your consignments will go off on Monday, and perhaps after all that a canvas of mine will go along with it. All the same that one isn't very important, for I hope that you will like the one I have just done, and the result of this will be that another canvas of mine will be going off to Holland.

I have been working on a size 20 canvas in the open air in an orchard, lilac ploughland, a reed fence, two pink peach trees against a sky of glorious blue and white. Probably the best landscape I have done. I had just brought it home when I received from our sister a Dutch notice in memory of Mauve, with his portrait (the portrait, very good), the text, poor and nothing in it a pretty water colour. Something - I don't know what - took hold of me and brought a lump to my throat, and I wrote on my picture

Souvenir de Mauve
Vincent Theo

and if you agree we two will send it, such as it is, to Mrs. Mauve. I chose the best study I've painted here purposely; I don't know what they'll say about it at home, but that does not matter to us; it seemed to me that everything in memory of Mauve must be at once tender and very gay, and not a study in any graver key.

"O never think the dead are dead,
So long as there are men alive,
The dead will live, the dead will live."

That's how I feel it. Nothing sadder than that.

I now have four or five studies of orchards besides this one, and I am going to begin a size 30 canvas on the same subject.

This zinc white that I am using now does not dry at all. If everything were dry, I could send off a batch at once. But every day is a good day now - not meaning the weather, on the contrary there are three windy days to one that's quiet - but those orchards in bloom that there are to paint!

I find painting hard work because of the wind, but I fasten my easel to pegs driven into the ground and work in spite of it, it is too lovely.

Now keep in close touch with Tersteeg, success or no; I'm inclined to think that it will come within a year.

I think that Tersteeg and not Reid ought to start the Impressionist Exhibition in England now. I do not like Reid's behaviour toward us at all. It seems strange to me that you and Guillaumin have not already arranged between yourselves to cancel the sale of the picture in question.

You can certainly tell Guillaumin from me that this is my opinion, and both in Guillaumin's interest and in that of the whole trade, *the price was ridiculous anyway*.

Either Reid, after what has happened, must buy at decent prices, or else the artists should shut the door in his face. I used to think so in the past, and on consideration I think so still. One jeopardizes future sales for the sake of 500 francs in cash, and that's a great pity.

Is there any chance of your buying the picture in question for us? Tersteeg should be told the whole story of Reid, and should know that he has a rival for the English business and that we would rather he did it. For that matter, it isn't my business, but that of the firm of Boussod Valadon, to which you and Tersteeg belong. In great haste,

Ever yours,

Vincent

Kind regards to Koning, till tomorrow, I hope, if I have time to write.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, 30 March 1888

W3

Arles, 30 March 1888
Dear Sister,
In order not to leave your letter unanswered, I will write at once after receiving your letter and Mother's, and the good wishes of you both.
I want to tell you that I should be happy to write to you more often if it were not that a pretty considerable number of things contribute to my not being master of my own time, and you should not imagine that I am doing exactly what I like, and not doing what I should prefer to leave undone. Work has got me in its grip now, and I think forever, and though this is not something to be unhappy about, yet the mental picture I have of happiness is different.

In the first place, it pleased me enormously that Theo and Mr. Tersteeg have entered into business relations in order to make the work of the painters here who are called impressionists known in Holland too.

Further, I don't regret coming here, for I think the scenery here extremely beautiful.

I shall have to produce an enormous number of things against next year - when the World's Fair will be held - seeing that my friends will not fail to have many interesting things on hand by then. Not that I myself or any of the painters I hold regular or special intercourse with are going to exhibit along with the others, but it is to be expected that there will be a free exhibition besides the official one. Now, for instance, I am working on six pictures of fruit trees in bloom. And what I brought home today would probably please you - it is a dug-up square of earth in an orchard with a fence of rushes and two peach trees in full bloom. Pink against a scintillating blue sky with white clouds, and in the sunshine.(+)

[Added as a footnote](+)It is possible you will see it, for I have finally decided to set it aside for Jet Mauve. I have written on it “Souvenir de Mauve, Vincent and Theo.”

Of course I know very well that I could have found a similar subject elsewhere, but if I take into consideration that many painters will paint the same thing, I do not think it a matter of indifference to work in the midst of a scenery which, although in general similar to ours, is undoubtedly richer and more colourful as subject matter and motif.

And then people here are picturesque too, and whereas in our country a beggar looks more like a spectre, he becomes a caricature here. Because - as you will observe when you read Zola and Guy de Maupassant - what they absolutely insist on is a great richness and a great gaiety in art - even though this same Zola and Guy de Maupassant have said perhaps the most poignantly tragic things that have ever been said - this same tendency is beginning to be the rule in the art of painting too.

So I can imagine, for instance, that a present-day painter should do something like what one finds described in Pierre Loti's book Le mariage de Loti, in which a picture of nature in Otaheite is drawn. A book which I warmly recommend to you to read.

You will understand that nature in the South cannot be painted with the palette of Mauve, for instance, who belongs to the North, and who is, and will remain, a master of the grey. But at present the palette is distinctly colourful, sky blue, orange, pink, vermilion, bright yellow, bright green, bright wine-red, violet.

But by intensifying *all* the colours one arrives once again at quietude and harmony. There occurs in nature something similar in what happens in Wagner's music, which, though played by a big orchestra, is nonetheless intimate. Only when making a choice one prefers sunny and colourful effects, and there is nothing that prevents me from thinking that in the future many painters will go and work in tropical countries. You will be able to get an idea of the revolution of painting when you think, for instance, of the brightly coloured Japanese pictures that one sees everywhere, landscapes and figures. Theo and I have hundreds of Japanese pictures in our own possession. You see I wrote only about my work, and I have to stop now, and I don't know if I shall be able to write anything more.

Best wishes to you and Mother, and thanks for your letters.

Vincent

It is my own duty to congratulate you on your birthday; as I should very much like to give you something of my work that will please you, I have set aside a little study of a book for you, and also, on a somewhat larger scale, a flower, with a lot of books with pink, green and bright red bindings - they were my set of seven Parisian novels, the same subject - Theo will take them along for you - I have a study for Jet Mauve too.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 2 April 1888

My dear Theo,

I'm in a fever of work since the trees are in blossom and I want to do a Provençal orchard full of enormous brightness. To write with a clear head presents serious difficulties. Yesterday I wrote some letters which I destroyed later. I keep on thinking that we must do something in Holland, and that we must set about it with the vigour of sans-culottes, with a French gaiety and worthy of the cause we are pleading.

Here is a plan of attack which will cost us several of the best pictures you and I have made between us, and certainly worth at least several 1000 franc notes. In any case they cost us money and a good piece of our lives.

But it would be an answer in a clear voice to certain heavy insinuations, treating us as though we had already died, and a revenge for your trip last year, when the welcome that they made you lacked any warmth. Enough.

Suppose therefore that first of all we gave to Jet Mauve the Souvenir de Mauve. Suppose I dedicate a study to Breitner (I have one exactly like the study which I exchanged with L. Pissarro and the one Reid has, of oranges, foreground white, background blue.)

Suppose we gave another study to our sister.

Suppose that we gave the Modern Museum in The Hague, since we have many memories of The Hague, the two views of Montmartre exhibited at the Independents.

One thing remains not so easily settled. Since Tersteeg has written you, “Send me some impressionists, but only those pictures that you yourself judge to be the best,” and on your part you sent a picture of mine in that consignment, I find myself in the not very easy position of having to *convince* Tersteeg that really I am a true impressionist of the Petit Boulevard, and that I intend to keep this position. Oh well, he will have a picture of mine in his own collection - I have been turning it over in my mind these days and I have found an odd thing, not like what I do every day.

It is the drawbridge with the little yellow cart and the group of washerwomen, a study in which the ground is bright orange, the grass very green and the sky and water blue.

It only needs a frame specially designed for it in royal blue and gold, in this fashion

the mount blue, the outside moulding gold; if necessary the frame could be in blue plush, but it would be better painted.

[Written in the margin] Believe me, Tersteeg will not refuse the picture; I have made up my mind that this one, and the one for Jet Mauve, must go to Holland

I think I can assure you that the work I do here is superior to than in the Asnières country last spring.

In the whole plan there is nothing absolutely fixed except the dedication *Souvenir de Mauve,* and the dedication to Tersteeg. I have not yet succeeded in writing a few words to explain it to him, but I will find them when the painting is done, they will come to me of themselves; but you well understand that we have the strength in us to make them talk about us if we choose, and we can go on with the work of launching the impressionists with the utmost calm and assurance.

If you see Reid again, it would be good to tell him that we don't have a great deal of confidence in the success of ambitious people, and that we would like them better if they did good work, that we were surprised at his way of doing things which ended up being inexplicable and that since then we don't know what to think of him.

[Written in the margin] For my part, I won't write to Tersteeg directly. If there is anything I will send the letter to you with the paintings.

I believe that Russell is trying to reconcile me with Reid, and that he wrote the letter expressly for that purpose. I shall certainly write to Russell and tell him that I told Reid frankly that he made a foolish mistake in loving dead pictures and to count for nothing living artists. That moreover I hoped to see him change, at least in that respect.

I had to spend almost the whole amount on colours and canvas as soon as your letter came, and I wish you could manage as soon as possible to send me something soon. The painting of the garden with the lovers is at the Théatre Libre. Boyer, the framer, still has a lithograph of mine: the old man with the bald head.

I should like it if what I am going to send you reached you before Tersteeg goes to Paris, and if you could put the blooming apple trees in your room. I'm very glad that it is working out all right with Koning and that you are not alone. What a pity about Vignon. I am sure M. Gendre was behind it, and I wish him, M. Gendre, the bad luck that he has brought on other people. It is a sad end for father Martin.

I can't yet manage to write you the kind of letter I want to, the work absorbs me completely.

But this is especially to tell you that I want to do some studies particularly for Holland, and after that we'll leave Holland alone for ever.

The last few days I have been more moved than was reasonable perhaps, thinking about Mauve, and J. H. Weissenbruch, Tersteeg and Mother, and Wil; and it steadies me to tell myself that there'll be some pictures going down there. Then afterwards I shall forget them, and probably think only of the Petit Boulevard.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 4 April 1888

My dear Theo,

I must write you, as I am sending you an order for paints; if you order them at Tasset's and L'Hôte, Rue Fontaine, it would be a good thing - since they know me - to tell them that I expect a discount equal to at least the cost of carriage, which I will willingly pay; they need not pay the carriage, we pay for it here, *but the discount in that case should be 20%*. If they agree to that - and I'm inclined to think they will - they can supply me with paints until further notice, and that you mean a big order for them.

You will please ask old Tasset or old L'Hôte his absolutely lowest price for 10 yards of his canvas prepared with plaster or absorbent, and let me know the result of the discussion, which you will probably have with the good man, about the delivery of the above-mentioned goods. Here is the list:

20	Flake white,	big tubes		
10	zinc white	ditto		
15	Malachite green	double tubes		
10	Chrome yellow	citron ditto		
10	Chrome yellow (No. two)	double tubes		
3	Vermilion	ditto		
3	Chrome yellow `No. three'	ditto	)	Newly pounded
6	Germanium lake	small tubes	)	if they are greasy
12	Crimson lake	“ “	)	I'll send them back
2	Carmine	“ “		
4	Prussian blue	small tubes		
4	Cinnabar green, very light	small tubes		
2	Orange lead	“ “		
6	Emerald green	“ “		

This is a pretty heavy order (but without counting the difference between the discount which I can hope for, and the cost of carriage); *we shall make on it as much as the carriage will cost me, even without taking into account that I get no discount here*.

Urgent

10	Flake white	Large tubes
6	Malachite green	Double tubes

3	Chrome yellow, citron	)
3	“ “ No. 2	) Double tubes
1	“ “ No.3	)
1	Vermilion	Double tube
3	Geranium lake,	Small tubes
6	Crimson lake	“ “
2	Prussian blue	“ “
4	Emerald green	“ “

Then - at once if possible - the actual price, to me, of 10 yards of the absorbent canvas, please.

The colour merchant here made me absorbent canvas, but he is so slow about it that I decided to have it sent from Paris or Marseilles, and I have given up all hope of getting him to do it, having lost all patience with him. *While I was waiting for one size 30 absorbent canvas I painted two on canvas that was nonabsorbent.*

You see of course that if you buy the paints for me, my expenses here will be at 50%. So far I have spent more on my paints, canvas, etc., than on myself.

I have still another orchard for you, but for heaven's sake send me the paints without delay. The flowering time is over so soon, and you know this kind of subject delights everybody. As soon as I can pay for the packing case and carriage (the latter will certainly be cheaper at the small station here than carriage-forward at the Gare de Lyon), I'll send you the studies.

Haven't a cent at the moment, as I told you before. Do what you can, but anyhow let's get the discount on the paints, provided you think it will pay us to work like this. Enclosed an order direct to Tasset and L'Hôte.

Ever yours, Vincent

I am rather curious to know what you will think of my first batch, which will certainly contain at least ten canvases.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 9 April 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the 100-franc note it contained. I have sent you sketches of the paintings destined for Holland. Of course the painted studies are more brilliant in colour. I'm once again hard at it, still orchards in blossom.

The air here certainly does me good. I wish you could fill your lungs with it; one effect it has on me is comical enough - one small glass of cognac makes me tipsy here, so that as I don't have to fall back on stimulants to make my blood circulate, there will be less strain on my constitution. The only thing is that my stomach has been terribly weak since I came here, but after all that's probably only a matter of time. I hope to make great progress this year, and indeed I need to.

I have another orchard, as good as the pink peach trees, apricot trees of a very pale pink. At the moment I am working on some plum trees, yellowish-white, with thousands of black branches. I am using a tremendous lot of colours and canvases, but all the same I hope it isn't a waste of money.

Out of 4 canvases, perhaps one at the most will make a *painting*, like the one for Tersteeg or Mauve; but the studies, I hope, will come in useful for exchanges.

When can I send you anything? I have a great mind to do a second version like Tersteeg's, because it is better than the Asnières studies.

Yesterday I saw another bull fight, where 5 men worked the bull with darts and cockades. One toreador crushed a ball in jumping the barricade. He was a blonde man with grey eyes and lots of sang-froid; people said he'll be ill long enough. He was dressed in sky blue and gold, just like the little horseman in our Monticelli, the 3 figures in a wood. The arenas are a fine sight when there's sunshine and a crowd.

Bravo for Pissarro, I think he is right. I hope he will make an exchange with us one day.

And the same for Seurat. It would be a good thing to have a painted study of his.

Well, I'm working hard, hoping that we can do something with things of this kind.

This month will be a hard time for both you and me, but if you can manage it, it will be to our advantage to make the most we can of the orchards in bloom. I am well started now, and I think I must have ten more, the same subject. You know I am changeable in my work, and this craze for painting orchards will not last for ever. After this it may be the arenas. Then I must do a *tremendous* lot of drawing, because I want to make some drawings in the manner of Japanese prints. There is nothing like striking while the iron is hot.

I shall be all in when the orchards are over, for they are size 25 and 30 and 20 canvases. We should not have too many of them, even if I could knock off twice as many. It seems to me that this may really break the ice in Holland. Mauve's death was a terrible blow to me. You will see that the pink peach trees were painted with a certain passion.

I must also have a starry night with cypresses, or perhaps above all, a field of ripe corn; there are some wonderful nights here. I am in a continual fever of work.

I'm very curious to know what the result will be at the end of a year. I hope that by that time I shall be less bothered with breakdowns. At present I feel pretty bad some days, but I don't worry about it in the least, as it is nothing but the reaction after last winter, which was out of the ordinary. And my blood is coming right, that is the great thing.

I must reach the point where my pictures will cover my expenses, and even more than that, taking into account how much was spent in the past. Well, it will come. I don't make a success of everything, I admit, but I'm getting on. So far you have not complained of my expenses here, but I warn you that if I continue to work at the same rate, I shall have great difficulty in making both ends meet. But the work is heavy indeed.

If there should happen to be a month or a fortnight when you were hard pressed, let me know and I will set to work on some drawings, which will cost us less. I mean, you must not put yourself out unnecessarily, there is so much to do here, all sorts of studies, not the way it is in Paris, where you can't sit down wherever you want.

If you can finance a rather heavy month, so much the better, since orchards in bloom are the kind of thing one has some chance of selling or exchanging.

But it occurred to me that you have to pay your rent, so you must tell me if things are too steep.

I am still going about with the Danish painter all the time, but he is going home soon. He's an intelligent boy, and all right as far as fidelity and manners go, but his painting is still rather spineless. You will probably see him when he passes through Paris.

You did well to go to see Bernard. If he goes to serve in Algiers, who knows but that I might go there too to keep him company.

Is it really over at last, this winter in Paris? I think what Kahn said is very true, that I have not sufficiently considered values, but they'll be saying very different things in a little while - and no less true.

It isn't possible to get values and colour.

Th. Rousseau did it better than anyone else, and with the mixing of his colours, the darkening caused by time has increased and his pictures are now unrecognizable.

You can't be at the pole and the equator at the same time.

You must choose your own line, as I hope to do, and it will probably be colour. Good-bye for the present. A handshake to you, Koning and the comrades.

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 9 April 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

Thanks for your kind letter and for the enclosed sketches of your decoration, which I think very funny. Sometimes I regret that I cannot make up my mind to work more at home and extempore. The imagination is certainly a faculty which we must develop, one which alone can lead us to the creation of a more exalting and consoling nature than the single brief glance at reality - which in our sight is ever changing, passing like a flash of lightning - can let us perceive.

A starry sky, for example. See, that's a thing I'd like to try to do, just as by day I want to try to paint a green meadow spangled with starry dandelions. Yet how can I do it, unless I work it out at home, and from my imagination? Of course, this faults my idea while yours gets praised.

At the moment I am absorbed in the blooming fruit trees, pink peach trees, yellow-white pear trees. My brush stroke has no system at all. I hit the canvas with irregular touches of the brush, which I leave as they are. Patches of thickly laid-on colour, spots of canvas left uncovered, here or there portions that are left absolutely unfinished, repetitions, savageries; in short, I am inclined to think that the result is so disquieting and irritating as to be a godsend to those people who have preconceived ideas about technique. For that matter here is a sketch, the entrance to a Provençal orchard with its yellow fences, its enclosure of black cypresses (against the mistral), its characteristic vegetables of varying greens: yellow lettuces, onions, garlic, emerald leeks.

Working directly on the spot all the time, I try to grasp what is essential in the drawing - later I fill in the spaces which are bounded by contours - either expressed or not, but in any case *felt* - with tones which are also simplified, by which I mean that all that is going to be soil will share the same violet-like tone, that the whole sky will have a blue tint, that the green vegetation will be either green-blue or yellow-green, purposely exaggerating the yellows and blues in this case.

In short, my dear comrade, in no case an eye-deceiving job.

As for visiting Aix, Marseilles, Tangier, no fear of that. If notwithstanding this I should go there, it would be in search of cheaper lodgings. Otherwise I am convinced that even if I were to work all my life, I should not be able to do one half of all that is characteristic in this town alone.

By the way, I have seen bullfights in the arena, or rather sham fights, seeing that the bulls were numerous but there was nobody to fight them. However, the crowd was magnificent, those great colourful multitudes piled up one above the other on two or three galleries, with the effect of sun and shade and the shadow cast by the enormous ring.

I wish you a good journey - a handshake in thought.

Your friend, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 11 April 1888

My dear Theo,

It is awfully good of you to send me all the paints I ordered; I have just received them, but have not yet had time to check them.

I am so glad to have them. And the weather today has been fine. This morning I worked on an orchard of plum trees in bloom; all at once a fierce wind sprang up, an effect I had seen nowhere else but here, and returned at intervals. The sun shone in between, and all the little white flowers sparkled.

It was so lovely. My friend the Dane came to join me, and I went on painting at the risk and peril of seeing the whole show on the ground at any moment - it's a white effect with a good deal of yellow in it, and blue and lilac, the sky white and blue. But as to the execution of what one paints outside like this, what will people say? Well, we shall see.

Then after dinner I set to work on the same picture that Tersteeg is to have (the “Pont de l'Anglais”) for you. And I have a good mind to make a replica of the one for Jet Mauve as well, for I spend so much, we must never lose sight of the need to get back the money that flies so fast.

I was sorry afterward not to have asked old Tanguy for the paints all the same, not that there would be the least advantage in doing so - on the contrary - but he's such a funny old soul, and I still think of him many a time. Don't forget to say hello for me if you see him, and tell him that if he wants pictures for his window, he can have some from here, and the best at that. Oh! It seems to me more and more that *people* are the root of everything, and though it will always be a melancholy thought that you yourself are not in real life, I mean, that it's more worth while to work in flesh and blood itself than in paint or plaster, more worth while to make children than pictures or carry on business, all the same you feel that you're alive when you remember that you have friends who are outside real life as much as you.

But just because it's what people have in their hearts that matters, and it is at the heart of all business dealings too, we must make friendships in Holland, or rather revive them. More especially since, as far as the Impressionists cause is concerned, there is little fear now that we shall not win.

And because of the victory already almost assured, we must have good manners, and do everything quietly.

I would have greatly liked to see Marat's “Incarnation” which you spoke of the other day; it would certainly interest me a lot. Instinctively I think of Marat as the equivalent --in character (only more powerful) of Xantippe - the woman of a soured love. She remains a touching figure all the same - but I admit, not so gay as the Tellier household in Guy de Maupassant.

Has de Lautrec finished his picture of the woman leaning on her elbows on a little table in a café?

If I can manage to learn to work our studies from nature on a fresh canvas, we should profit by it, as far as a likelihood of selling is concerned. I hope to manage it here, and that's why I'm experimenting with the two pictures which are to go to Holland, so that you will have them too, and then it won't be unbusinesslike.

You were right to tell Tasset that he must put in the geranium lake all the same; he has sent it, I have just checked it. *All the colours that the Impressionists have brought into fashion are unstable,* so there is all the more reason not to be afraid to lay them on too crudely - time will tone them down only too much.

So, of all the colours I ordered, the three chromes (orange, yellow, citron-yellow), the Prussian blue, the emerald, the crimson lakes, the Malachite green, or the orange lead, hardly one of them is to be found on the Dutch palette, in Maris, Mauve, or Israëls. They are only to be found in Delacroix, who had a passion for the two colours which are most condemned, and with most reason, citron-yellow and Prussian blue. All the same, I think he did superb things with them - the blues and the citron-yellows.

A handshake for you and Koning, and once again thank you very much for the paints.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 13 April 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the samples of absorbent canvas, I shall be very glad to have it, but there is no hurry at all, 3 meters of the stuff at 6 Fr.

As to the paints you sent, there are only four large tubes of white, and all the other tubes of white are half-sized. If he has charged for them accordingly, it's all right, but look into it. Four tubes of white at 1 Fr., but the rest ought only to be half-price. I find that his Prussian blue and his cinnabar are bad. The rest are good.

Now I must tell you that I am working at 2 pictures of which I want to make copies. The pink peach tree gives me the most trouble.

You see from the three squares on the other side of this page that the three orchards make a series, more or less. I have also just now a little pear tree, vertical, between two horizontal canvases. That will make six canvases of orchards in bloom. I am now trying every day to touch them up and give them a certain unity.

I dare hope for three more, matching in the same way, but so far they have got no further than embryos or fetuses.

I should like very much to do this series of nine canvases. You see, we may consider this year's nine canvases as the first idea for a definitive decoration a great deal bigger (this present one consists of size 25 and 12 canvases), which would be carried out along just the same lines next year at the same season.

Here is the other middle piece of the size 12 canvases. The ground violet, in the background a wall with straight poplars and a very blue sky. The little pear tree has a violet trunk and white flowers, with a big yellow butterfly on one of the clusters. To the left in the corner, a little garden with a fence of yellow reeds, and green bushes, and a flower bed. A little pink house. There now, you have the details of this decoration scheme of orchards in bloom that I have planned for you.

But the last three pictures exist only provisionally; they should represent a very big orchard surrounded by cypresses and great pear trees and apple trees.

The Pont de l'Anglais for you is coming along well, and will be better than the study, I think. I am very anxious to get back to work. As to the Guillaumin, surely it would be a good bargain if it's possible to buy it. Only since they are talking of a new method of fixing pastels, it would perhaps be wise to ask him to fix it in this way if you do buy it.

With a handshake for you and Koning,

Ever yours, Vincent

I have had a letter from Bernard with some sonnets he has concocted and some of them really come off quite well. He'll manage to write a good sonnet yet: a thing I could very nearly envy him.

As soon as the Pont de l'Anglais and the copy of the other picture, the pink peach tree, are dry, I'll send them off.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 21 April 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

Many thanks for the sonnets you sent me; I very much like the form and the sonorous melody of the first one:

Sous les dômes dormeurs des arbres gigantesques.

[Beneath the sleeping domes of the gigantic trees.]

However, with regard to idea and sentiment it may be that I prefer the last one:

Car J'espoir dans mon sein a versé sa névrose.

[For hope has poured into my breast its neurosis.]

But it seems to me that you do not say clearly enough what you want to make felt - the certainty that one seems to have, and which one can in any case prove, of the nothingness, the emptiness, the betrayal of the desirable good and beautiful things; and that, despite this knowledge, one lets oneself be eternally fooled by the charm which external life, the things outside ourselves, exercises on our six senses, as if one did not know anything, and especially not the difference between objectivity and subjectivity. Fortunately for us we remain stupid and hopeful in this way.

Now I also like:

L'hiver, n'avoir ni sou, ni fleurs -

[Winter, having neither a sou nor flowers -]

and “Mépris.” [Contempt.]

I think “Coin de chapelle” [Corner of a Chapel] and “Dessin d'Albrecht Dürer” less clear; for instance, which exactly is the drawing by Albrecht Dürer? But nevertheless there are excellent passages in it:

Venus des plaines bleues
Blemis par la longueur des lieues.

[Come from the blue plains,
Paled by the length of the leagues.]

renders very smartly the landscapes bristling with blue rocks, between which the roads meander, as in the backgrounds of Cranach and Van Eyck.

Tordu sur sa croix en spirale

[Twisted on his spiralled cross]

conveys very well the exaggerated leanness of the mystic Christs. But why not add that the anguished look of the martyr is, like the eye of a cab horse, infinitely sad; that would make it more Parisian of Paris, where one sees such looks in the eyes of the superannuated nags of the little carriages as well as in those of the poets, artists.

In short it is not as good as your painting yet; never mind, it will come; you must certainly continue your sonnets. There are so many people, especially among our comrades, who imagine that words are nothing - on the contrary, isn't it true that saying a thing well is as interesting and as difficult as painting it? There is the art of lanes and colours, but the art of words is there nonetheless, and will remain.

[Vincent sketched Orchard in Blossom here.]

Here is another orchard, rather simple as a composition: a white tree, a small green tree, a square patch of green, lilac soil, an orange roof, a large blue sky. I am working on nine orchards: one white; one pink, almost red; one white-blue; one grayish pink; one green and pink. Yesterday I overdid one [canvas] of a cherry tree against a blue sky; the young leaf shoots were orange and gold, the clusters of flowers white, and that against the green-blue of the sky was wonderfully glorious. Unfortunately there is rain today which prevents my returning to the charge.

I saw a brothel here last Sunday - not counting the other days - a large room, the walls covered with blued whitewash - like a village school. Fifty or more military men in red and civilians in black their faces a magnificent yellow or orange (what hues there are in the faces here), the women in sky blue, in vermilion, as unqualified and garish as possible. The whole in a yellow light. A good deal less gloomy than the same kind of offices in Paris.

There is no “spleen” in the air here.

For the moment I am still lying low and keeping very quiet, for first of all I must recover from a stomach disorder of which I am the happy owner, but after that I shall have to make a lot of noise, as I aspire to share the glory of the immortal Tartarin de Tarascon.

I was enormously interested to hear that you intend to spend your time [as a soldier] in Algeria. That is perfect, and quite far from being a misfortune. Really, I congratulate you on it; at any rate we shall see each other in Marseilles.

You will see how delighted you will be with seeing the blue here and with feeling the sun. At present I have a terrace for a studio.

I certainly intend to go do seascapes at Marseilles too; I don't yearn for the grey sea of the North. If you see Gauguin, remember me most kindly to him. I must write to him right now.

My dear comrade Bernard, don't despair and above all don't have *spleen,* old fellow, for with your talent and with your stay in Algeria you will turn out a wonderfully good and true artist. You too will belong to the South. If I have any advice to give you it is to fortify yourself to eat healthy things, yes, a full year in advance - from now on - for it won't do to come here with a damaged stomach and deteriorated blood.

This was the case with me, and although I am recovering, I am recovering slowly, and I regret not having been a bit more careful beforehand. But not such a damnable winter as the past one - what was there to be done? - for it was a superhuman winter.

So get your blood in good condition in advance; here, with the bad food, it is difficult to pull through, but once one is in good health again it is less difficult to remain so than in Paris. Write to me soon, always the same address: “Restaurant Carrel, Arles.”

A handshake,
Sincerely yours,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to John Russell

Arles, c. 21 April 1888

[This letter to John Russell was written in English, and is reproduced without alterations.]

My dear Russell,

I ought to have answered your letter ever so long ago, but working pretty hard every day, at night I feel so often too weary to write. As it rains today I avail myself of the opportunity. Last Sunday I have met MacKnight and a Danish painter, and I intend to go to see him at Fonvieille next Monday. I feel sure I shall prefer him as an artist to what he is as an art critic, his views as such being so narrow that they make me smile.

I heartily hope for you that you will be able to leave Paris for good soon and no doubt leaving Paris will do you a world of good in all respects. As for me I remain enraptured with the scenery here, am working at a series of blooming orchards. And involuntarily I thought often of you because you did the same in Sicily. I wished you would one day or another when I shall send over some work to Paris exchange a Sicilian study with me - in case you should have one to spare.

You know I thought and think such a deal of those of yours. I don't gainsay that your portraits are more serious and higher art, but I think it meritory in you and a rare quality that together with a perfection as appeared to me the Fabian and McKnight portraits you are at the same time able to give a Scherzo, the adagio con expressione, the gay note, in one word together with more manly conceptions of a higher order. And I so Heartily hope that you will continue to give us simultanément both the grave and elaborate works and those aforesaid scherzos. Then let them say if they like that you are not always serious or that you have done work of a lighter sort - So much the worse for the critics and so much better for you.

I have heard nothing of our friend Mr. Reid. I felt rather anxious on his account because I feel sure he was on a false track. My brother has received a letter from him but pretty unsatisfactory.

I was very much taken in by him during the first six weeks or two months, but after that period he was in pecuniary difficulties and in the same acted in a way that made on me the impression that he had lost his wits.

Which I still think was the case and consequently he not responsible even if his doings then were pretty unfair. He is very nervous - as we all are - and can't help being so. - He is prompted to act in his crisis of nerves to make money… whilst painters would make pictures…

So much to say that I consider the dealer stronger in him than the artist though there be a battle in his conscience concerning this - of the which battle I do not yet know the result. So much - pour votre gouverne - as I had the pleasure of introducing him to you [I] feel bound to warn you with the same sympathy however for him, because I found him artistic in pleading the Monticelli cause. In the which I took and take my part. Witnessing the very scenery which inspired Monticelli I maintain this artist has rights to public though too late appreciation. Surely Monticelli gives us not, neither pretends to give us, local colour or even local truth. But gives us something passionate and eternal - the rich colour and rich sun of the glorious South in a true colourist way parrallel with Delacroix' conception of the South *viz.* that the South be represented now by contraste simultané of colours and their derivations and harmonies and not by forms and lines in themselves as the ancient artists did formerly, by pure form Greeks & Michel Ange or by pure line or delineation Rafael Mantegna, Venetian primitives (Botticelli Cimabue Giotto Bellini).

Contrariwise the thing undertaken by P. Veronese & Titian - colour. The thing undertaken by Velasquez and Goya to be continued and - more fully or rather more universally done by the more universal knowledge we have and possess of the prism and their properties.

Hoping to write you again and to hear of you pretty soon!

Yours very truly, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 21 April 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter of today, and for the 110-franc note it contained. As for the earlier letter with the 50 francs, I got it too, and I wrote you about it the day, or two days, before I sent the two drawings. These drawings were made with a reed sharpened the way you would a goose quill; I intend to make a series of them, and hope to do better ones than the first two. It is a method that I had already tried in Holland some time ago, but I hadn't such good reeds there as here.

I have had a letter from Koning, please thank him for it; I shall be very pleased to exchange the two drawings for one of his studies, which you must choose and keep in your collection. I will write him to explain the method and send him some sharpened reeds so that he can try it too.

This is important news - your journey to Brussels. You will be able to judge how the old high-priced stuff is going there. But what a business! For probably these fellows are planning some move. Do you remember that we talked about it before I left, and said that in expectation of the Universal Exhibition Bouguereau, Lefèvre, Benjamin C. [Constant], the whole set, would go to Boussod's to complain and to insist that they count on the firm of B's (the best in the world) remaining true and faithful to the principles of that art which is in truth the most civilized and most attractive - that is to say their own pictures.

Whatever it may be, it was pretty disquieting. And the situation would become serious if you quarreled with these gentlemen.

I don't disguise from you that it will be a pretty severe blow to you; not at the moment but say six months later, because of the change in your way of life that it would bring about.

When a man comes out of prison after having been there a long time, there will be moments when he will even miss his prison, because he finds himself at a loss now that he is at liberty - so called, I suppose, because the grinding daily task of earning your living hardly leaves any liberty at all.

But you know all this. You will certainly regret some things in spite of yourself, even while you are gaining others.

I have ten orchards now, not counting three little studies, and one big one of a cherry tree, which I've spoiled.

When will you be back and what exactly am I to do about sending things? - for I must get fresh subjects, as most of the flowering in the orchards is over.

Therefore, these orchards, with the Pont de l'Anglais, constitute a first series. If you would rather leave them to dry out here, perhaps it would be as well. They are now on a covered terrace to dry. I say, Daumier is on view at the Beaux-Arts and Gavarni too, aren't they? Bravo for the Daumier, but not for the Beaux-Arts.

Here is a sketch of an orchard that I planned more particularly for you to celebrate May 1. It's absolutely clear, and done all in one go. A frenzy of impastos of the faintest yellow and lilac on the original white mass.

You will probably be in Holland by then, and perhaps you will be seeing the same trees in flower there on that very day.

I am very glad you have taken lessons in eating from young Koning. He is thoroughly well up on it: and it's amusing to eat with that budding young artist.

I am very pleased that you have got his study of the Negress.

But indeed, it will do you good to have breakfast. I do it here myself, and eat two eggs every morning. My stomach is very weak, but I hope to be able to get it right; it will take time and patience. In any case I am really much better already than in Paris.

Besides, one doesn't really seem to need a great deal of food here, and while I think of it, I want to tell you that more and more I doubt the truth of the legend of Monticelli drinking such enormous quantities of absinthe. When I look at his work, I can't think it possible that a man who was flabby with drink could have done that.

Perhaps that Limoges woman, the La Roquette female, set her evil tongue wagging and so the legend took root.

I am writing in haste so that you will get my letter before you leave, if it is this Sunday that you intend to start.

Although I do not think that the journey will be very delightful if Delort & Co.'s pictures are to be the bulk of the collection designed for the worthy Belgians, all the same I wish you a good time, and a good journey, and above all be of good heart.

I saw Bernard's still life unfinished, and thought it magnificent.

A handshake for you and Koning.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 24 April 1888

My dear Theo,

I must begin by telling you that the letter you did not get was wrongly addressed by me, and so came back. In a moment of absent-mindedness, just like me, I addressed it to Rue de Laval instead of Rue Lepic.

That being so, I will repeat what was in the letter as though it just happened, the visit of McKnight, Russell's friend, who also came again last Sunday. I am to go to see him, and his work, of which I have so far seen nothing.

He is a Yankee, and probably paints much better than most Yankees do, but a Yankee all the same.

Have I said enough? When I have seen his pictures or drawings, I'll tell you what I think of his work. Meantime, so much for the man.

The chief object of this letter is to find out if you have started and how. And afterward - oh! This afterward - perhaps you will hardly know yourself.

Well, it seems that these Boussod Valadon people still don't give two straws for the judgement of the artists themselves.

I can't deny that I felt it was bad news, and that I've been thinking about it - in spite of myself, I assure you - ever since.

You see, I daren't go on in a line of things which are going to cost you more than they will bring in at present.

For all these discussions with the B. V. people are rather an indication that impressionism hasn't taken on enough. As far as I'm concerned, I stopped painting at once, and went on with a series of pen drawings, of which you have had the first two but this time they are in a smaller size.

For I said to myself that a quarrel with these people would mean that you must have fewer expenses on my account. Not being so keen as all that on my pictures, I could leave them alone without repining overmuch.

Happily for me, I am not the sort of fellow who cares for nothing in the world but pictures.

On the contrary, since I believe it's possible to produce a work of art at less cost than one must spend on a painting, I've begun the series of pen-and-ink drawings.

Meanwhile I have some vexations, and I don't think I can get rid of them as long as I stay where I am. I would rather take a room or if needs be two rooms, one for sleeping, one for work.

For the people here are trying to take advantage of me so as to make me pay high for everything, on the pretext that I take up a little more room with my pictures than their other clients, who are not painters. On my side I shall make the most of the fact that I stay longer, and spend more in the inn than the workmen who come and go. And they won't find it easy to get so much as a cent out of me.

But it's a perpetual nuisance to have to drag all one's apparatus and one's pictures after one, and it makes it harder both to go out and to come in.

As I must make a move in any case, would you like it, or rather would it suit you better, if I went to Marseilles now? I could do a series of marines there, like the series of orchards in bloom here. Also, I have bought three strong linen shirts and two pairs of stout shoes with the idea of moving.

At Marseilles I'd make it more especially my business to get hold of a window to show the impressionist if you on your side could promise that you would provide me with impressionist pictures for it; supposing you were asked to show any - that will be easy enough.

Sometimes I am seriously afraid that both you and I are going to be swindled by this B. V. & Co. crew, with all the annoyance they're giving us. But I'm for fighting it out.

Don't let them swindle you. That's enough for today; let me know your address if you go anywhere. When will you be in Holland? The same address for me, but I should like to move, for I'm not comfortable. I'll send you pen drawings in a little while; I've done four already.

With a handshake,

Vincent

I shall be very hard up by the end of the month, but I'll manage; it's just that I should like to be able to clear out at once, that's worrying me.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 1 May 1888

My dear Theo,
Many thanks for your letter and the 50 Fr. note enclosed.

I don't see the whole future black, but I do see it bristling with difficulties and sometimes I ask myself if they won't be too much for me. But this is mostly in moments of physical weakness, and last week I had such a fierce toothache that much against my will I had to waste time.

However, I have just sent you a roll of small pen-and-ink drawings, a dozen I think. By which you will see that if I have stopped painting, I haven't stopped working. You will find among them a hasty sketch on yellow paper, a lawn in the square as you come into the town, with a building at the back, rather like this:-

Well, today I've taken the right wing of this complex, which contains 4 rooms, or rather two with two closets. It is painted yellow outside, whitewashed inside, in full sunlight. I have taken it for 15 Fr. a month.

Now my idea would be to furnish one room, the one on the first floor, so as to be able to sleep there. This [house] will remain the studio and the storehouse for the whole campaign, as long as it lasts in the South, and now I am free of all the innkeepers' tricks: they're ruinous and they make me wretched. Just now Bernard writes me that he also has a *whole house,* but he has his for nothing. What luck!

I'll be sure to make you a better drawing of it than the first sketch. And after this I can venture to tell you that I mean to invite Bernard and others to send me pictures, to show them here if there is an opportunity, which there certainly will be in Marseilles. I hope I have landed on my feet this time, you know - yellow outside, white inside, with all the sun, so that I shall see my canvases in a bright interior - the floor is red brick; outside, the garden of the square, of which you will find two more drawings. I think I can promise you that the drawings will get better and better.

I have had a letter from Russell; he has bought a Guillaumin and two or three Bernards. And, what gives me enormous pleasure, he also writes suggesting in exchange of studies.

I should be afraid of nothing if it wasn't for my cursed health. All the same, I am better than I was in Paris, and if my stomach has become terribly weak, it's a trouble I picked up there and most likely due to the bad wine, which I drank too much of. The wine is just as bad here, but I drink very little of it. And so it comes about that by eating hardly any solid food and hardly drinking I am pretty weak, but my blood is getting healthier instead of getting poisoned. Once again, it's patience I need to see me through, and perseverance.

The absorbent canvas arrived a few days ago, so I am starting on a new size 30 canvas which I hope will be better than the others.

Do you remember in La Recherche du Bonheur the good soul who bought as much land as he could go around in a day? Well, in my orchard decoration I have been more or less like that man; I have half a dozen out of a dozen now, but the six others are not so good, and I am sorry I didn't do just two instead of the last six. At all events I will send you ten one of these days. I bought two pairs of shoes, which cost me 26 Frs., and three shirts, which cost 27 Frs. This means that in spite of the 100-franc note, I am not rolling in money. But in view of the business I count on doing at Marseilles, I want to be well turned out, and I mean to buy nothing but good stuff. The same with the work: it is better to paint one picture less than to paint one less well. If it should actually come to a break with these people, don't think that I doubt the possibility of carrying on the business all the same; but we must not be taken by surprise, that's all, and if there is still a little delay, it's all to the good. For my part, if I have the next few months to get ready for an expedition to Marseilles, I can carry on there with more assurance than if I arrive all out of breath.

I have seen Mr. McKnight again, but so far nothing of his work.

I still have paints and brushes and several other things in stock, but one must not waste one's powder. I think, supposing you leave those worthies, I must manage to live without spending more than, say, 150 Frs. a month; at present I could not do it, but you will see that in two months I shall be settled accordingly. And if by that time we are earning more, so much the better. I want to make sure of that.

You know, if I could only get really strong soup, it would do me good immediately: it's preposterous, but I never can get what I ask for, even the simplest things, from these people here. And it's the same everywhere in these little restaurants.

But it is not so hard to bake potatoes?

Impossible.

Then rice, or macaroni? None left, or else it is messed up in grease, or else they aren't cooking it today, and they'll explain that it's tomorrow's dish, there's no room on the stove, and so on. It's absurd, but that is the real reason my health is low.

All the same, it cost me positive agony to decide on a definite step, for I reminded myself that in The Hague and Nuenen I had tried to take a studio, and how badly it turned out! But many things have changed since then, and the ground feels firmer underfoot, so let's get on ahead. Only we have spent such a lot already on this blasted painting that we must not forget that we ought to get it back in pictures.

If we dare believe, and I am still persuaded of it that the impressionist pictures will go up, we must paint plenty of them and keep the prices up. All the more reason for concentrating quietly on the quality of the work, and not wasting time. Then at the end of several years I foresee the possibility that the capital we have put out will have returned to our pockets again, if not in cash, then in the value of the stock.

Meanwhile, if you approve, I shall furnish the bedroom, either hiring or buying it for cash down; I shall see about that today or tomorrow morning. I am still convinced that nature down here is just what one wants to give one colour. So that it's more than likely I shall hardly ever budge from here.

Raffaelli has painted Edmond de Goncourt's portrait, hasn't he? It ought to be fine. I've seen the Salon, published by L'Illustration. Is the Jules Breton good?

You will soon be getting a picture I painted for you for the first of May. I could quite well share the new studio with someone, and I should like to. Perhaps Gauguin will come south? Perhaps I could come to some arrangement with McKnight. Then the cooking could be done in one's own place.

In any case, the studio is too public for me to think it might tempt any little woman, and a petticoat crisis couldn't easily end in a liaison. Besides, morals here seem to be less inhuman and less contrary to nature than in Paris. But with my disposition, going on a spree and working are not at all compatible, and in the present circumstances one must content oneself with painting pictures. It is not really living at all, but what is one to do? And indeed, this artistic life, which we know is not the real life, seems to me so vital, one would be ungrateful not to be content with it.

I have one less big worry now that I have found the little white studio. I looked in vain at heaps of rooms. It will sound funny to you that the lavatory is next door, in a fairly big hotel which belongs to the same proprietor. In a southern town I feel I have no right to complain of it, since these offices are few and dirty, and one cannot help thinking of them as nests of microbes. For another thing, I have water laid on.

I shall put some Japanese things up on the wall.

If there are any canvases in your apartment that bother you, this can always be used for storage, which will soon be a necessity, because you must not have any mediocre things in your place.

Bernard has written me and sent sketches.

I am very glad that you found our mother and sister well.

Are you going back to Holland for the holidays? If only you could manage both, to go and see Tersteeg, and come to Marseilles about all this impressionist business, and between these two jobs have a rest at Breda! Have you seen Seurat again?

A good handshake for you. I wish you a year as sunny as today is here.

Greetings to Koning.

Ever yours, Vincent

If you send me 100 francs next time, I could sleep this very week at the studio. I will write you what arrangement the furniture dealer is willing to make.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 3 May 1888

My dear Theo,

Yesterday I went to the furniture dealer's to see if I could hire a bed *etc.* Unfortunately they would *not* hire, and even refused to sell on a monthly installment plan. This is rather awkward.

I thought perhaps if Koning leaves after seeing the Salon which I believe was his original intention, that you might send me the bed that he now occupies after his departure. One must take into account that if I sleep at the studio it will make a difference of 300 Frs. a year which would otherwise have to be paid to the hotel. I know that it is impossible to say in advance that I shall stay here so long but all the same I have many reasons for thinking that a long stay here is probable.

I was in Fontvieille yesterday at McKnight's; he had a good pastel - a pink tree - and two watercolours just started, and I found him working on the head of an old woman in charcoal. He has reached the stage where he is plagued by new colour theories, and while they prevent him from working on the old system, he is not sufficiently master of his new palette to succeed in this one. He seemed very shy about showing me the things, I had to go there for that express purpose, and tell him that I was *absolutely* set on seeing his work.

It is not impossible that he may come to stay for some time with me here. I think we should both benefit by it.

I think very often of Renoir and that pure clean line of his. That's just how things and people look in this clear air.

We are having a tremendous lot of wind and mistral here, just now three days out of four, though the sun shines anyway: but it makes it difficult to work out-of-doors.

I think there would be something to do here in portraits. Although the people are blankly ignorant of painting in general, they are much more artistic than in the North in their own persons and their manner of life. I have seen figures here quite as beautiful as those of Goya or Velásquez. They will put a touch of pink on a black frock, or devise a garment of white, yellow and pink, or else green and pink, or else *blue and yellow*, in which there is nothing to be altered from the artistic point of view. Seurat would find some very picturesque men's figures here in spite of their modern clothes.

Now, as for portraits, I am pretty sure they'd take the bait.

But first before I dare start along that line, I want my nerves steadier, and also to be settled in so that I could have people in my studio. And if I must tell you roughly what I figure it would take to get me quite well and acclimatized for good, it will mean a year, and to set me up completely, a cool thousand francs. If during the first year - the present year - I spend 100 francs on food and 100 francs on this house per month, you see there won't be a cent left in the budget for painting.

But at the end of that year I should have a decent establishment and my own health to show for it - of that I am sure. And in the meantime I should spend my time drawing every day, with two or three pictures a month besides.

In figuring what it would cost to set me up, I am also counting in a complete new set of linen and clothes and shoes.

And at the end of the year I should be a different man.

I should have a home of my own and the peace to get back my health.

(Needless to say, if you have got canvases that take up too much room, you can send them here by goods service, and I will keep them in the studio here. If this is not yet the case, it will be later on, and I am keeping a good many studies which don't seem good enough to send to you.)

And then I can hope not to get exhausted before my time. Monticelli was physically stronger than I, I think, and if I had the strength for it, I'd live from hand to mouth as he did. But if even he was paralyzed, and that without being such a tremendous drinker, there'd be precious little hope for me.

I was certainly going the right way for a stroke when I left Paris. I paid for it nicely afterward! When I stopped drinking, when I stopped smoking so much, when I began to think again instead of trying not to think - Good Lord, the depression and the prostration of it! Work in these magnificent natural surroundings has restored my morale, but even now some efforts are too much for me: my strength fails me. And that was why, when I wrote you the other day, I said that if you left the Goupils, you would feel healthier in mind, but the cure would be very painful. Whereas one does not feel the disease itself.

My poor boy, our neurosis. etc., comes, it's true, from our way of living, which is too purely the artist's life, but it is also a fatal inheritance, since in civilization the weakness increases from generation to generation. If we want to face the real truth about our constitution, we must acknowledge that we belong to the number of those who suffer from a neurosis which already has its roots in the past.

I think Gruby is right about such cases - to eat well, to live well, to see little of women, in short to arrange one's life in advance exactly as if one were already suffering from a disease of the brain and spine, without counting the neurosis which is actually there. Certainly that is taking the bull by the horns, which is never a bad policy. And Degas did it, and succeeded. All the same, don't you feel, as I do, that it is frightfully hard? And after all, doesn't it do one all the good in the world to listen to the wise advice of Rivet and Pangloss, those excellent optimists of the pure and jovial Gallic race, who leave you your self-respect?

However, if we want to live and work, we must be very sensible and look after ourselves. Cold water, fresh air, simple good food, decent clothes, a decent bed, and no women. And not to let oneself go with women, or with life that *is* life, as much as one would like to.

I am not set on sleeping at the studio, but *if* I went to sleep there, it would be because I saw the possibility of settling down pretty definitely for a long time.

Now that I need take up no more room in the hotel, seeing that I have the studio, I shall beat these people down to 3 francs a day, whether they like it or not. Consequently there is nothing urgent. But if it's all the same to you, send me 100 francs next time anyway, as I want to get some drawers made, just as I have had the shirts and shoes, and must send almost all my clothes to be cleaned and mended. Then they will be quite all right again. This is urgent in case I have to go to Marseilles or see people here. The more precautions we take now, the surer we are of being able to hold out in the long run, and of getting the work under control.

I have got ten canvases that I'm looking for a case for, and I'll send them one of these days.

A handshake for you, and Koning too. I got a postcard from Koning saying that he had had a letter telling him to take back the pictures from the Independents' show. Naturally it was the only thing to do, and what could I do about it?

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 4 May 1888

My dear Theo,

I'm dropping you another line to tell you that, on reflection, I think it would be better simply for me to just get a rug and a mattress and make a bed on the studio floor. It will be so hot all summer that this will be more than enough. When winter comes we can see whether we have to get a bed or not.

As for the bed at your place, I think that as far as conversation and company are concerned, having a painter to stay with you is good for both the painter and yourself. So that even when Koning leaves there may well be someone to take his place. Anyway, why don't you keep the bed with you?

It is quite possible that as far as the house is concerned, I might find something even better either in Martigues, by the coast, or somewhere else. Only, what is so delightful about this studio is the garden opposite. But we would do well to wait before doing any repairs to it or furnishing it half decently - it would be wiser - especially as, if we should get cholera here in the summer, I might up and go to the country. This is a filthy town, with all its old streets!

The women of Arles about whom there's so much talk, isn't there - do you want to know my real opinion of them? They are, no question about it, truly charming, but no longer what they must once have been. They are more often like a Mignard than a Mantegna, because they're now in decline. That doesn't prevent them from being beautiful, very beautiful, and I am talking here only of the type in the Roman type - rather boring and ordinary - but what exceptions there are! There are women like a Fragonard and - like Renoirs. And some that one cannot label with anything that's been done in painting so far.

The best thing one could do here, from all points of view, would be to make portraits of women and children. Only I don't think that I am the man to do it, I'm not enough of a M. Bel Ami for that.

But I should be extremely happy if this Bel Ami of the Midi, which Monticelli was not, but tried to be - who, I'm sure, is on his way, though I know it isn't to be me - I should be extremely happy, as I say, if a kind of Guy de Maupassant of painting came along to paint happy pictures of all these beautiful people and things round here.

As for me, I shall go on working, and here and there something of my work will prove of lasting value - but who will there be to achieve for figure painting what Claude Monet has achieved for landscape? However, you must feel, as I do, that someone like that is on the way - Rodin? - he does not use colour - it won't be him. But the painter of the future will be *a colourist the like of which has never yet been seen*. Manet was getting there but, as you know, the impressionists have already made use of stronger colour than Manet has.

I can't imagine this painter of the future living in small cafés, setting to work with a lot of false teeth, and going to the Zouave's brothels, as I do.

But I'm sure I am right to think that it will come in a later generation, and it is up to us to do all we can to encourage it, without question or complaint.

Will you please tell Guillaumin that Russell wants to come and see him, and intends to buy another of his pictures? I am writing Russell today. I heard yesterday from McK. and the Dane that there is never anything good in the shop windows at Marseilles, and they think there is absolutely nothing doing there.

I should very much like to look around a little myself, but being in no way anxious to fly into a rage, I shall wait till my nerves are steadier.

In the very letter I had addressed wrongly I again said something about Bonger. It is probable that he dares to say so much because at the moment the Russians are having so much success at the Théâtre Libre, *etc*. But this is no reason, is it, to try and make use of this success in order to denigrate the French? I have just reread Zola's Le [Au] Bonheur des Dames, and it seems to me more beautiful than ever.

Now it is news indeed that Reid is back. I told Russell that as I was the one to introduce him, I felt it more or less my duty to explain the cause of the quarrel. That Reid was ambitious, and that, being short of money like all of us, he was beside himself when it was a question of earning money. That I looked upon these as involuntary acts (and consequently he was not responsible, but to be excused for them) committed by an overwrought nervous system.

But that in Reid's character the vulgar merchant predominates over the distinguished artist. This does not mean getting even with Reid, but isn't it right to tell the truth? I feel sure that now it isn't any better, but rather worse.

That friend of Russell's, McKnight, is a dry sort of person and not too sympathetic either - so much the worse if I should have the two of them against me. Yet I have not said anything about McKnight, though I suppose he has no more heart than Reid. If he could find his own painting, it would do him good, and it is not impossible that this will happen. He is still young, twenty-seven, I think.

Supposing you agree, we need be in no hurry to fix up the studio. It will do well enough as it is meanwhile, and if I sleep there, as I've said, it will cost me nothing, I save 30 francs at the hotel and I pay 15 for rent, so that there is clear profit.

With a handshake for you and Koning; I have another drawing.

Yours ever, Vincent

I saw a heap of boxes for my purpose in the market and am going back to take measurements. Was the subject of the De Groux which you mention the same as that in the Brussels gallery, the “Bénédicité”? It's true what you say of Braekeleer. Have you heard that he suffered from a disease of the brain which left him impotent??? I have heard this, but wasn't it only temporary? You talk of another one of his which I do not know.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 7 May 1888

My dear Theo,

I am writing you a second time today because when I tried to settle my bill at the hotel I stay at, I had still another proof of how I've been swindled.

I suggested coming to an agreement, they wouldn't hear of it, and when I wanted to take away my things, they would not let me.

And that was that, but I told them that I would have it out with them before the magistrate: but perhaps the judgement will go against me. Only now, you see, in case it goes against me I must keep enough to pay 67.40 Fr. instead of the 40 which I owe them. So you see I dare not buy my mattress and must go and sleep in some other hotel. But I would like to ask you to let me have enough to buy my mattress all the same.

What often worries me here is that it is more expensive than I had calculated, and that I cannot manage to get along on the same money as Bernard and Gauguin do in Brittany. But all the same, now that I am feeling better, I won't give in; and besides, if I had had the health I hope to recover here, this and lots of other things would not have happened to me. The case would have been on its way already if I had not been bothered all day.

I keep thinking that you have got nothing out of my work yet and that I have already spent such a lot of money.

I am sending you in the case all the studies I have except a few that I have destroyed, but I am not signing them all; there are a dozen that I have taken off the stretchers and 14 on stretchers.

There is a little landscape with a hovel, white, red, and green, and a cypress beside it; you have the drawing of it, and I did the whole painting of it in the house. This will show you that, if you like, I can make little pictures like the Japanese prints of all these drawings. But we can talk about that when you have seen them.

At the moment it is a nuisance that I am practically compelled to take the step of staying at the studio, but in the end it will mean greater quiet for my work.

Now that the first studies are gone, I'm beginning another series.

I explained all this business to you in the letters that are still in Paris.

It had been my intention to stay with these people until I was ready. But it doesn't matter.

I want to get my case forwarded today.
I hope you will write soon.
Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 7 May 1888

My dear Theo,

I have just received your letter enclosing 100 Frs. Thank you very much, also for the earlier one (likewise dated from Brussels) enclosing 50 Frs. This is to tell you that I got them all right. Only there must be at least two letters that I sent to Paris, and a roll of drawings which, just as you thought, Koning cannot have sent on to you. Koning has sent me a postcard saying that he had had a note from the Independents that if the pictures were not taken away between *April* 5 and 6, they would be deposited elsewhere in a furniture store. All he had to do was to get them, if he meant between May 5 and 6. It's likely that the good boy has rather lost his head, because of your being away.

I am glad that you have sold a Degas, and to hear what you say of this buyer Meunier. I have seen very fine things by him myself and of course by Henri de Braekeleer too.

That fellow who came to Paris from the Vingtistes, you remember, Los Rios de Guadalquivir [R. de los Rios], or something even more sonorous, declared that De Braekeleer had been reduced to utter helplessness by a disease of the brain that had left him a hopeless wreck. I should like to think it isn't true. Have you heard of it?

You will see by the letters in question that I have taken a studio, an entire 4-room house at 180 francs a year. Now the thing is to go and sleep there. I am going to buy a mat and a mattress and blanket today.

I also have to pay the hotel 40 francs, so I shan't have much left. But from now on I shall be free of that inn where one paid far too much and wasn't comfortable at that. And I shall begin to have a home of my own.

You will find details in the letters I have already written. There has been a good deal of mistral here, so I did the dozen little drawings which I have sent you.

Now the weather is splendid, I have done another two big drawings and five small ones.

I have found a case to send my things in, and I hope they'll leave tomorrow. I am sending the five small drawings to you in Brussels today.

You will see some lovely things at Claude Monet's. And you will think what I send very poor stuff in comparison. Just now I am dissatisfied with myself and dissatisfied with what I do, but I have just a glimmer of hope that I'm going to do better in the end.

And then I hope that later on other artists will rise up in this lovely country and do for it what the Japanese have done for theirs. And it's not so bad to work towards that end.

I often used to go for walks with Rappard where you said. Is the suburb and the country beyond the Congress Column called Schaerbeek? I remember a place called, I think, the valley of Jehosaphat, where there were some poplars, and where Hypolyte Boulanger the landscapist did some lovely things.

I remember sunsets in the Jardin des Plantes seen from the boulevard which runs alongside.

You will find some reeds for Koning in the case I'm sending. The address from now on will be:

2 Place Lamartine.

I hope - indeed I'm sure - that when you return to Paris it will be spring at last, and my word, none too soon.

You get nowhere if you live at a hotel, but now after a year I shall have some furniture, etc., which will be my own; and though this would not matter if I were only in the South for a few months, it is very different when it's a question of a long stay. And I have no fear but that I shall always love this country. It is rather like Japanese art, once you love it, you never go back on it.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 10 May 1888

My dear Theo,

I have had to pay my bill provisionally, while stipulating on the receipt that this payment was only made so that I could regain possession of my belongings, and that the exorbitant bill will be submitted to the magistrate.

But I have almost nothing left after all this: I bought things for making the little coffee and soup at home, and two chairs and a table. That means that I have exactly 15 francs left. So I beg you to send me some more money, in any case not later than on your return to Paris.

I feel sure that I'll soon have several new canvases on the easel.

What I'm sending is packed up and will leave today.

Only it is discouraging to work hard and to see one's subsidy going into the hands of people whom one loathes.

But we'll put a stop to that. I'll make a permanent studio here, where I can put up another painter if necessary.

Foreigners are exploited here, and from their point of view the natives are in the right; they consider it a duty to get whatever they can. Right in the country, like McKnight, you pay less, but McKnight is getting very dull and has worked very little *so far*. And it is better to work hard and spend more, if one must.

If you would put on one side the best things in what I have sent, and consider these pictures as payment to be deducted from what I owe you, then, when the day comes when I'll have bought you in something like 10,000 francs in this way, I'll feel happier.

The money that has already been spent in other years ought to yield some return also, at least in kind.

I am still far from that.

But I feel that on these surroundings there is everything one needs to do good work. So it will be my own fault if I don't succeed. Mauve *painted* and sold in a single month 6,000 francs' worth of watercolours, as you told me yourself some time ago. Well, there are runs of luck like that, and after going through all these worries I feel that it's possible.

In this batch there are the pink orchard on coarse canvas, and the white orchard, lengthways, and the bridge. If we keep these, I think the price may go up later, and some fifty pictures of this quality would compensate us in some measure for our very bad luck in the past. Take these three then for your own collection, and do not sell them, for they will each be worth 500 later on.

And if we had 50 like these put aside, then I should breathe more freely.

Well, write me soon.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 10 May 1888

My dear Theo,
I have already written you once in Brussels, to tell you that I hoped you would be able to send me some more money at the latest on your return to Paris. You see, I have had to pay the whole bill provisionally, so as to get hold of my belongings, though I stipulated on the receipt that this exorbitant bill should be gone into before the magistrate.

I am not sure of winning, though I have *undoubted* right to a 27 franc deduction, and even then I have no compensation for all the worry which this has caused me. First I had a period of absolutely absorbing work, then I was so exhausted and so ill that I did not feel strong enough to live alone, and I let things slide too much. They have calculated yesterday's bill from the time when I was paying them more because I was sick, and had asked them for better wine. But in the end it will be for the best, because all this has driven me to take this decision. I consider that I am after all a workman, and not a coddled foreigner travelling for pleasure, and it would be feeble of me to let myself be exploited as such. So I am beginning to set up a studio which can likewise be used by the other fellows if one of them comes along or if there were painters here.

The first thing you will find in the case are the pictures I did for Jet Mauve and Tersteeg. If meanwhile you have come to the conclusion that Tersteeg would be offended by it, if in short I had better have nothing to do with him, then keep it yourself and you can scrape off the dedication, and we can exchange it for something by one of the comrades.

As for the copies of these two studies, I think that the bridge is better than Tersteeg's, but that the study for Jet Mauve is simpler than the copy.

Perhaps this copy will improve in time. I have worked on it a lot.

Next the series of orchards - I think that the white orchard of which I sent you a pen drawing, and the biggest one in pink and green on absorbent canvas, are the best.

A big study without stretchers and another one on stretchers, in which there is a lot of stippling, are unfinished, which I regret, for the composition gave the general effect of the big orchards here surrounded by cypresses. I have already written you what I think of them and you will have them soon, since the case will be leaving this evening.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I think that as for frames, the two yellow bridges with the blue sky would do well in the dark blue they call royal blue, the white orchard in cold white, the big pink orchard in a rather warm creamy white.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 12 May 1888

My dear Theo,
I am writing a little note again to tell you that I was at the gentleman whom the Arab Jew in Tartarin calls “le Zouge de paix.” Anyway, I got back 12 francs, and my landlord was reprimanded for having kept my trunk, since I did not refuse to pay, he had no right to keep it from me. If he had won his case, it would have been harmful to me, for he would not have failed to tell everyone that I could not or did not want to pay, and that he had been obliged to keep my trunk. Whereas now - for I left at the same time as he did - he said in the street that he had been angry, but that he had not meant to insult me.

I think myself that this was probably just what he was trying to do, and seeing that I had had enough of his dump and that he could not force me to stay, he would have tried to blacken my reputation here. Very good. If I had wanted to get what is probably the fair reduction, I ought to have claimed more, for example for damages. If I let myself be had by the first comer here, you can imagine that soon I should not know where to turn.

I have found a better restaurant where I can eat for 1 franc.

I am in better health now.

Just now I have two new studies like these: you already have a drawing like of one of them, of a farm by the high road among cornfields.

A meadow full of very yellow buttercups, a ditch with iris plants with green leaves and purple flowers, the town in the background, a few gray willows - a strip of blue sky.

If they don't mow the meadow I'd like to do this study again, for the subject was very beautiful, and I had some trouble finding the composition. A little town surrounded by fields completely blooming with yellow and purple flowers; you know, it is a beautiful Japanese dream.

I asked the cost of carriage for the consignment I sent by goods train, it will be 7 francs to the station in Paris. Seeing that I haven't much left, I did not pay in advance here, but if they ask more you must protest; the case is marked VV&W. 1042.

Yesterday and today we have the mistral again. I hope that my shipment will arrive before Tersteeg comes to Paris.

With a handshake, write me soon.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 15 May 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter enclosing 100 Fr. I am very glad to have left those people, and since then I have been feeling much better. It was mainly their bad food which kept me down, and their wine, which was regular poison. I get a very good meal now for 1 franc or for 1.50.

Tasset's absorbent canvas would suit me much better if the canvas itself were three times as rough.

If you meet the man, try to find out what he uses for plaster. I should not be surprised if he prepared his canvas with pipe clay. If I could find out about this, I think that I could prepare the canvas myself. There is no hurry, but try to find out. I still have 4 meters of canvas 1.20 m. wide, which I bought here, but it is not prepared.

Next time I have paints sent, he could put some plaster in the same lot, enough to prepare 4 meters. But there is no hurry yet.

When you got back, did our gentlemen say anything to you about making you travel for them?

One of these days you will see the Danish painter who was here turning up in Paris, I don't know how to spell his name (Mories?). He is going to see the Salon, and then return home, and perhaps come back to the South after a year.

His last three studies were better and more full of colour than what he had done before.

I do not know what he will do in the future. But he is good-natured, and I am sorry he is going away. I told him that a Dutch painter was staying with you, and if Koning would take him to the Butte Montmartre, he would probably make some studies there.

I talked to him a lot about the impressionists; he knew them all by name or from having seen their pictures, and he is very much interested. He has an introduction to Russell. His health has improved here, and he is very well now; he will be all right for two years, but after that it will do him good to come back here for his health's sake.

What is the new book on Daumier, L'Homme et l'Oeuvre? Have you seen the exhibition of the caricaturists?

I have done two new studies, a bridge and the side of a high road. Many subjects here are exactly like Holland in character, the difference is in the colour. There is that sulphur-yellow everywhere the sun lights.

You will remember that we saw a magnificent garden of roses by Renoir. I was expecting to find subjects like that here, and indeed, it was that way while the orchards were in bloom. Now the appearance of things has changed and become much harsher. But the green, and the blue! I must say several landscapes of Cezanne's which I know render this very well, and I am sorry not to have seen more of them. The other day I saw a subject exactly like the lovely Monticelli landscape with the poplars which we saw at Reid's.

You would probably have to go to Nice to find Renoir's gardens again. I have seen very few roses here, though there are some, among them the big red roses called Rose de Provence.

Perhaps it is already something to have found plenty of subjects - provided the pictures are worth what they cost. If the impressionists go up in value, it may happen. And at the end of several years' work we may be able to make up a bit for the past. And at the end of a year I shall have a quiet home of my own.

I am anxious to know what you will say of what I have sent, I think it will take ten days by goods train from here to Paris. If there are any really too bad ones among them, don't show them! I only sent the lot to give you an idea of the things I have seen. I must go and look for a new subject, so, thanking you again very heartily for writing so soon, with a handshake for you and Koning,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 20 May 1888

My dear Theo,

What you write about your visits to Gruby has distressed me, but all the same I am relieved that you went. Has it occurred to you that the dazedness - the feeling of extreme lassitude - may have been caused by this weakness of the heart, and in this case the iodide of potassium would have nothing to do with the feeling of collapse? Remember how last winter I was stupefied to the point of being absolutely incapable of doing anything at all, except a little painting, although I was not taking any iodide of potassium. So if I were you, I should have it out with Rivet if Gruby tells you not to take any. I am sure that in any case you mean to keep on being friends with both.

I often think of Gruby *here* and *now*, and I am completely well, but it is having pure air and warmth that makes it possible. In all that racket and bad air of Paris, Rivet takes things as they are, without trying to create a paradise, and without in any way trying to make us perfect. But he forges a cuirass, or rather he hardens one against illness, and keeps up one's morale. I do believe, by making light of the disease one has got. If only you could have one year of life in the country and with nature just now, it would make Gruby's cure much easier. I expect he will make you promise to have nothing to do with women except in case of necessity, but anyhow as little as possible.

Now as for me, I am doing very well down here, but it is because I have my work here, and nature, and if I didn't have that, I should grow melancholy. If work had any attraction for you where you are, and if the impressionists were getting on, it would be a very good thing. For loneliness, worries, difficulties, the unsatisfied need for kindness and sympathy - that is what is hard to bear, the mental suffering of sadness or disappointment undermines us more than dissipation - us, I say, who find ourselves the happy possessors of disordered hearts.

I believe iodide of potassium purifies the blood and the whole system, doesn't it? And can you do without it? Anyway you must have it out frankly with Rivet; he oughtn't to be jealous.

I wish you had company more roughly, warmly alive than the Dutch. All the same, Koning with his caprices is an exception, better than most. And it is always a good thing to have someone. But I should like you to have had some friends among the French as well.

Will you do something which will give me great pleasure? My Danish friend who is leaving for Paris on Tuesday will give you two little pictures, nothing much, which I should like to give to *Mme.* la Contesse de la Boissière at Asnières. She lives in the Boulevard Voltaire, on the first floor of the first house, at the end of the Pont de Clichy. Old Perruchot's restaurant is on the ground floor.

Would you care to take them there for me in person, and say that I had hoped to see her again this spring, and that I have not forgotten her; I gave them two little ones last year, her and her daughter.

I hope that you will not regret making these ladies' acquaintance, for it is really a *family*. The countess is far from young, but she is countess first and then a *lady*, the daughter the same.

And it would be wiser for you to go, since I cannot be sure that the family will stay at the same place this year (though they have been coming there for several years, and Perruchot should know their address in town). Perhaps it is an illusion of mine, but I cannot help thinking of it, and perhaps it would give pleasure both to them and to you if you met them.

Look here, I will do my best to send you some new drawings for Dordrecht.

I have done two still lifes this week.

A blue enamel coffeepot, a cup (on the left), royal blue and gold, a milk jug in squares of pale blue and white, a cup - on the right - of white with a blue and orange pattern, on an earthen tray of grayish yellow, a jug in earthenware or Majolica, blue with a pattern in reds, greens and browns, and lastly 2 oranges and 3 lemons; the table is covered with a blue cloth, the background is greenish-yellow, so that there are six different blues and four or five yellows and oranges.

The other still life is the majolica pot with wild flowers.

Thank you very much for your letter and the 50-Fr. note. I hope the case will arrive soon. Next time I think I shall take the canvases off the stretchers, so as to send them rolled up by passenger train.

I think you will soon be friends with this Dane; he doesn't do anything much, but he has intelligence and feeling, and he probably didn't start painting such a long time ago. Take a Sunday sometime to get to know him.

As for me, I am feeling infinitely better, blood circulation good and my stomach digesting. I have found a place where the food is very, very good, and the result is immediately apparent.

Did you notice Gruby's face when he shuts his mouth tight and says - “No women!”? It would make a fine Degas, that. But there is no answering back, for when you have to work all day with your brain, calculating, considering, planning, you've had as much as your nerves can stand.

So go out now and meet women socially; you'll find that you'll get on swimmingly - artists and all that. That's how it will turn out, you'll see. And you won't miss much by doing it, you know.

I have not yet been able to do business with the furniture dealer. I have seen a bed, but it was dearer than I expected. I feel that I must polish off some more work before spending more on furnishing. I have my room for 1 Fr. per night. I have bought some more linen, and some paints too. I took very strong linen.

Bit by bit as my blood quickens, the thought of success quickens too. I should not be greatly surprised if your illness were also a reaction from that terrible winter, which has lasted an eternity. And then it will be the same story as mine, get as much of the spring air as possible, go to bed *very early,* because you must have sleep, and as for food, plenty of fresh vegetables, and no *bad* wine or *bad* alcohol. And very little of women, and *lots of patience*.

It doesn't matter if you don't shake it off at once. Gruby will give you a strengthening diet of meat now, you being where you are. Here I could not take much, and it is not necessary here. It is precisely that sense of stupefaction that I'm getting rid of. I do not feel so much need of distraction, I am less harassed by my passions, and I can work more calmly, I could be alone without getting bored. I have come through rather older in the way I look at things, but no sadder.

I shall not believe you if in your next letter you tell me there's nothing wrong with you. It is perhaps a more serious change, and I should not be surprised if you were a trifle low during the time it will take you to recover. In the fullness of artistic life there is, and remains, and will always come back at times, that homesick longing for the truly ideal life that can never come true.

And sometimes you lack all desire to throw yourself heart and soul into art, and to get well for that. You know you are a cab horse and that it's the same old cab you'll be hitched up to again: that you'd rather live in a meadow with the sun, a river and other horses for company, likewise free, and the act of procreation.

And perhaps, to get to the bottom of it, the disease of the heart is caused by this; it would not surprise me. One does not rebel against things, nor is one resigned to them; one's ill because of them, and one does not get better, and it's hard to be precise about the cure.

I do not know who it was who called this condition - being struck by death and immortality. The cab you drag along must be of some use to people you do not know. And so, if we believe in the new art and in the artists of the future, our faith does not cheat us. When good old Corot said a few days before his death - “Last night in a dream I saw landscapes with skies all pink,” well, haven't they come, those skies all pink, and yellow and green into the bargain, in the impressionist landscapes? All of which means that there are things one feels coming, and they are coming in very truth.

And as for us who are not, I am inclined to believe, nearly so close to death, we nevertheless feel that this thing is greater than we are, and that its life is of longer duration than ours.

We do not feel we are dying, but we do feel the truth that we are of small account, and that we are paying a hard price to be a link in the chain of artists, in health, in youth, in liberty, none of which we enjoy, any more than the cab horse that hauls a coachful of people out to enjoy the spring.

So what I wish for you, as for myself, is to succeed in getting back your health, because you must have that. That “Espérance” by Puvis de Chavannes is so true. There is an art of the future, and it is going to be so lovely and so young that even if we give up our youth for it, we must gain in serenity by it. Perhaps it is very silly to write all this, but I feel it so strongly; it seems to me that, like me, you have been suffering to see your youth pass away like a puff of smoke; but if it grows again, and comes to life in what you make, nothing has been lost, and the power to work is another youth. Take some pains then to get well, for we shall need your health.

A handshake for you and the same for Koning.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 20 May 1888

My dear Bernard,

I just received your last letter. You are quite right to see that those Negresses were heart-rending. You are quite right not to think such a thing innocent.

I have just read a book - not a beautiful one and not well written for that matter - about the Marquesas Islands, but sad enough when it tells of the extermination of a whole native tribe - cannibal in the sense that once a month, let us say, an individual got eaten - what does it matter!

The whites, very Christian and all that…in order to put a stop to this barbarity (?), really not very cruel…could find no better means than the extermination of the tribe of cannibal natives as well as the tribe against which the latter fought (in order to provide themselves from time to time with the necessary palatable prisoners of war).

After which they annexed the two isles, which then became unutterably lugubrious!!

Those tattooed races, Negroes, Indians, all of them, all, all are disappearing or degenerating. And the horrible white man with his bottle of alcohol, his money and his syphilis - when shall we see the end of him? The horrible white man with his hypocrisy, his greediness and his sterility.

And those savages were so gentle and so loving!

You are damned right to think of Gauguin. That is high poetry, those Negresses, and everything his hands make has a gentle, pitiful, astonishing character. People don't understand him yet, and it pains him so much that he does not sell anything, just like other true poets.

My dear comrade, I should have written you before, only I had a lot of things to attend to. I have sent a first batch of studies to my brother, that's number one. And I have been having trouble with my health, that's number two. And number three is that I have rented a house, painted yellow outside, whitewashed within, in the full sun (four rooms).

On top of all that I am working on new studies. And in the evening I was often too beat to write. That's why my answer has been delayed.

Listen, that sonnet about the women of the boulevard has some good in it, but it isn't the real thing, the end is banal. A “*sublime* woman”...I don't know what you mean by that, neither do you when it comes right down to it. Furthermore:

Dans le clan des vieux et des jeunes maraude
Ceux qu'elle ammenera coucher le soir, très tard
[Ensnaring among the tribe of the old and young ones
Those whom she will take to bed with her that night, very late.]

Something like this is not characteristic at all, for the women of our boulevard - the little one - usually sleep alone by night, for they have five or six hauls during the day or in the evening. and très tard there is that honorable carnivore, their maquereau [pimp], who comes and takes them home, but he does not sleep with them (or rarely). The worn-out stupefied woman usually goes to bed alone and sleeps a leaden sleep.

But if you alter two or three lines, it will be all right.

What have you painted recently? As for me, I have done a still life of a blue-enameled iron coffeepot, a royal-blue cup and saucer, a milk jug with pale cobalt and white checks, a cup with orange and blue patterns on a white ground, a blue majolica jug decorated with green, brown and pink flowers and leaves. The whole on a blue tablecloth, against a yellow background, and among this crockery two oranges and three lemons. So it is a variation of blues, livened up by a series of yellows that go as far as orange.

Then I have another still life, lemons in a basket against a yellow background. Further a view of Arles. Of the town itself one sees only some red roofs and a tower, the rest is hidden by the green foliage of fig trees, far away in the background, and a narrow strip of blue sky above it. The town is surrounded by immense meadows all abloom with countless buttercups - a sea of yellow - in the foreground these meadows are divided by a ditch full of violet irises. They were mowing the grass while I was painting, so it is only a study and not the finished picture that I had intended to do. But what a subject, hein! That sea of yellow with a hand of violet irises, and in the background that coquettish little town of the pretty women! Then two studies of roadsides - later - done with the mistral raging. If you were not expecting my prompt reply I should make you a sketch. Keep your courage up, good luck. A handshake. I am exhausted tonight. I shall write you again in the next few days, more at my ease.

Vincent

P.S. The portrait of a woman in your last letter but one is very pretty. My address: 2, Place Lamartine, Arles.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 26 May 1888

My dear Theo,

I read a notice in L'Intransigeant that there is to be an exhibition of impressionists at Durand Ruel's - there will be some of Caillebotte's pictures - I have never seen any of his stuff, and I want to ask you to write me what it is like, there are sure to be other remarkable things.

Today I sent you some more drawings, and I am putting in another two. These are views taken from a rocky hill, from which you see the country towards Crau (very good wine comes from there), the town of Arles and the country towards Fontvieilles. The contrast between the wild and romantic foreground, and the distant perspective, wide and still, with horizontal lines sloping into the chain of the Alpines, so famous for the great climbing feats of Tartarin P. C. A., and of the Alpine Club - this contrast is very striking. The two belated drawings that I am adding now will give you an idea of the ruin that crowns the rocks. But is it worth the trouble to make frames for this Dordrecht exhibition?

It seems idiotic to me, and I would rather not be in it.

I should like to think that Bernard or Gauguin will exchange drawings with us, so that the Dutch will see *nothing*.

Have you met the Dane, Mourier Petersen? He will have brought you two more drawings.

He has studied medicine, but I suppose he was discouraged by the student's life, and by the other fellows and the professors as well. He never said anything to me about it though, except once when he stated, “It's the doctors that kill people.”

When he came here, he was suffering from a nervous disorder, which had been brought on by the strain of the examinations. I do not know how long he has been painting - he certainly hasn't gone very far as a painter - but he's a good fellow to knock around with, and he observes people and often sums them up very accurately.

Do you think it would work if he were to come and stay with you? I think that in intelligence he would be very much preferable to that L., of whom - I don't know why - I have a very poor opinion. You certainly don't want sixth-grade Dutch and worse about you, the sort that will say and do idiotic things when they go home. Unfortunately, a picture dealer is more or less a public character. Not that it matters much.

The Swede [This is referring to Mourier, who was Danish. Vincent makes the same odd mistake in letter 498] comes from a good family, he has a sort of decency and orderliness in his way of life and as a man; he reminds me of the kind of character you find in Pierre Loti's books. With all his stolidity, he has some heart.

I expect to be drawing a lot more. It's good and hot already, I can tell you.

I must add an order for colours to this, though in case you'd rather not get them at once, I can do a few more drawings and it will not be time wasted. Also, I divided the order in two, according to what is more or less urgent.

What is always urgent is the drawing, and whether you do it straight off with the brush or with something else, say a pen, you never get enough done.

I am trying now to exaggerate the essential, and purposely leave the obvious things vague.

I am very glad that you have bought the book on Daumier, but if you could make a complete job of it by buying some more of his lithographs, it would be all to the good, for in the future the Daumiers will not be as easy to get hold of.

How are you? Have you seen old Gruby again? I rather think that he exaggerates the heart trouble, a little to the detriment of the drastic treatment that you need for your nerves.

But in the end he will come to see it in proportion as you follow his treatment; with Gruby you will survive, but unfortunately for us, it is more than the old boy will do himself, for he is aging, and when the time comes when we shall need him most, he won't be there.

I feel more and more that we must not judge of God from this world, it's just a study that didn't come off. What can you do with a study that has gone wrong? - if you are fond of the artist, you do not find much to criticize - you hold your tongue. But you have the right to ask for something better. We should have to see other works by the same hand though; this world was evidently slapped together in a hurry on one of his bad days, when the artist didn't know what he was doing or didn't have his wits about him. All the same, according to what the legend says, this good old God took a terrible lot of trouble over this world-study of his.

I am inclined to think that the legend is right, but then the study is ruined in so many ways. It is only a master who can make such a blunder, and perhaps that is the best consolation we can have out of it, since in that case we have a right to hope that we'll see the same creative hand get even with itself. And this life of ours, so much criticized, and for good and even exalted reasons, we must not take it for anything but what it is, and go on hoping that in some other life we'll see something better than this.

With a handshake for you and Koning.

Ever yours,

Vincent

I am hoping to hear from you tomorrow; if not, I'll be in rather a bad way, since I have only enough money for tomorrow, Sunday. Have you at long last received the case? I am not much surprised in a way at its going slowly, seeing that it had to be taken from one station to another, but all the same!

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 27 May 1888

My dear Theo,
I see that I did not put in the sample of the canvas in the list for Tasset. So I am sending it with this letter.

I had hoped to hear from you today, thinking that you surely would have received the case.

I remember having *written* on the dispatch form that the case was to be delivered at the *house*.

But as stuff sent by goods train often remains standing *in the station*, if you have not already received the case, you had better call and see.

I have got them to repaint the house, the front, the doors, and the windows both inside and out. Only I must pay 10 francs as my share. But I think that it will be very well worth it.

I am working with pleasure.

I have asked for some watercolours because I would like to make some open drawings, to be washed afterward in flat tints like the Japanese prints.

I hope you will have as fine a Sunday in Paris as we are having here; there is a glorious sun, and no wind.

Write me at once, I have no money at all.

With a handshake for you and Koning.

Yours, Vincent

What exactly is the exchange that Koning is to make with me? He asked me for two drawings for one study of his. I accepted, telling him to give you the study, but I have had no reply to that. If it means that friend Koning has changed his mind and would prefer not to exchange anything, of course I shall not insist at all.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 May 1888

My dear Theo,
Your letter of this morning gave me great pleasure. Thank you very much for the 100-franc note enclosed.

And I am glad that the case has arrived.

If you think the Souvenir de Mauve tolerable, you should put it in the next lot for The Hague, in a plain white frame.

If you find among them a study that seems to you more suitable for Tersteeg, you can put it in without any dedication and keep the one with his dedication, which you can then scrape off. Because it is better to give him one without any dedication. Then he can pretend that he hadn't realized it was a present and can send it back without saying anything if he would rather not have anything from me.

I certainly must offer him one to show that I have some zeal for the cause and that I appreciate his taking it up - but anyway, however it goes, whether you send one with or without a dedication, or send another one, it is all the same to me. Only as Mauve and he were such close friends, it seemed to come naturally to me, in the emotion of the moment, to do something for Tersteeg while I was doing a souvenir of Mauve. And that's the only thing I had in mind. That's all.

The study of the orchard you speak of - where there is a lot of stippling - is half of the principal subject for the scheme of decoration. The other half is the study of the same size, without stretchers.

And between them they should give some idea of the arrangement of the orchards here. Only I myself thought one study too soft and the other too harsh, both of them failures. It was partly due to the changeable weather, and then I was like the Russian who tried to gobble too much of the country in one day's march.

I am very curious to see the results of Gruby's system - in the long run - say, after a year's trial. It would be wise to go and show yourself to him sometimes, and chat with him, and *really* to catch his *attention*, a really serious effort on his part, just as B. at last managed to get his sympathy and a more serious interest. Then I'd be happier about you. Now I cannot be.

These people's proposal to send you on short journeys across the water is terribly upsetting to you. And I accuse myself of upsetting you too - with my continual need of money.

It seems to me that what these people ask of you would be reasonable enough if they first agreed to give you a year's leave (on full pay) to regain your health. You would devote that year to going around and revisiting all the impressionists and the impressionist collectors. That would still be working in the interests of Boussod & Co. And after that you'd set off with a steadier health and nerves, and be able to start fresh business there.

But taking the chestnuts out of the fire for these people in your present condition means utterly exhausting yourself within a year. And that's no good to anyone.

My dear fellow, the Moslem idea that death comes only when it must - but that is a question - for my part I think that we have no proof of any direct management from above in this matter. On the contrary, I think there is proof that good hygiene not only prolongs life, but above all can make it more serene, a clearer stream; whereas bad hygiene not only muddies the current of life, but that in addition the absolute lack of it may put an end to life before its time. Didn't I myself see a very fine man die before my eyes for want of an intelligent doctor; he was so calm and serene through it all, but he kept on saying, “If only I had another doctor,” and he died with a shrug of the shoulders and a look I shall never forget.

Would you like me to go to America with you? It would be only fair for these people to pay my passage.

I am indifferent to most things, but not to this - that you should first of all really regain your health.

But I think that once again you must steep yourself more and more in nature and in the world of artists.

And I would rather see you independent of the Goupils, and dealing with the impressionists on your own account, than this other life of travelling around with expensive pictures belonging to these people. When our uncle was their partner, he got plenty out of it for some years - but look what it cost him.

As for you, your lungs are all right - but, but, but… a year of Gruby first, and then you will see the danger you are now running. At present you have had ten years of Paris, which is more than enough.

Perhaps you will tell me that Détaille, for instance, has had thirty years of Paris, and that he is as fit as a fiddle. Very well, do the same if you have similar powers, I won't object, and our family is tough.

All that I want to say comes to this - if these people want you to pull their chestnuts out of the fire at such a distance, either make them pay you well, or refuse, and go over to the impressionists, doing less business as far as your financial turnover goes, but living more with nature.

As for me, I am feeling decidedly better, and my digestion has improved tremendously during the past month. Some days I still suffer from unaccountable, involuntary fits of excitement or else utter sluggishness, but that will pass as I get calmer. I expect to make an excursion to Saintes-Maries, and see the Mediterranean at last.

I am sure our sister will be delighted to come to Paris, and it will do her no harm, no doubt of that.

I wish everybody would come South like me. I am always reproaching myself that my painting is not worth what it costs.

But I must work, only remember that if ever circumstances make it desirable for me to go into trade instead, provided it will relieve you, I will do so without regret. Mourier will give you two more drawings.

You know what you must do with these drawings - make sketchbooks with 6 or 10 or 12 like those books of original Japanese drawings. *I very much want* to make such a book for Gauguin, and one for Bernard. For the drawings are going to be better than these.

Today I bought some paints here, and some canvases, for with the weather we are having I must return to the charge. That is another reason why there is nothing urgent in the list of colours except the ten large tubes of white.

Odd, but one evening recently at Mont Majour I saw a red sunset, its rays falling on the trunks and foliage of pines growing among a jumble of rocks, colouring the trunks and foliage with orange fire, while the other pines in the distance stood out in Prussian blue against a sky of tender blue-green, cerulean. It was just the effect of that Claude Monet; it was superb. The white sand and the layers of white rocks under the trees took on tints of blue. What I would like to do is the panorama of which you have the first drawings. It has such breadth and then it doesn't change into grey, it remains green to the last line - and then the range of hills, blue.

Today we have had a gale and rain, but it will only do good. If Koning prefers a painted study, do just as things turn out.

Think well before you agree to everything that the Goupils are asking, and if it entails a change for me, really, now that my health is improving, I can work anywhere, and have no fixed prejudice on the subject.

A handshake for you and Koning.

Ever yours, Vincent

I think that *white* orchard needs a white frame, cold white and rough. Remember that I would far rather give up painting than see you killing yourself to make money. One must have it, to be sure - but has it come to the point where we must go so far to find it?

You understand so well that “to prepare oneself for death,” the Christian idea (happily for him, Christ himself, it seems to me, had no trace of it, loving as he did people and things here below to an unreasonable extent, at least according to the folk who can only see him as a little cracked) - if you understand so well that to prepare oneself for death is idle - let it go for what it's worth - can't you see that similarly self-sacrifice, living for other people, is a mistake if it involves suicide, for in that case you actually turn your friends into murderers.

So if it has come to this, that you have to travel around like this, with never any peace, it honestly kills any desire in me to get back my own ease of mind.

If you agree to these proposals, all right - but then ask these Goupils to take me on again, at my old wages, and take me with you on these journeys. People matter more than things, and the more trouble I take over pictures, the more pictures in themselves leave me cold. The reason why I try to make them is to be among the artists. You understand, it would make me wretched to be forcing you to make money. Rather, let's be together whatever happens. Where there's a will there`s a way, and I think if you can get well now, you will be well for quite a number of years. But don't kill yourself now, either for me or for anybody else. You know the portrait of the elder Six, the man going away, his glove in his hand. Well, *live* until you go away like that; I can see you do so, married. You would carry it off well. Think it over, and consult Gruby before you accept such a proposal.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Paul Gauguin

Arles, 28 May 1888

My dear comrade Gauguin,
I have thought of you very often, and the reason why I did not write sooner is that I did not want to write empty phrases. The deal with Russell has not come off yet, but for all that Russell has bought some impressionists, *e.g.* Guillaumin and Bernard, so bide your time - he will come to it of his own accord, but after two refusals I could not possibly insist any longer, as the refusals also contained a promise for the future.

I wanted to let you know that I have just rented a four-room house here in Arles.

And that it would seem to me that if I could find another painter inclined to work in the South, and who, like myself, would be sufficiently absorbed in his work to be able to resign himself to living like a monk who goes to the brothel once a fortnight - who for the rest is tied up in his work, and not very willing to waste his time, it might be a good job. Being all alone, I am suffering a little under this isolation.

So I have often thought of telling you so frankly.

You know that my brother and I greatly appreciate your painting, and that we are most anxious to see you quietly settled down.

Now the fact is that my brother cannot send you money in Brittany and at the same time send me money in Provence. But are you willing to share with me here? If we combine, there may be enough for both of us, I am sure of it, in fact. Once having attacked the South, I don't see any reason to drop it.

I was ill when I came here, but now I am feeling better, and as a matter of fact, I am greatly attracted by the South, where working out-of-doors is possible nearly all the year round.

However, it seems to me that life is more expensive here, but on the other hand the chances of getting more pictures done are better. However this may be, if my brother were to send 250 francs a month for both of us, we might share, should you care to come. Only in this case it would be necessary to have our meals at home as much as possible; we might engage some kind of charwoman for a few hours a day, so as to avoid all the expense of going to an inn.

And you would give my brother one picture a month; you could do what you like with the rest of your work.

Well, the two of us would immediately start exhibiting at Marseilles, thus clearing the way for other impressionists as much as for ourselves. You must not forget that now there would be the cost of moving and of buying a bed, which would also have to be paid for in pictures.

Of course you are free to exchange views with my brother about this business, however I must warn you that in all probability he will decline responsibility for it. He will only assure you that up to the present the only means we have found of coming to your aid in a more practical way is this combining, if it should appeal to you. We have thought it over carefully. It seems to me that what your health requires above all is quiet. If I should be mistaken, and if the heat of the South should be too strong for you - well, then we must try to find another solution. As for myself, I am feeling quite well in this climate. I want to tell you a great many other things - but business must come first. Send us both your answer at your earliest convenience.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 May 1888

My dear Theo,
I have been thinking about Gauguin, and look here. If Gauguin wants to come here, there is Gauguin's journey, and there are two beds or two mattresses, which in that case we absolutely must buy. But afterward, as Gauguin is a sailor, we shall probably manage to eat at home.

And the two of us will live on the same money that I now spend by myself.

You know that I have always thought it idiotic the way painters live alone, *etc*. You always lose by being isolated.

This is in reply to your wish to get him out of his trouble. You can't send him what will keep him going in Brittany and me what keeps me going in Provence.

But you may think it a good idea for us to share, and fix a sum - say 250 a month, if every month, besides and in addition to my work, you get a Gauguin.

Provided that we did not exceed this sum, wouldn't it even mean a profit?

Besides, it has always been my idea to join hands with other people.

So here is a rough draft of a letter to Gauguin, which I will write, if you approve, with whatever changes that will doubtless have to be made in the phrasing. But this is how I wrote it first.

Take the thing as a plain matter of business, that is the best way for everyone, and let's treat it squarely as such. Only, seeing that you are not in business for yourself, you may perhaps see fit to let me take it upon myself, and to let Gauguin join in with me as a comrade.

I judged that you wanted to help him, just as I myself am distressed at his being ill, and it's a thing that doesn't get better overnight. We cannot suggest something better than this, and others would not do so much.

As for me, it worries me to spend so much money on myself alone, but the only way to remedy it is for me to find a woman with money, or some fellows who will join me to paint pictures.

I don't see the woman, but I do see the fellows.

If this will suit him, we must not keep him dangling.

And this would be the beginning of an association. Bernard, who is also coming South, will join us, and truly, I can see you at the head of an Impressionist Society in France yet. And if I can be of any use in getting them together, I would willingly look upon them all as better artists than I. You must realize how it vexes me to spend more than they do; I must find some arrangement more advantageous both for you and to them. And it would be so in this case. Think it over carefully, but isn't it true that in good company you can live on little, provided you spend your money at home?

Perhaps the time will come when we shall be less hard up, but I do not count on it. It would please me so if you had the Gauguins first. I am not such a bad hand at cooking, etc., but they have had more practice, as they have done their military service, *etc.*

With a handshake for you and regards to Koning; all the same it is a satisfaction to you to hand him over in good condition, which is more than he might have been if you hadn't taken him in. It is satisfactory, too, that the Goupils have decided to take that hall you suggested.

Ever yours, Vincent

Has Tersteeg come to Paris yet?

You must think things over very, very, very carefully before you start travelling. I think it is very likely that your place is in France.

To prepare the way, and to round off this letter, I wrote to Gauguin, but *without saying a word* of all this, only talking about work.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 29 May 1888

My dear Theo,
If the roll is not too big to be accepted by the post office, you will receive another big pen drawing, which I would very much like the Pissarros to see if they come on Sunday. I have just received part of the paints order, and thank you very much for it.

Early tomorrow I start for Saintes-Maries on the Mediterranean. I shall stay there till Saturday evening.

I am taking two canvases, but I'm rather afraid it will probably be too windy to paint.

You go by diligence, it is 50 kilometers from here. You cross the Camargue, grass plains where there are herds of fighting bulls and also herds of little white horses, half wild and very beautiful.

I am taking especially whatever I need for drawing. I must draw a great deal, for the very reason you spoke of in your last letter. Things here have so much line. And I want to get my drawings more spontaneous, more exaggerated. I am still worried by your travel plans, or rather the proposals which have been made to you about travelling.

Travelling beats you up, and above all it disturbs the brain more than can be good for you.

Anyway, I feel that I am to blame for it, and tell myself that it is my need for money that is driving you to it. No - it's not right.

Then I say to myself that we can begin to hope that in a little while I shall sell one or two pictures a month, *for they are improving*. Keep putting them off and talk to Gruby about it; I venture to think that he would rather you kept quiet for a year. If I am wrong, and if Gruby thinks that a change would be good - but this cannot be so. I have written to Gauguin, and said only that I was sorry we were working so far from one another, and that it was a pity that several painters did not combine for one campaign.

We must count on this by dragging on for years perhaps before the impressionists have a steady value, and so we must consider that helping him will be a lengthy business. But he has such great talent that being associated with him would be a step forward for us.

I was quite serious when I first told you that, if you like, I will go to America with you, provided that it would be a good long stay and would be worth the trouble.

We must try not to become ill, for if we do, we are *more isolated* than, for instance, the poor concierge who has just died. These people have their own set, and see the comings and goings of the household, and live in foolishness. And here are we alone with our thoughts and there are times we could wish we were fools too. Given the physique we have, we need to live with our own crowd.

Enclosed is a line of farewell to Koning. I must get some stuff done that might persuade somebody like Thomas, for instance, to join you in sending people who would go to work down here. In that case I think that Gauguin would be sure to come.

With a handshake - many thanks for the paints.

Ever yours, Vincent

It would be a great risk to take Gauguin, but we must aim at this, and I hope that you will find Tersteeg a help, or Thomas, or somebody, I don't know who, but I hope so.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to A. H. Koning

Arles, 29 May 1888

[Letter to A. H. Koning, reprinted from the evening issue of the Amsterdam newspaper *De Telegraaf* of Tuesday, November 28, 1933. See also letter 571a.]

My dear friend Koning,

Having heard from Theo that you are going back to Holland, I want to write you a few farewell words. I take it you have managed to see the impressionists at Durand Ruel's. You'll have quite a lot to tell those fellows in Holland about what you've seen in Paris.

I was much pleased to hear from Theo that you are in good health. We can hardly do without it in our kind of work. Tomorrow I am going to Saintes-Maries on the seacoast to have a look at the blue sea and the blue sky. And to try to get an idea of the figures. For I suppose that all at once I shall make a furious onslaught on the figure, which I seem to be giving a wide berth at the moment, as if I were not interested in it, although it is really what I aim at.

In the meantime I am getting rather sunburned. People here are sunburned yellow or orange, and now and then red-ochre.

It rather surprises me that I have not yet heard whether the exchange of our pictures will come off - I hope it will.

I have just finished a drawing, even larger than the first two, of a cluster of straight pines on a rock, seen from the top of a hill. Behind this foreground a perspective of meadows, a road with poplars, and in the far distance the town. The trees very dark against the sunlit meadow; perhaps you will get an opportunity to see this drawing.

I did it with very thick reeds on thin Whatman paper, and in the background I worked with a quill for the finer strokes.

I can recommend this method to you, for the quill strokes are more in character than those of the reed.

I am very pleased to hear that you have been able to see my first consignment; I hope there will be some marines in the next one, and after that … the figure.

This is what I am aiming at, only it seemed to me that walking and working in the open air would be better for my health, and I did not want to start on the figure before feeling stronger.

Well, old fellow, I know I shall often think of our meetings in Paris, and I do not doubt we shall hear from you as soon as you are back in Holland. It is an excellent thing that you are returning in good health and good spirits.

If you come back next year, do come and have a look here too. I wish you could see the colour here.

I am very anxious to see the region I am going to visit tomorrow and to see the sea. At present there are bullfights almost every Sunday. Last Sunday a bull jumped the hoarding and made a rush at the spectators' seats, but the arenas here are built so high that no harm can be done. On the other hand, once in a neighboring village a bull jumped out of the enclosure, broke through the ring of spectators, injuring several of them, and after that rushed through the village.

At the end of the village, which is built on a rock, there is an enormously high, steep cliff; in his fury the bull rushed on, and - got smashed down below.

A cordial handshake in thought.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Van Gogh Family

Paris, 1888

[Letter from Theo to Wil.]

24 February 1888

When he came here two years ago I had not expected that we would become so much attached to each other, for now that I am alone in the apartment there is a decided emptiness about me. If I can find someone I will take him in, but it is not easy to replace someone like Vincent. It is unbelievable how much he knows and what a sane view he has of the world. If he still has some years to live I am certain that he will make a name for himself. Through him I got to know many painters who regarded him very highly. He is one of the avant-garde for new ideas, that is to say, there is nothing new under the sun and so it would be better to say: for the regeneration of the old ideas which through routine have been diluted and worn out. In addition he has such a big heart that he always tries to do something for others. It's a pity for those who cannot understand him or refuse to do so.

[…]

The young school of painting concentrates particularly on getting sunshine into their pictures and you will easily understand that the grey days we were having offer few subjects for painting. Moreover, the cold made him ill. After the years of so much worry and adversity he has not become any stronger and he really felt the need to be in a softer climate.

[Letter from Theo to Wil.]

14 March 1888

Although I know little about it I like hearing music, but the occasions to hear something good here are rare, unless one goes to the concerts. Still, I went with Vincent a few times to listen to a Wagner concert before he left, and we both liked it very much. It still seems strange that he has gone, he has lately meant so much to me. Soon the studio will be occupied again by a young Dutch painter [Arnold Hendrik Koning], but he has by no means Vincent's talent, although he is not bad. At the end of the month an exhibition will be opened with three of Vincent's paintings on view. He does not attach much importance to this exhibition, but here where there are so many painters it is essential to become known, and an exhibition is, after all, the best thing for that.

[Letter from Theo to Wil.]

December 1888

[Of Isaäcson] He doesn't have a penny and his life is thus far from easy. I don't know how he would be able to make ends meet if he didn't have that good fellow De Haan. He is very busy painting portraits, especially in order to make some money for models. As far as their brains are concerned, both are very clever people, and therefore interesting company. As De Haan is physically weak, he stays at home most of the time, with the result that we get more people to come and have quite a pleasant life….

[Letter from Gauguin to Theo]

about 12 December 1888

Dear M. Van Gogh, I would appreciate it if you would send me part of the money for the canvases you have sold. Everything considered, I am obliged to return to Paris; Vincent and I simply cannot live together without trouble, due to the incompatibility of our characters, and we both need tranquillity for our work. He is a man of remarkable intelligence whom I esteem very highly and whom I leave with regret, but I repeat, it is necessary. I much appreciate the thoughtfulness of your conduct with regard to me, and I hope you will excuse my decision.

[Letter from Theo to his mother.]

Theo announces his engagement.

21 December 1888

My dearest little mother, I recently wrote to you, when I had met my friend De Haan, that I sometimes had the feeling as if something was being sent to me, but now it is something even more important.

Imagine a few days ago I met Jo Bonger here; what was I to do? We stopped to talk to each other and she asked me if she might have a word with me. First she wanted to know if I thought that it was her fault that I was no longer on good terms with André. From one thing came the other, and gradually we became so familiar that I thought there would be no harm in looking upon her as a friend, and so she and her brother and I became good friends again.

But, Mother, that was not possible. I loved her too much, and now, after we had seen much of each other the last few days, she has told me that she loves me too and that she wants to have me just as I am. In a way I am afraid that she is mistaken about me and that I will disappoint her, but oh! I am so happy, and I'll gladly try to understand her and make her happy, if I can…admit I do believe that she knew beforehand that I still loved her. And now, my dearest Mother, I must ask you to give her your loving Mother's heart too, and to help us both with your experience and your advice to become good people as is our duty. She can learn a lot from you and wants to, and from the bottom of our hearts we both wish to do what is good. It is impossible for me to leave here, otherwise I would have come with her to you and her parents. Now I have to rely on a letter, but I hope to come to Holland the first days of January. I have written to her parents today too, and she encloses a word for you here…

[Letter from Theo to his sister Lies.]

23 December 1888

Dearest Lies, You are one of the first whom I want to tell a very great piece of news which will cause a great change in my life and which makes me incredibly happy. The question is that I am engaged to Jo Bonger. When I write this down so simply, I still cannot imagine that it is true, such a short time after I had exclusively in my mind that it would be forever impossible. I can't tell you precisely how it came about as I really don't know myself anymore. She has been staying with her brother for the last four weeks and was on the point of leaving when I met her. We started to see more of each other, and I soon came to the conclusion that I loved her just as much as before….

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 4 June 1888

My dear Theo,

I am at last writing to you from Stes-Maries on the shore of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean has the colours of mackerel, changeable I mean. You don't always know if it is green or violet, you can't even say it's blue, because the next moment the changing light has taken on a tinge of pink or gray.

A family is a queer thing - quite involuntary and in spite of myself I have been thinking here between whiles of our sailor uncle, who must have seen the shores of this sea many a time.

I brought three canvases and have covered them - two marines, a view of the village, and then some drawings which I will send you by post when I return to Arles tomorrow.

I have board and lodging for 4 francs a day and they began by asking 6.

As soon as I can, I shall probably come back again to make some more studies.

The shore here is sandy, neither cliffs nor rocks - like Holland without the dunes, and bluer.

You get better fried fish here than on the Seine. Only fish is not available every day, as the fishermen go off and sell it in Marseilles. But when there is some, it's frightfully good.

If there isn't - the butcher is not much more appetizing than the fellah butcher of M. Gérôme's - if there is no fish, it is pretty difficult to get anything to eat, as far as I can see.

I do not think there are 100 houses in the village, or town. The chief building, after the old church and an ancient fortress, is the barracks. And the houses - like the ones on our heaths and peat bogs in Drenthe; you will see some specimens of them in the drawings.

I am forced to leave my three painted studies here, for of course they are not dry enough to be submitted with safety to five hours' jolting in the carriage.

But I expect to come back here again.

Next week I'd like to go to Tarascon to do two or three studies.

If you have not written yet, I shall naturally expect the letter at Arles.

A very fine gendarme came to interview me here, and the curé too - the people can't be very bad here, because even the curé looked almost like a decent fellow.

Next month it will be the season for open-air bathing here. The number of bathers varies from 20 to 50. I am staying till tomorrow afternoon, I still have some drawings to do.

One night I went for a walk by the sea along the empty shore. It was not gay, but neither was it sad - it was - beautiful. The deep blue sky was flecked with clouds of a blue deeper than the fundamental blue of intense cobalt, and others of a clearer blue, like the blue whiteness of the Milky Way. In the blue depth the stars were sparkling, greenish, yellow, white, pink, more brilliant, more emeralds, lapis lazuli, rubies, sapphires. The sea was very deep ultramarine - the shore a sort of violet and faint russet as I saw it, and on the dunes (they are about seventeen feet high) some bushes Prussian blue.

Besides half-page drawings I have a big drawing, the pendant of the last one. Good-by for the present only, I hope, with a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 5 June 1888

My dear Theo,

If Gauguin is agreeable, and if there is only the difficulty of removal to get over before we get going, it would be better not to keep him dangling. So I have written, though I hardly had time, as I have two canvases on the easel. If you think the letter clear enough, send it; if not, in case of doubt it's better to do nothing. And whatever you do for him must not upset your plan of sending for our sister, and above all, your own needs and mine. For if we cannot keep ourselves in good condition, how can we pretend to lend a hand in other people's difficulties? But now we are actually on the way to a sound, strenuous life, and so if possible let's do the work that is nearest.

I send enclosed a sample of canvas for Tasset, but I do not know whether I should go on with his canvas.

If you send me the next letter on Sunday *morning*, I shall probably take myself off that day to Saintes-Maries to spend a week there. I am reading a book on Wagner which I will send you afterward. What an artist - one like that in painting would be something. It *will come*.

Do you know this -

At 6, Rue Coëllogon, Rue de Rennes,

On the 7th and 8th of June, from 1 to 7 P.M.

Exhibition of pictures and drawings by Régamey.

It might be very interesting, as they travelled everywhere, he and his brother.

A handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

I believe in the victory of Gauguin and the other artists, but it's a long time between then and now, and although he may have the luck to sell one or two canvases, it would be just the same. Meanwhile Gauguin may croak like Méryon, disheartened; it is bad that he is not working - but we shall see what his answer is.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 5 June 1888

My dear Theo,
Many thanks for your kind letter and for the 50-franc note enclosed. All the same, Gauguin must have written. The worst of it is this blasted journey; if we persuade him to do it and afterward it does not suit him, we'll be in the hole. I think I shall write him today, *and send you the letter*.

Now that I have seen the sea here, I am absolutely convinced of the importance of staying in the Midi, and of positively piling it on, exaggerating the colour - Africa not so far away. I am sending you by the same post the drawings of Stes-Maries. I made the drawing of the boats just as I was going to leave, very early in the morning, and I am working on the picture after it, a size 30 canvas with more sea and sky on the right.

It was before the boats cleared off; I had watched it all the other mornings, but they leave very early, I didn't have time to do it.

I have three more drawings of cottages which I still need, and which will follow these: they are rather harsh, but I have some more carefully drawn ones.

I'll send you a batch of paintings rolled up as soon as the marines are dry. Did you ever see such nerve as that of those idiots in Dordrecht? The arrogance of them - they will be good enough to condescend to Degas and Pissarro, without ever having seen a scrap of their stuff, mind you, any more than of the others. But it is a very good sign that the young ones are furious, perhaps it's a proof that there are older ones who have praised the stuff.

About this staying on in the South, even if it is more expensive, consider: we like Japanese painting, we have felt its influence, all the impressionists have that in common; then why not go to Japan, that is to say to the equivalent of Japan, the South?

Only it's bad policy to stay here alone, when two or three could help each other to live cheaply.

I wish you could spend some time here, you would feel it after a while, one's sight changes: you see things with an eye more Japanese, you feel colour differently. The Japanese draw quickly, very quickly, like a lightning flash, because their nerves are finer, their feeling simpler.

I am convinced that I shall set my individuality free simply by staying on here.

I have only been here a few months, but tell me this - could I, in Paris, have done the drawing of the boats in an hour? Not even with the perspective frame, and this one is done without measuring, just by letting my pen go.

So I tell myself that bit by bit expenses will be balanced by the work. I should like to earn a lot of money so as to get good artists down here, instead of leaving them shivering in the mud of the Petit Boulevard, as too many of them do.

Fortunately it is very easy to sell nice polite pictures in a nice polite place to a nice polite gentleman.

Now the great Albert has given us the recipe, every difficulty has disappeared by magic.

One has only to go into the Rue de la Paix, stroll about ostentatiously for that express purpose - the complete art lover.

If Gauguin came here, he and I might go to Africa with Bernard when he goes to do his military service there. What have you settled about our sister?

Anquetin and Lautrec - I think - will not like what I am doing; there has been an article, it seems, in the Revue Independante on Anquetin, which called him the leader of a new trend, in which the Japanese influence is even more apparent. I have not read it but anyway the leader of the Petit Boulevard is undoubtedly Seurat, and young Bernard has perhaps gone further in the Japanese style than Anquetin. Tell them that I have done a picture of boats, that and the “Pont de L'Anglais” could go to Anquetin.. What Pissarro says is true, you must boldly exaggerate the effects of either harmony or discord which colours produce. It is the same as in drawing --accurate drawing, accurate colour, is perhaps not the essential thing to aim at, because the reflection of reality in a mirror, if it could be caught, colour and all, would not be a picture at all, no more than a photograph.

Good-by for the present. With a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 6-11 June 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,
More and more it seems to me that the pictures which must be made so that painting should be wholly itself, and should raise itself to a height equivalent to the serene summits which the Greek sculptors, the German musicians, the writers of French novels reached, are beyond the power of an isolated individual; so they will probably be created by groups of men combining to execute an idea held in common.
One may have a superb orchestration of colours and lack ideas. Another one is cram-full of new concepts, tragically sad or charming, but does not know how to express them in a sufficiently sonorous manner because of the timidity of a limited palette. All the more reason to regret the lack of corporative spirit among the artists, who criticize and persecute each other, fortunately without succeeding in annihilating each other.

You will say that this whole line of reasoning is banal - so be it! However, the thing itself - the existence of a renaissance - this fact is certainly no banality.

A technical question. Just give me your opinion on it in your next letter. I am going to put the *black* and the *white,* just as the colour merchant sells them to us, boldly on my palette and use them just as they are. When - and observe that I am speaking of the simplification of colour in the Japanese manner - when in a green park with pink paths I see a gentleman dressed in black and a justice of the peace by trade (the Arab Jew in Daudet's Tartarin calls this honourable functionary zouge de paix) who is reading L'Intransigeant…Over him and the park a sky of a simple cobalt… then why not paint the said zouge de paix with ordinary bone black and the Intransigeant with simple, quite raw white. For the Japanese artist ignores reflected colours, and puts the flat tones side by side, with characteristic lines marking off the movements and the forms.

In another category of ideas - when for instance one composes a motif of colours representing a yellow sky, then the raw hard white of a white wall against the sky may be expressed, if necessary, in a strange way by raw white, softened by a neutral tone. For the sky itself colours it with a delicate lilac hue.

Furthermore, imagine in this so naïve landscape, which is reasonable, a cottage whitewashed all over (the roof too) standing in an orange field - certainly orange, for the Midi sky and the blue Mediterranean provoke an orange tint that gets more intense just as the scale of blues gets more vigorous tones. The black note of the door, the windows and the little cross on the ridge of the roof produce a simultaneous contrast of black and white just as pleasing to the eye as that of blue and orange.

To take a more amusing motif: let's imagine a woman in a black and white checked dress in the same primitive landscape with a blue sky and an orange soil - that would be a rather funny sight, I imagine. In Arles they often do wear black and white checks.

Suffice it to say that black and white are also colours, for in many cases they can be considered as colours, for their simultaneous contrast is as striking as that of green and red, for example.

The Japanese make use of it for that matter. They express the mat and pale complexion of a young girl and the piquant contrast of the black hair marvellously well by means of white paper and four strokes of the pen. Not to mention their black thornbushes starred all over with a thousand white flowers.

At last I have seen the Mediterranean, which you will probably cross sooner than I shall.

I spent a week at Saintes-Maries, and to get there I drove in a diligence across the Camargue with its vineyards, moors and flat fields like Holland. There, at Saintes-Maries, were girls who reminded one of Cimabue and Giotto - thin, straight, somewhat sad and mystic. On the perfectly flat, sandy beach little green, red, blue boats, so pretty in shape and colour that they made one think of flowers. A single man is their whole crew, for these boats hardly venture on the high seas. They are off when there is no wind, and make for the shore when there is too much of it.

Gauguin, it seems, is still sick.

I am very eager to know what you have been working at lately - I myself am still doing nothing but landscapes - enclosed a sketch. I should also very much like to see Africa, but I hardly make any definite plans for the future, it will all depend on circumstances.

What I should like to find out is the effect of an intenser blue in the sky. Fromentin and Gérôme see the soil of the South as colourless, and a lot of people see it like that. My God, yes, if you take some sand in your hand, if you look at it closely, and also water, and also air, they are all colourless, looked at in this way. *There is no blue without yellow and without orange,* and if you put in blue, then you must put in yellow, and orange too, mustn't you? Oh well, you will tell me that what I write to you are only banalities.

A handshake in thought,

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 12 or 13 June 1888

My dear Theo,
I am dropping you another line as your letter hasn't come yet. But I suppose you thought I would probably be in Stes-Maries.

Since the rent of the house and the painting of the doors and windows and the purchases of canvases all came at the same time, I've run out, and you would be doing me a very great kindness if you could send me the money a few days earlier.

I am working on a landscape with wheat fields which, I think, is as good as, say, the white orchard. It is in the same style as the two landscapes of the Butte Montmartre which were at the Indépendants, but I think it is more robust and rather more stylish.

And I have another subject, a farm and some haystacks, which will probably be the pendant.

I am very curious to know what Gauguin plans to do. I hope he'll be able to come. You will tell me that it's pointless to think about the future, but the painting is progressing slowly and where that's concerned you do have to plan ahead. If I sold no more than a few canvases, that would be neither Gauguin's salvation nor mine. To be able to work one has to order one's life as best one can, and to secure one's existence one needs a fairly solid basis. If he and I stay here for a *long* time, our pictures will become more and more individual, precisely because we shall have made a more thorough study of subjects in this region.

Now that I have made a start in the South, I can hardly conceive of going anywhere else. Better not to do any more moving - just to keep going out into the countryside.

I'm sure I should have a greater chance of success if I tackled subjects - and even business matters - on a somewhat bigger scale, instead of confining myself to one that is too small.

And for that very reason I'm thinking of working on larger canvases and launching out boldly to the 30 square. These cost me 4 francs apiece here, and taking carriage into account that isn't expensive.

The latest canvas absolutely kills all the others; it is only the still life with the coffeepots and cups and plates in blue and yellow that could stand the comparison with it. It must be because of the drawing.

I can't help recalling what I've seen of Cézanne's work, because - as in the harvest which we saw at Portier's - he has bought out the harsh side of Provence so much.

It has become very different from what it was in spring, and yet I certainly have no less love for this countryside, which is already beginning to look scorched. One might say that everything has old gold, bronze and copper in it, and this, together with the green azure of the white-hot sky, imparts a delicious, exceptionally harmonious colour, with broken tones à la Delacroix.

If Gauguin were willing to join us it would be, I think, a step forward for us. It would establish us squarely as the openers-up of the South, and nobody could argue with that.

I must try to achieve the solidity of colour that I got in that picture that kills the rest. I remember what Portier used to say, that his Cézannes, seen by themselves, looked like nothing on earth, but that when placed next to other canvases they wiped the colour out of all the rest. And also that the Cézannes looked good in gold, which implies a brilliant palette.

Perhaps, perhaps, I am therefore on the right track and I am getting an eye for the countryside here.

We'll have to wait and see.

This latest picture stands up well to the red surroundings of the bricks with which my studio is paved. When I put it on the floor, on this brick-red, *deep red*, ground, the colour of the picture does not look washed-out or blanched.

The countryside near Aix - where Cézanne works - is just the same as here, it is still the Crau. When I get back home with my canvas and I say to myself, Hullo, I've got old Cézanne's very tones, all I mean is that since Cézanne, just like Zola, is *so at home in these parts* and hence knows them so intimately, one must be making the same mental calculation to arrive at the same tones. It goes without saying that seen side by side they would go together, but not look alike. With a handshake, I hope that you will be able to write one of these days.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 12 June 1888

My dear Theo,
I got your telegraph order for 50 francs on Monday morning, and thank you very much for it. Only I have not received your letter yet, and I am rather surprised.

I have had a letter from Gauguin, who says he got a letter from you with 50 Fr. enclosed, which touched him greatly, and in which you said something of the plan. As I had sent you my letter to him, he had not yet received the more definite proposal when he wrote.

But he says that he knows from experience, because when he was with this friend Laval in Martinique they managed much better together than when they were alone, so that he quite agreed with me as to the advantages there would be in living together.

He says that the pains in his bowels still continue, and he seems to me to be very depressed.

He speaks of some hopes he has of finding a capital of 600,000 francs to set up as a dealer in impressionist pictures, and that he will explain his plan, and would like you to head the enterprise. I should not be surprised if this hope is a fata morgana, a mirage of destitution, the more destitute you are - especially if you are ill - the more you think of such possibilities. To me this scheme simply looks like another proof of his breaking down, and it would be better to get him away as quickly as possible.

He says that when sailors have to move a heavy load, or weigh anchor, so as to be able to lift a very heavy weight, and to make a huge effort, they all sing together to keep them up to the mark and give them vim.

That is just what artists lack! So I should be very much surprised if he is not glad to come, but in addition to the hotel and travelling expenses, there is the doctor's bill as well, so it will be pretty steep.

But I think he ought to leave the debts unpaid, giving some pictures as security - if he is coming here, and if the people do not agree to that, to leave the debts as they are, without pictures as security. I was obliged to do the same thing to get to Paris, and though I lost a lot of things, it cannot be helped in a case like this, and it is better to get away no matter how than to go to rack and ruin where you are.

I have not gone to Saintes-Maries; they have finished painting the house, and I have had to pay for that, and then I had to get in a fairly big stock of canvases; so out of 50 francs I have got one louis left, and it is only Tuesday morning, so it was hardly possible for me to go, and I am afraid next week will be just as bad.

I was glad to hear that Mourier has come to stay with you.

If Gauguin would rather take the risk of going into business again, and if he really hopes to do something in Paris, Good Lord! let him go, but I think that he would be wise to come here at least for a rest; there is someone here who has been to Tonkin, and came back ill from that delightful place - he has recovered here.

I have two or three new drawings, and two or three new painted studies too.

One day I went to Tarascon, but unfortunately there was such a blazing sun and so much dust that day that I came back with an empty bag. I have heard of two Monticellis in Marseilles, a bunch of flowers at 250 francs, and some figures. It was that friend of Russell's McKnight, who had seen them there. I should very much like to go to Marseilles sometime.

I keep on finding very beautiful and interesting subjects here, and in spite of the worry about the expense, I think that there is a better chance in the South than in the North.

If you saw the Camargue and many other places, you would be surprised, just as I was, to find that they are exactly in Ruysdael's style.

I am working on a new subject, fields green and yellow as far as the eye can reach. I have already drawn it twice, and I am starting it again as a painting; it is exactly like a Salomon Konink - you know, the pupil of Rembrandt who painted vast level plains. Or it is like Michel, or like Jules Dupré - but anyway it is very different from rose gardens. It is true that I have only been through one part of Provence, and that in the other part there is the kind of scenery that you get in Claude Monet, for instance.

I am very curious to know how Gauguin will get on. He says that he disposed of thirty-five thousands' worth of impressionist stuff at Durand Ruel's in his time, and that he hopes to do the same for you. But it is so wretched when your health begins to bother you. I think myself that the most solid asset Gauguin has now is his painting, and the best business he could do - his own pictures. Probably he has written you already. I replied to his letter last Saturday.

I think it would come very heavy to pay all that he owes, and the journey, etc., *etc. If Russell bought a picture from him,* but he has the house that he is building, which leaves him short of money. I think, however, that I shall write too that effect. I have to send him something myself for our exchange, and if Gauguin wants to come, then I could ask him quite confidently. It is quite certain that if one could buy his pictures at their present price in exchange for the money given

Gauguin, there would be no risk of losing money. I should very much like you to have all his pictures of Martinique. Well, let's do what we can. With a handshake, I hope you will write soon.

Ever yours, Vincent

What is the bust of a woman by Rodin in the Salon? It cannot be the bust of Mrs. Russell, he must be working on that now though.

Hasn't my friend Mourier a lordly accent? Bropaply he sdill trinks gognac mit vatter?

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 15 June 1888

My dear Theo,

In case of doubt it is better to do nothing, I think that is what I said in the letter to Gauguin, and that is what I think now, having read his answer. If he on his part returns to the idea, he is very welcome, but we should look too - I don't know just what - if at the moment we pressed him to say Yes. You see that I have had your letter, thank you very much for it, there was a lot in it; thank you very much for the 100-franc note too. As for the delay of the wire, it was dated Sunday, so it is the postman's fault, but it did not matter, because the coach for Stes-Maries runs every day. Only what kept me back was the necessity of buying canvases and paying the rent.

I have already hinted that I don't greatly care for Tasset's canvas for work in the open air. In the future I think we will have the ordinary canvas. I have bought 50 francs' worth of canvas with stretchers as well, as I need stretchers of different sizes to stretch the canvas on, although I send them to you rolled up. They are the rather large sizes, 30, 25, 20, and 15 - all of them square. I think that the large sizes (after all they aren't very big) suit me better.

But I must talk about what you wrote in your letter. I congratulate you on having the Monet exhibition at your place, and I am very sorry I can't see it. It will certainly not do Tersteeg any harm to see this exhibition; he will come round to it yet, but, as you thought too, it will be late. It is certainly odd that he has changed his mind about Zola. I know from experience that once he couldn't bear to hear a word about him. What a queer character Tersteeg is; he has the excellent quality that, however hard and fixed his opinions may be, once he has realized that a thing is actually different from what he thought, as with Zola for instance, he turns around and becomes enthusiastic for it. Lord, what a pity that you and he don't see eye to eye in business now. But that's that; it's what I think is called fatality.

You have been lucky to meet Guy de Maupassant. I have just read his first book, Des Vers, poems dedicated to his master Flaubert; there is one, “Au bord de l'eau,” which is already *himself*. What Van der Meer of Delft is to Rembrandt among the painters, he is to Zola among the French novelists.

Altogether Tersteeg's visit was not all that I had dared to hope, and I do not disguise from myself that I made a false calculation based on the likelihood of his co-operation.

And in the business with Gauguin too, perhaps. Let's wait and see. I thought that he was on the rocks, and there I was with money, and this boy who does better work than I do with none; so I said, He ought to have half of mine, and let him, if he likes.

But if Gauguin isn't on the rocks, then I am in no great hurry. And I withdraw my proposal categorically, and the only question left for me is simply this: if I looked for a comrade to work with, would it be a good thing, would it be to my brother's advantage and mine, and would the other fellow lose by it, or would he gain? These are the questions that my mind is running on, but they'd have to come up against reality to become facts.

I do not want to discuss Gauguin's project, having once thought the situation over this winter - you know the result. You know that I think a Society of Impressionists would be something of the same nature as the Society of the Twelve English Pre-Raphaelites, and I think that the artists would guarantee each other a livelihood, each consenting to give a considerable number of pictures to the society, and that the profits as well as the losses should be had in common.

I do not think that this society would last indefinitely, but I think that while it lasted we should live courageously, and produce.

But if Gauguin and his Jewish bankers came tomorrow and asked me for no more than 10 pictures for a society of dealers, and not a society of artists, on my word I do not know if I'd have confidence in it, though I would willingly give 50 to a society of artists.

Isn't it a bit like Reid - why say that Gabriel de la Roquette is a queer fellow if you do the same yourself? There, there, let the boy do as his heart inclines, but his plan is far from making me enthusiastic. I'd rather have things as they are, taking them for what they're worth without altering them, than have them only half reformed.

The great revolution - art for the artists - Lord, Lord, perhaps it is Utopia: well then, so much the worse for us.

I feel that life is so short and goes so fast; well, being a painter, one must paint after all.

You also know that since then, that winter, it has been casually discussed a good deal with Pissarro and the rest, and at present I will not try to say any more than this, that personally before next year I mean to do my share of 50 pictures; if I manage to do that, then I stick to my opinion.

Today I sent you 3 drawings by post.

You will think the one with the ricks in a farmyard too bizarre, but it was done in a great hurry as a cartoon for a picture and it is to show you the idea.

The “Harvest” is rather more serious.

That is the subject I have worked on this week on a size 30 canvas; it isn't at all finished, but it kills everything else I have, except a still life which I patiently worked out. McKnight and one of his friends who has also been in Africa saw it today, this study, and said it was the best I had done. Like Anquetin and friend Thomas - you can't help thinking something of yourself when you hear that said, but then I say, “The rest certainly must seem damn bad.” And the days when I bring home a study I say to myself - If it was like this every day, we might be able to get on; but the days when you come back empty-handed, and eat and sleep and spend money all the same, you don't think much of yourself, and you feel like a fool and a shirker and a good-for-nothing.

And dear Doctor Ox, I mean our Swede Mourier, I am rather fond of him, because he goes ingenuously and benignly around this wretched world with his spectacles, and because I credit him with a more virgin heart than most, and with even more inclination to honesty than many a scoundrel has. And knowing that he has not been painting long, I do not care a bit that his work is the acme of fatuousness. And I saw him every day for several months.

Well, what can be the reason for his losing those qualities? This is what I think. He came to the South to recover from a nervous illness, caused by a lot of worry he has had, on account of which he changed his career. He was *perfectly well* here, he was very even tempered. But the shock of Paris has been too much, the change too sudden, he has not found the Paris of his dreams, and so he is restless and perhaps disagreeable, and anyway making an ass of himself.

He will soon get over his mental measles, I hope. Meanwhile let him do what he likes, without feeling that it matters. He counts a lot on Russell (*I think*), he wants an adviser and a master, and it's no good telling him that Russell may not be *everything* that he needs.

But I think that Russell will see that here's somebody who does not know the surroundings he has to deal with, and I think that Russell will take him seriously and will try to be good to him. I think Russell is getting a reputation among those who are instinctively afraid of Paris.

It is difficult to explain what I mean by that. Russell is such a good fellow, but you know that one can't order or force people to like Paris, any more than one can recommend that they take a pipe or black coffee with their brandy. Then Russell is rich, and has lost money in Paris, so he can and does say to people, “That's what I've been up against.” But anyway, I'm going to write a short note to Russell.

It appears that McKnight was not very pleased with me, but that Russell told him in reply that he should hold his tongue.

All this is to tell you that I understand, thoroughly understand, since he has turned out like this, why you are not getting along with the Swede, who probably, judging by what you write, is again suffering from his nervous disorders and is set on edge by Paris. If he had money to waste by taking a studio à la Gérôme, it would be serious; seeing that I rather imagine he hasn't a great deal to waste, he will be in for some censure, and my word, he rather deserves it. Nothing can be done if he won't listen, but he must not stay on.

I am not writing to Gauguin direct, but will send the letter to you, because in any case we had better sit tight. *If we say nothing more*, if the reply shows that we have made such and such a proposal but that there must be some initiative on his side too, then we can see if he is keen on it.

If he is not keen on it, if it's all the same to him, if he has something else in mind, let him remain independent and me too.

With a handshake for you and Mourier.

Ever yours, Vincent

What I'm inclined to think particularly strange in Gauguin's plan is this: The society *gives its protection in exchange* for ten pictures, which the artists have to *give*; if the artists did this, this Jew Society would pocket a good 100 pictures “to begin with.” Pretty dear, this protection by a society which doesn't even exist!

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to John Russell

Arles, c. 17 June 1888

[Letter presented here in Vincent's unaltered English.]

My dear Russell,

For ever so long I have wanted to write you - but then the work has so taken me up. We have harvest time here at present and I am always in the fields.

And when I sit down to write I am so abstracted by recollections of what I have seen that I leave the letter. For instance at the present occasion I was writing to you, and going to say something about Arles as it is - and as it was in the old days of Boccaccio.

Well, instead of continuing the letter I began to draw on the very paper the head of the dirty little girl I saw this afternoon whilst I was painting a view of the river with a greenish yellow sky.

The dirty “mudlark” I thought yet had a vague Florentine sort of figure like the heads in the Monticelli pictures, and reasoning and drawing this wise I worked on the letter I was writing to you. I enclose the slip of scribbling that you may judge of my abstractions, and forgive my not writing before as such. Do not however imagine I am painting old Florentine scenery - no, I may dream of such - but I spend my time in painting and drawing landscapes or rather studies of colour.

The actual inhabitants of this country often remind me of the figures we see in Zola's work.

And Manet would like them as they are, and the city as it is. Bernard is still in Brittany and I believe he is working hard and doing well.

Gauguin is in Brittany too, but has again suffered of an attack of his liver complaint. I wished I were in the same place with him, or he were here with me.

My brother has an exhibition of 10 new pictures by Claude Monet - his latest works, for instance a landscape with red sunset and a group of dark fir trees by the seaside. The red sun casts an orange or blood red reflection on the blue green trees and the ground. I wished I could see them.

How is your house in Brittany getting on - and have you been working in the country?

I believe my brother has also another picture by Gauguin which is as I heard say very fine, two negro women talking, it is one of those he did at Martinique. McKnight told me he had seen at Marseilles a picture by Monticelli, flowerpiece.

Very soon I intend sending over some studies to Paris and then you can, if you like, choose one for our exchange.

I must hurry off this letter for I feel some more abstractions coming on and if I did not quickly fill up my paper I would again set to drawing and you would not have your letter.

I heard Rodin has a beautiful head at the salon.

I have been to the seaside for a week and very likely am going thither again soon. Flat shore sands - fine figures there like Cimabue - straight stylish.

Am working at a sower:

the great field all violet the sky & sun very yellow, it is a hard subject to treat.

Please remember me very kindly to Mrs. Russell - and in thought I heartily shake hands.

Yours very truly, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 18 June 1888

My dear Bernard,

Forgive me for writing in haste, I'm afraid my letter will be illegible, but I did want to reply at once.

Do you realize that we have been very stupid, Gauguin, you and I, in not going to the same place? But when Gauguin left, I still wasn't sure if I could get away, and when you left, that awful money business, and the bad reports I sent you about the cost of living here, stopped you from coming.

It wouldn't have been such a stupid thing to do if we had all gone to Arles together, for with three of us here, we could have done our own housekeeping. And now that I have found my bearings a bit more, I am beginning to discover the advantages. For my part, I'm getting on better here than I did in the north. I even work right in the middle of the day, in the full sun, with no shade at all, out in the wheat fields, and lo and behold, I am as happy as a cicada. My God, if only I had known this country at 25 instead of coming here at 35! At that time I was fascinated by grey, or rather lack of colour. I kept dreaming of Millet, and then I also had such acquaintances among the Dutch painters as Mauve, Israëls, *etc.*

[Here Vincent drew a sketch of the Sower.]

Here is a sketch of a sower: a large piece of land with clods of ploughed earth, for the most part a definite purple. A field of ripe wheat, in yellow ochre with a little carmine.

The sky chrome yellow, almost as bright as the sun itself, which is chrome yellow 1 with a little white, while the rest of the sky is chrome yellow 1 and 2 mixed. Thus very yellow.

The Sower's smock is blue and his trousers white.

Size 25 canvas, square.

There are many touches of yellow in the soil, neutral tones produced by mixing purple with the yellow, but I couldn't care less what the colours are in *reality*. I'd sooner do those naïve pictures out of old almanacs, old farmers' almanacs where hail, snow, rain or fine weather are depicted in a wholly primitive manner, like the one Anquetin used so successfully in his Moisson. To he honest with you, I have absolutely no objection to the countryside, since I grew up in it - I am still enchanted by snatches of the past, have a hankering after the eternal, of which the sower and the sheaf of corn are the symbols. But when shall I ever get round to doing the *starry sky*, that picture which is always in my mind?

Alas, alas, it is just as the excellent fellow Cyprien says in J. K. Huysman's “En ménage”: the most beautiful paintings are those which you dream about when you lie in bed smoking a pipe, but which you never paint.

Yet you have to make a start, no matter how incompetent you feel in the face of inexpressible perfection, of the overwhelming beauty of nature.

How I should like to see the study you have done of the brothel!

I am always reproaching myself for not having done any figures here yet.

[Sketch of Summer Evening drawn here.]

Herewith another landscape. Setting sun? Rising moon?

A summer evening, anyway.

Town purple, celestial body yellow, sky green-blue. The wheat has all the hues of old gold, copper, green-gold or red-gold, yellow-gold, yellow-bronze, red-green. Size 30 canvas, square.

I painted it at the height of the mistral. My easel was fixed in the ground with iron pegs, a method I recommend to you. You push the legs of the easel deep into the ground, then drive iron pegs fifty centimetres long into the ground beside them. You tie the whole lot together with rope. This way you can work in the wind.

This is what I wanted to say about black and white. Take the Sower. The picture is divided in two; one half is yellow, the upper part, the lower part is purple. Well, the white trousers help rest the eye and distract it just as the excessive contrast of yellow and purple starts to jar. There you are, that's what I wanted to say.

I know a second lieutenant in the Zouaves here; his name is Milliet. I give him drawing lessons - with my perspective frame - and he is beginning to do some drawings and, honestly, I've seen far worse. He is keen to learn, has been in Tonkin, etc… He is leaving for Africa in October. If you were to join the Zouaves, he would take you along and guarantee you a fairly large measure of freedom to paint, at least if you were willing to help him with his artistic plans. Might this be of any use to you? If so, let me know as soon as possible.

One reason for working is that the canvases are worth money. Since you doubt that, you may call this reason fairly prosaic. But it is true. One reason for not working is that canvases and paint simply swallow up our money while they are waiting to be sold.

Drawings, on the other hand, don't cost a lot.

Gauguin too is bored at Pont-Aven, complains just like you of his isolation. If only you could go and see him! But I haven't any idea whether he means to stay, and I'm inclined to think he's planning to go to Paris. He told me he thought you would come to Pont-Aven. My God, if only all three of us were here! You will say that it's too out of the way. All right, *but think of the winter*, for here you can work all year round. The reason why I love this country is that I have less to fear from the cold, which, because it stops my blood circulating properly, makes it impossible for me to think or even do anything at all.

You will see that for yourself when you are a soldier. Then your melancholy will be gone, which could easily be the result of your having too little or the wrong blood, which I don't really think is the case.

It's the fault of that damned foul wine in Paris and those foul greasy steaks.

My God, I had reached the point where my blood was no longer circulating at all, literally no longer at all. But after four weeks it has started to circulate again. However, my dear friend, at the same time I have had, just like you, a fit of melancholy, from which I would have suffered as much as you, had I not welcomed it with great pleasure as a sign that I was recovering - which is indeed what happened.

So, don't go back to Paris but stay in the countryside, for you will need your strength to come through the trial of serving in Africa. Well then, the more blood you produce beforehand, good blood, the better it will be, for over there in the heat you may not be able to do it quite so easily.

Painting and fucking a lot don't go together, it softens the brain. Which is a bloody nuisance.

The symbol of St. Luke, the patron saint of painters, is, as you know, an ox. So you just be patient as an ox if you want to work in the artistic field. Still, bulls are lucky not to have to work at that foul business of painting.

But what I wanted to say is this: after the period of melancholy is over you will be stronger than before, you will recover your health, and you will find the scenery round you so beautiful that you will want to do nothing but paint.

I think that your poetry will change in the same way as your painting. After a few eccentric things, you have succeeded in doing some with Egyptian calm and a great simplicity.

“Que l'heure est donc brève
Qu'on passe en aimant,
C'est moins qu'un instant,
Un peu plus qu'un rêve.
Le temps nous enlève

Notre enchantement.”
[How short, then, the hour
One spends in loving,
It is less than an instant,
Little more than a dream.
Time strips us of
Our enchantment.]

That's not by Baudelaire, I don't know who wrote it. They're the words of a song found in Daudet's Nabab - that's where I took it from - but doesn't it express the idea just like a shrug of the shoulders from a real lady?

The other day I read Loti's Madame Chrysanthème, it includes interesting details about Japan.

My brother is holding a Claude Monet exhibition at the moment which I should very much like to see. Guy de Maupassant among others came to have a look, and said that he'll be coming often to the Boulevard Montmartre in the future.

I must go and paint, so I'll stop; I'll probably write again soon. A thousand apologies for my not putting enough stamps on that letter, even though I stuck them on at the post office, nor is this the first time that it has happened here that, being in doubt and enquiring at the counter, I have been given the wrong information about the postage. You have no idea of the indifference, the unconcern of the people here. Anyway, you'll soon be seeing all that with your own eyes, in Africa. Thanks for your letter, I hope to write again soon, at a moment when I'm in less of a rush.

With a handshake,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 21 June 1888

Arles, 21st June 1888
My Dear Theo,

I have just read Geffray's article on Claude Monet. What he says is really very good. I should so like to see that exhibition! The only way I can console myself for not seeing it is to look round and see so many things in nature that I hardly have time to think of anything else, for just now it is harvesttime.

I have had a letter from Bernard, who says that he is feeling very lonesome, but that he is working all the same, and has written a new poem on himself in which he makes fun of himself rather pathetically. And he asks, “What's the use of working?” Only he asks that *while he is working*; he says that work is no earthly good at all *while he is working*, which is not at all the same thing as saying it when one is not working: I should very much like to see what he is doing.

I am curious to know what Gauguin will do if Bernard does not go back to him at Pont-Aven; I've given them each other's addresses up to now because they might need each other.

I have had a week's hard, close work among the cornfields in the full sun. The result is some studies of cornfields, landscapes, and - a sketch of a sower.

A ploughed field, a big field with clods of violet earth - climbing toward the horizon, a sower in blue and white. On the horizon a field of short ripe corn.

Over it all a yellow sky with a yellow sun.

You can tell from this simple mentioning of the tones that it's a composition in which colour plays a very important part.

And the sketch, such as it is - a size 25 canvas - torments me, making me wonder if I shouldn't attack it seriously and make a terrible picture of it.

My Lord, how much would I like to do it. But I keep asking myself if I have vigour enough to carry it out.

Such as it is, I am putting the sketch to one side, hardly daring to think about it. I have been longing to do a sower for such a long time, but the things I've wanted for a long time never come off. And so I am almost afraid of it. And yet, after Millet and Lhermitte, what still remains to be done is - a sower, in colour and large size.

Let's talk of something else - I have a model at last - a Zouave - a boy with a small face, a bull neck, and the eye of a tiger, and I began with one portrait, and began again with another; the half-length I did of him was horribly harsh, in a blue uniform, the blue of enamel saucepans, with braids of a faded reddish-orange, and two yellow stars on his breast, an ordinary blue, and very hard to do. That bronzed, feline head of his with a red cap, I placed it against a green door and the orange bricks of a wall. So it's a savage combination of incongruous tones, not easy to manage. The study I made of it seems to me very harsh, but all the same I'd like always to be working on vulgar, even loud portraits like this. It teaches me something, and above all that is what I want of my work. The second portrait will be full length, sitting against a white wall.

Did you notice in the Dessins Raffaeli, “The Street,” published lately in the Figaro? The main one - you would say it was the Place Clichy with all its bustle - is very much alive. Figaro is said to have published a number with Caran d'Ache's drawings.

I forgot to tell you in my last letter that I received - it's a fortnight ago now - the consignment of paints from Tasset. I shall need a fresh batch, since these studies of wheat fields and Zouaves have fairly devoured my tubes.

Only *a third or a half* is urgent.

Among the studies of wheat fields there is one of the stacks, of which I sent you the first sketch; it is on a square size 30 canvas.

We have had torrential rain these last two days, which has gone on all day, and will change the appearance of the fields. It came absolutely unexpectedly and suddenly, while everyone was harvesting. They brought in a great part of the wheat just as it was.

I am hoping to go for a trip into the Camargue next Friday with a veterinary surgeon; there are bulls there and wild white horses, and pink flamingos too. I shouldn't be surprised if it was very beautiful.

There is no desperate hurry for the canvas either.

I am very curious to know what Gauguin will do, but to risk persuading him to come - no - for I do not know if it would suit him. And perhaps when you consider his large family, it is more his duty to try to bring off something that would bring in enough to let him be the head of the family again.

In any case, I certainly do not want to cramp anybody's individuality by any association, and if he is hankering after that plunge he mentioned, he may have good reason for it, and I should not like to deter him if he is really set on it, which remains to be seen. We may find that out from his reply.

Good-bye for the present. A handshake, and thank you for the paper, and good luck with your exhibition.

Ever yours,

Vincent.

What is old Tanguy doing? Have you seen him lately? I am always glad to get paints from him, even if they are just a little worse than elsewhere, provided however that they are not too expensive.

Arles, 21 June 1888

Here is the letter for Gauguin - I know that there is the following passage in the letter: “I *insist* that, supposing the capital is got together, or half of it got together, your brother will exert his powers to lead the enterprise to success, and will be its director.” I know quite well that he also writes: “In principle I accept your proposition.” But I think it would be going a bit too far if we did not firmly point out to him that our proposal was meant without all those special considerations, and that we ourselves are too short of money to be able to risk anything but living together and sharing the monthly money.

And it is true I did not know that he had such a big family; because of this he might prefer to stay in the North.

The utmost one could do would be for me to leave the South and go and join him in Brittany, if this would solve his difficulties. And my longing to work in the South is naturally subordinate to the interests of fellows like him.

For all that, one should not think lightly of a change.

Besides, I am a bit afraid of being scolded for having separated him from his family, or [for having stirred up] some such hornets' nest.

My God, if he has such a big family, it is probably his duty not to absent himself any more. And possibly he would be much happier if you simply bought a picture from him once in a while.

If for the present I have neither referred to these two passages in his letter nor to certain others, it is because I feel it is too difficult to say Yes to them candidly. If on the other hand his whole plan is nothing but a fata morgana, which consequently will disappear of its own accord, he will speak of it again.

But there are the travelling expenses, the debt at the inn, his doctor's bill; now he mentions another debt of 300 francs, which he will pay off with that picture, if that art lover he knows agrees. But if he doesn't agree…?

In short, it would not be very prudent to hold out expectations beyond our means, and to enter into greater obligations than we could fulfill. Gauguin may say that he is very, very agitated, and this is bad enough, and will not do his work any good. No, one must not change haphazardly, without taking into account those doubts and alterations whose existence is not auspicious. The more I calm down here, and the more I recover my strength, the more I feel that after all work is the only sure thing. I admit that, if life in Brittany is considerably cheaper, I should if necessary have to sacrifice my plan to work here, and this I shall do with pleasure if it is to his advantage. But all the more reason to work hard at the fifty pictures that I should like to have finished before speaking again about projects of the kind we discussed last winter.

Just now a letter arrived from home. At present I am feeling so well that it is not indispensable for me to stay here solely because of my health. We must try to arrange things in such a way that you are not overburdened with expenses; that is what is necessary, and it is serious enough.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, c. 22 June 1888

Arles, c. 22 June 1888

Dear sister,

Many thanks for your letter, which I have been longing for. I dare not indulge my feelings to the extent of writing you often or of encouraging you to do the same. All this correspondence does not tend to keep us, who are of a nervous temperament, vigorous in case of possible immersions in melancholy of the type you mention in your letter, and to which I myself fall victim now and then.

An acquaintance of ours used to assert that the best treatment for all diseases is to treat them with profound contempt.

The remedy for the immersion which you mention is not, as far as I know, to be found growing among the herbs with healing powers. Nevertheless, I am in the habit of taking large quantities of bad coffee in such cases, not because it is very good for my already damaged collection of teeth, but because my strong imaginative powers enable me to have a devout faith - worthy of an idolater or a Christian or a cannibal - in the exhilarating influence of said fluid. Fortunately for my fellow creatures I have until today refrained from recommending this and similar remedies as efficacious.

The sun in these parts, *that* is something different, and also if over a period of time one drinks wine, which - at least partly - is pressed from real grapes. I assure you that in our native country people are as blind as bats and criminally stupid because they do not exert themselves to go more to the Indies or somewhere else where the sun shines. It is not right to know only one thing - one gets stultified by that; one should not rest before one knows the opposite too.

What you say about extenuating circumstances, namely that, alas, they do not obviate the fact of one's having done something wrong or of having spoiled something is very true. Only think of our national history, the *Rise and fall of the Dutch Republic*, and you will understand what I mean. We must never invoke the excuse of extenuating circumstances, of our inability, and so on. It is less Christian (in the sense in which it is diluted nowadays), but it is better for us, and perhaps even for others. And energy begets energy, and conversely paralysis paralyzes others.

Here we are now, living in a world of painting which is unutterably paralytic and miserable. The exhibitions, the picture stores, everything, everything, are in the clutches of fellows who intercept all the money. And do not suppose for a moment that this is only my imagination. People give a lot of money for the work after a painter himself is dead. And they are always slighting the living painters, fatuously defending themselves by pointing to the work of those who are no longer there.

I know we are unable to do anything to alter this. So for heaven's sake one must resign oneself to it, or try to find some sort of subvention, or conquer a rich woman, or something of the kind, or else one cannot work. All that one hopes for, independence through work, influence on others, all comes to nothing, nothing at all.

And yet it is a certain pleasure to paint a picture, and yet at this very moment there are some twenty painters here, all having more debts than money, etc., all leading lives approximately comparable to the lives of street dogs, who are going to be of perhaps more importance than the whole of the official exhibition as far as the future style of painting is concerned.

I should imagine that the most distinctive characteristic of the painter is being able to paint. Those who are able to paint, to paint the best, are the beginnings of something that will last a long time to come; they will go on existing as long as there are eyes capable of enjoying something that is specifically beautiful. But I always regret that one cannot make oneself richer by working harder - on the contrary -

If only one could do that, one would be able to achieve a good deal more, get associated with others, and whatnot. For now everybody is chained to the opportunity he has of earning his bread, which means that in fact one is far from free.

You ask whether I sent something to the “Arti” exhibition - certainly not! Only Theo sent Mr. Tersteeg a consignment of pictures by impressionist painters and among them there was one of mine. But the only result has been that neither Tersteeg nor the artists, as Theo informed me, have seen anything in them.

Well, this is extremely comprehensible, for it is invariably the same thing all over again. One has heard talk about the impressionists, one expects a whole lot from them, and…and when one sees them for the first time one is bitterly, bitterly disappointed and thinks them slovenly, ugly, badly painted, badly drawn, bad in colour, everything that's miserable.

This was my own first impression too when I came to Paris, dominated as I was by the ideas of Mauve and Israëls and other clever painters. And when there is an exhibition in Paris of impressionists only, it is my belief that a lot of visitors come back from it bitterly disappointed, and even indignant, in a state of mind comparable to the mood of the decent Dutchmen in the days of yore, who left church and a moment later heard a discourse by Domela Nieuwenhuis or one of the other socialists.

And yet - you know it - within ten or fifteen years the whole edifice of the national religion collapsed, and - the socialists are still there, and will be there for a long time to come, although neither you nor I are very much addicted to either creed.

Well, Art - the officially recognized art - and its training, its management, its organization, are stagnant-minded and moldering, like the religion we see crashing, and it will not last, though there be ever so many exhibitions, studios, schools, *etc.* Will last as little as the bulb trade.

But this is none of our business; we are neither the founders of something new, nor are we called on to be the preservers of something old.

But this is what remains - a painter is a person who paints, in the same way that a florist is in reality a person who loves plants and grows them himself, which is not done by the flower merchant.

And consequently, though some of those twenty painters or so who are called impressionists have become comparatively rich men, and rather big fellows in the world, yet the majority of them are poor devils, whose homes are cafes, who lodge in cheap inns and live from hand to mouth, from day to day.

But in a *single day* those twenty whom I mentioned paint everything they lay eyes on, and better than many a big noise who has a high reputation in the art world.

I tell you this in order to make you understand what kind of tie exists between me and the French painters who are called impressionists - that I know many of them personally, and that I like them.

And that furthermore in my own technique I have the same ideas about colour, even thought about them when I was still in Holland.

Cornflowers and white chrysanthemums and a certain number of marigolds - see here a motif in blue and orange.

Heliotrope and yellow roses - motif in lilac and yellow.

Poppies or red geraniums in vigorously green leaves - motif in red and green.

These are fundamentals, which one may subdivide further, and elaborate, but quite enough to show you without the help of a picture that there are colours which cause each other to shine brilliantly, which form a *couple*, which complete each other like man and woman.

Explaining the whole theory to you would involve quite a lot of writing, yet it might be done.

Colourings, wallpapers and whatnot could be made much prettier by paying attention to the laws of colours.

You will understand that Israëls and Mauve, who did not use whole colours, who were forever working in grey - with all due respect and love - do not satisfy the present-day for colour.

And another thing: somebody who can really play the violin or the piano is in my opinion highly amusing. He takes his violin and starts playing, and a whole company enjoys itself all through the evening. This is something a painter should be able to do too. And now and then it gives me pleasure, when I work outdoors, to have somebody looking on. Suppose, for instance, one is in a wheat field. Well, within a few hours one ought to be able to paint that wheat field, and the sky above it, in perspective, in the distance. Somebody witnessing this will, as soon as an opportunity occurs, keep his mouth shut about the clumsiness of the impressionists, and their incompetent painting - do you see?

But we of the present day seldom have acquaintances who are sufficiently interested to accompany us - but if they do, they may be converted once and for all.

Now contrast this with the fellows in studios who require months and months to do something, which is often enough rather insipid when all is said and done.

Can't you understand then that there is something in this new style of painting? And there is something additional that I should like to have - I want to be able to paint a portrait in one morning or in one afternoon, which I have done occasionally, for that matter. This kind of work does not prevent one from working on other pictures for a long time. By yesterday's mail I sent you a drawing which is the first scratch for a large picture.*

But isn't it curious that, as I tell you this, there are at least a score of fellows who in a few hours could paint a portrait in which there would be character - they are hardly ever asked to do one - some twenty fellows capable of doing whatever landscape you please, at whatever hour of the day with whatever colour effect, on the spot, without hesitation - and nobody stands behind them looking on? They are always working alone. If only everybody knew this - but this is how conditions are, they are so little known.

But I imagine that in the next generation, or in one of the later generations, this working resolutely and without hesitation, this measuring correctly at a glance, this adroitness in the mixing of colours, this drawing with lightning speed - there will come a generation that will not only do this just as we are doing it now, unappreciated, but then with a public that will like it, in the portrayal of persons no less than in the portrayal of landscapes or of interiors.

But I am writing far too much just about painting; only what I wanted to make you understand is this, that it is rather important that Theo has succeeded in introducing the business he manages to have a permanent exhibition of the impressionists now. Next year will be rather important.

Just as in literature the French are irrefutably the masters, they are the same in painting too; and in modern art history, names like Delacroix, Millet, Corot, Courbet, Daumier, dominate all that is produced in other countries.

Oh well, that clique of painters who are lording it over the official world nowadays adorn themselves with the laurels won by those of the past, but they themselves are of a far lower rank. Consequently *they* won't be able to contribute much at the forthcoming World's Fair to helping French art retain the importance it now has. Next year the attention, *not* of the public in general - which of course looks at everything without troubling its head about history - but the attention of those who are well informed will be drawn to the retrospective exhibition of the pictures of the big fellows who are dead, *and* by the impressionists. This will not instantly alter the circumstances in which the latter find themselves either, but it will certainly be conducive to the spreading of the ideas, and induce a little more animation. But the dull schoolmasters who are now on the selection committee of the Salon will never think of admitting the impressionists.

But the latter will hardly desire this at all, and they will hold an exhibition of their own.

If you now take into consideration that I want to have at least some fifty pictures ready toward that time - though I may not be exhibiting at all - you will perhaps feel that I am gradually and to a certain extent taking part in the battle in which, if one does participate, one is at least not exposed to the danger of being awarded a *prize* or a medal like a “good boy.” In point of fact these fellows are ambitious too, but there is a difference nevertheless, and many here are beginning to understand how preposterous it is to make oneself dependent on the opinion of others in what one does.

I hate writing about myself, and I have no idea why I do it. Perhaps I do it in order to answer your questions. You see what I have found - my work; and you see too what I have not found - all the rest that belongs to life. And the future? Either I shall become wholly indifferent to all that does not belong to the work of painting, or . . . I dare not expatiate on the theme, seeing that this becoming exclusively a painting machine, unfit for and uninterested in anything else, may be so much better or worse than the average. It might be pretty easy for me to resign myself to the average, and so be it for the present, for I am now in the same mess as in the past.

Listen, speaking about messes. Perhaps it might be worth while to try to save something of the “mess” that Theo tells me is still lying in some garret at Breda; however, I dare not ask you to do this, and perhaps it has got lost, so don't worry.

But the question is this - you know that Theo brought a whole lot of wood engravings with him last year. Yet a number of the best portfolios are missing and the rest is less good because of the very fact that the collection is no longer complete. Of course the wood engravings from illustrated papers get rarer and rarer according to the age of the issues they are taken from. Enough - so I am not wholly indifferent to that “mess,” you see? There are, for instance, a copy of Gavarni's “Human Masquerade,” and a book Anatomy for Artists - in short a number of things that are really far too good to lose. However, I look upon them in advance as lost; what may be found would be pure profit. When I went away, I did not know it would be for good. For the work at Nuenen did not go badly, and it was only a matter of continuing it; *I still feel the want* of my models, who seemed to be made for me, and whom I still adore; if only I had them here - I feel sure my fifty pictures would turn out to be hits. Do you understand this?? I am not the master of mankind because I am this or that - I fully grant in advance that those who say so are right - but I feel grieved because I do not have the power to make those I want to pose for me to do it, wherever I want them, and as long as I want them.

There, and not in the technical difficulties, lies the obstacle, which I shall have to clear out of the way in the end. And today I am a landscape painter, whereas in reality portrait painting would suit me better. So it would not surprise me if at some future time I should change my style. One painter - Chaplin - who paints the most beautiful women of Paris gloriously - ladies in boudoirs, with or without costume - has painted vigorous landscapes and herds of pigs on the heath. What I want to say is that one must do the work that is nearest, and retain a hold on one's technique. If you were within my reach I am greatly afraid you would get irretrievably addicted to painting. There are Parisian ladies, at least one of them really good, among the impressionists - even two good ones.

And when I think that it is precisely this new style which would put women who are *incapable* of pernickety accuracy, who feel musically, on the right track, I regret now and then that I am getting older and uglier than my interest demands.

It is very commendable of Theo to have invited you to come to Paris. I don't know how it would impress you. When I saw it for the first time, I felt above all the dreary misery, which one cannot wave away, as little as one can wave away the tainted air in a hospital, however clean it may be kept. And this remained with me afterward - though later on I gained the impression that it is also a hotbed of ideas, and that people try to get everything out of life that can by the remotest chance be got out of it. Other cities become small in comparison with it, and it seems as big as the sea. There one always leaves behind a considerable part of one's life. But one thing is certain, *nothing is fresh there*. Therefore, when one leaves it, one thinks a lot of things elsewhere excellent.

I am extremely glad you have regained your health. All that one does, one does involuntarily; and so, without understanding it oneself for the moment, one does wrong when one falls ill.

It is my impression that you would *not* think the sun here unpleasant at all; I feel it is excellent for me to work in the open air during the hottest part of the day. It is a dry, clean heat.

Essentially the colour is exquisite here. When the green leaves are fresh, it is a rich green, the like of which we seldom see in the North, quiet. When it gets scorched and dusty, it does not lose its beauty, for then the landscape gets tones of gold of various tints, green-gold, yellow-gold, pink-gold, and in the same way bronze, copper, in short starting from citron yellow all the way to a dull, dark yellow colour like a heap of threshed corn, for instance. And this combined with the blue - from the deepest royal blue of the water to the blue of the forget-me-nots, cobalt, particularly clear, bright blue - green-blue and violet-blue.

Of course this calls up orange - a sunburned face gives the impression of orange. Furthermore, on account of the many yellow hues, violet gets a quick emphasis; a cane fence or a grey thatched roof or a dug-up field make a much more violet impression than at home. Furthermore - something you've already suspected - people are often good-looking here. In a word, I believe that life here is just a little more satisfying than in many other spots. However, I have the impression that people are getting slack here, a little too much affected by the decadence of carelessness, indifference, whereas if they were more energetic the land would probably produce more.

I have not had much time to read lately, except Madame Chrysanthème by Pierre Loti, and also L'Abbé Constantin by Ohnet, frightfully sweet and heavenly, so that even his Maître des forges, which already shows a similar tendency, becomes all the more suspect. At times, driven by a certain mental voracity, I even read the newspapers with fury, but do not deduce from this fact that I feel a craving for reading. This is not really the case to a large extent, because I prefer to look at things myself; but the fact is that one gets into the habit of reading for a few hours at night, so one cannot help feeling as if one were in want of something; but that this feeling is not really distressing, one may infer from the fact that one goes on thinking what one *sees* interesting.

I have spent a week on the Mediterranean coast; you should think it beautiful. What strikes me here, and what makes painting so attractive, is the clearness of the air; you *cannot* know what this means, because this is exactly what we do not have in our country - but one distinguishes the colour of things at an hour's distance; for instance the grey-green of the olive trees and the grass green of the meadows, and the pink-lilac of a dug-up field. In our country we see a vague grey line on the horizon; here even in the far, far distance the line is sharply defined, and its shape is clearly distinguishable. This gives one an idea of space and air.

Seeing that I am so busily occupied with myself just now, I want to try to paint my self-portrait in writing. In the first place I want to emphasize the fact that one and the same person may furnish motifs for very different portraits.

Here I give a conception of mine, which is the result of a portrait I painted in the mirror, and which is now in Theo's possession.

A pinkish-grey face with green eyes, ash-coloured hair, wrinkles on the forehead and around the mouth, stiff, wooden, a very red beard, considerably neglected and mournful, but the lips are full, a blue peasant's blouse of coarse linen, and a palette with citron yellow, vermilion, malachite green, cobalt blue, in short all the colours on the palette except the orange beard, but only whole colours. The figure against a greyish-white wall.

You will say that this resembles somewhat, for instance, the face of - Death - in Van Eeden's book or some such thing - all right, but it is a figure like this - and it isn't an easy job to paint oneself - at any rate if it is to be *different* from a photograph. And you see - this, in my opinion, is the advantage that impressionism possesses over all the other things; it is not banal, and one seeks after a deeper resemblance than the photographer's.

However, at the present moment I look different, insofar as I am wearing neither hair nor beard, the same having been shaved off clean. Furthermore, my complexion has changed from green-greyish-pink to greyish-orange, and I am wearing a white suit instead of a blue one, and I am always very dusty, always more bristlingly loaded like a porcupine, with sticks, painter's easel, canvases and further merchandise. Only the green eyes have remained the same, but of course another colour in the portrait is the yellow straw hat, like a *hannekenmaaier's*, and a very black little pipe - I live in a little yellow house with a green door and green blinds, whitewashed inside - on the white walls very brightly coloured Japanese prints, red tiles on the floor - the house in the full sunlight - and over it an intensely blue sky, and - the shadows in the middle of the day much shorter than in our country. Well - can you understand that one may be able to paint something like this with only a few strokes of the brush? But can't you understand too that there are people who say, “This makes too queer an impression,” not to mention those who think it a total abortion or utterly repulsive? But if only there is a likeness, but a likeness different from the products of the God-fearing photographer with his colourless phantoms - this is the aim.

I am positively not very fond of Mr. Vosmaer, and am sufficiently hardhearted to be little impressed by the man's departure from life.

I think it a very good thing that you and Mother preferred to get hold of a garden with she-cats, tom-cats, sparrows and flies, rather than put up with another flight of stairs. In Paris I could never accustom myself to climbing stairs, and I always had fits of dizziness in a horrible nightmare which has left me since, but which came back regularly then.

If I should not mail this letter immediately, I feel absolutely sure that I should tear it up if I read it over - and so I will not read it over, and I think its legibility doubtful. I don't always have time to write. I truly believe there is nothing in this letter, and I should not be able to understand by what means it got this long. Thank Mother in my name for her letter. A long time ago now I designated a painted study for you, and you are sure to get it. I am afraid that if I should send it by parcel post, even if I prepaid the carriage, I should make you pay for insufficient postage, as in the case of the flowers from Menton, and this one is even bigger - but Theo will be sure to send you one; so if I should not think of it, please ask him for it.

I embrace you and Mother in thought.

Your loving Vincent

Theo is doing his best for all the impressionists; he has done something, or sold something, for every one of them, and he will certainly go on doing so. But the few things I wrote you about this question will show you that he is quite different from the other dealers, who do not care the least bit about the painters.

* *Were there enough stamps on the drawing*? Please let me know, for I have to know.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 23 June 1888

My dear Theo,
Many thanks for your letter, and the 50-Fr note enclosed. I did not know that the article on Claude Monet was by the same person as the one on Bismarck. It does one good to read things like that, more than most of the stuff the decadents write, with their passion for saying the most obvious things in the most wildly contorted phrases.

I am very dissatisfied with what I have been doing lately, because it is very ugly. But all the same, figure is interesting me more than landscape.

Anyway, I shall send you a drawing of the Zouave today. In the end making studies of figures so as to experiment and to learn will be the shortest way for me to do something worth while.

Bernard has got to the point. Today he sent me a rough sketch of a brothel, which I am sending you enclosed to hang beside his clowns, which you already have. There is a poem on the back of the drawing, in just the same tone as the drawing; probably he has a more finished painted study of it.

I should not be surprised if he wanted to make an exchange with me for the Zouave's head, though it is very ugly. But as I do not want to deprive him of studies which he can sell, I will not suggest an exchange unless we could buy something from him for a small sum at the same time.

It is still raining heavily here, which is doing a great deal of harm to the wheat that is still standing.

But fortunately I have a model these days.

I am in need of a book - the A B C D of Drawing, by A. Cassagne. I asked for it at the bookshop here, and after waiting a fortnight, they told me that they must have the name of the publisher, which I do not know. I'd be very grateful if you could send it to me. The carelessness, the lazy happy-go-lucky ways of the people here are beyond belief; you have trouble getting the most trifling things. That is why I'll have to go to Marseilles someday, to get what I want there. The cost of carriage from Paris is no joke and runs up the price of things, but to have to run one's errands in Marseilles makes them even more expensive.

What often vexes me is that painting is like having a bad mistress who spends and spends and it's never enough, and I tell myself that even if a tolerable study comes out of it from time to time, it would have been much cheaper to buy it from somebody else.

The other thing, the hope of doing better, is rather a fata morgana too. But there is no quick remedy for all this, unless sometime or another you can join hands with a good worker, and produce more together.

As for the publisher of Cassagne's book - surely you have his treatise on perspective, and the address must be in it; besides they keep those books at Lalouche and Rue's in the Chaussée d'Antin, that place that always has the continuations of the various series.

It is great that Claude Monet managed to paint those ten pictures between February and May. Quick work doesn't mean less serious work, it depends on one's self-confidence and experience. In the same way Jules Guérard, the lion hunter, says in his book that in the beginning young lions have a lot of trouble killing a horse or an ox, but that the old lions kill with a single blow of the paw or a well-placed bite, and that they are amazingly sure at the job.

I see nothing here of the Southern gaiety that Daudet talks about so much, but on the contrary, all kinds of insipid airs and graces, a sordid carelessness. But the country is beautiful in spite of it.

Nature here however must be very different from what it is at Bordighera, Hyères, Geneva, or Antibes, where there is less mistral and where the mountains have an entirely different character. Here, except for an intenser colouring, it reminds one of Holland: everything is flat, only one thinks rather of the Holland of Ruysdael or Hobbema or Ostade than of Holland as it is.

What surprises me is the scarcity of flowers; there are no cornflowers in the wheat, and seldom poppies.

What was the cost of the carriage on that last case of pictures? The impasto on some of the canvases is dry on the surface, but not enough to be rolled, or else I would send them.

McKnight has a friend with him now, I never see any of his work. Yesterday I showed four or five new studies to him and his friend; they looked at them in frosty silence. I think they are preparing a surprise on their own account, and I hope it will be good, because it would give me great pleasure to see what they have found their way.

A handshake for you and Mourier if he is not already installed in the studio à la Gérôme.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 23 June 1888

My dear Bernard,
You do very well to be reading the Bible. I begin with that, because I have always refrained from advising you to do so. As I read the many sayings of Moses, Luke, etc., I couldn't help thinking, you know, that's all he needs - and now it has come to pass…the artistic neurosis. For that is what the study of Christ inevitably leads to, especially in my case, where it is aggravated by the smoking of innumerable pipes.

The Bible is Christ, for the Old Testament leads to that culmination. Paul and the evangelists stand on the other slope of the holy mountain.

How small-minded the old story really is! My God! Does the world consist solely of Jews, who declare from the very start that all those who are different from them are impure?

Why didn't the other nations under the great sun over there, the Egyptians, the Indians, the Ethiopians, Babylon and Nineveh, record their annals with the same care? Well, anyway, the study of it is beautiful, and, after all, being able to read everything would be tantamount to not being able to read at all.

But the consolation of that deeply saddening Bible, which arouses our despair and indignation, which seriously offends us and thoroughly confuses us with its pettiness and infectious foolishness - the consolation it contains like a stone inside a hard rind and bitter pulp, is Christ.

Only Delacroix and Rembrandt have painted the face of Christ in such a way that I can feel him…and then Millet painted…the teachings of Christ.

The rest rather makes me laugh, the rest of religious painting - from the religious point of view, not from the point of view of painting. And the Italian primitives - Botticelli, or let's say the Flemish primitives, Van Eyck, the German, Cranach - they are no more than heathens who only interest me for the same reason as do the Greeks, Velásquez and so many other naturalists.

Christ alone, of all the philosophers, magicians, etc., has affirmed eternal life as the most important certainty, the infinity of time, the futility of death, the necessity and purpose of serenity and devotion. He lived serenely, *as an artist greater than all other artists*, scorning marble and clay and paint, working in the living flesh. In other words, this peerless artist, scarcely conceivable with the blunt instrument of our modern, nervous and obtuse brains, made neither statues nor paintings nor books. He maintained in no uncertain terms that he made…*living men*, immortals.

That is a profoundly serious matter, the more so as it is the truth.

Nor did this great artist write books. Christian literature as a whole would undoubtedly have aroused his ire, and includes very few literary works beyond Luke's Gospel or Paul's epistles - so simple in their austere and militant form - that would have found favour in his eyes.

This great artist - Christ - although he did not concern himself with writing books on ideas (sensations), felt considerably less disdain for the spoken word, and for parables in particular (what a sower, what a harvest, what a fig tree! etc.).

And who would dare claim that he lied on that day when, scornfully predicting the destruction of Rome, he said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

These spoken words - which, like a prodigal grand seigneur, he did not even deign to write down - form one of the pinnacles, the highest pinnacle, reached by art, which at that point becomes creative force, pure creative force.

These thoughts, Bernard, dear friend, lead us far, very far, afield, they raise us above art itself. They give us a glimpse of the art of life-creation, the art of being immortal and alive. They are bound up with painting. The patron saint of painters - Luke, physician, painter, evangelist - who has as a symbol, alas, nothing more than an ox, gives us hope.

Yet our own life is a modest one indeed, our life as painters, languishing under the back-breaking yoke of the problems of a calling that is almost too hard to practise on this ungrateful planet, where “love of art drives out true love.”

However, since nothing confutes the assumption that lines and forms and colours exist on innumerable other planets and suns as well, we are at liberty to feel fairly serene about the possibilities of painting in a better and different existence, an existence altered by a phenomenon that is perhaps no more ingenious and no more surprising than the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly or of a grub into a maybug.

The existence of a painter-butterfly would be played out on the countless celestial bodies which, after death, should be no more inaccessible to us than the black dots on maps that symbolize towns and villages are in our earthly lives.

Science - scientific reasoning - strikes me as being an instrument that will go a very long way in the future.

For look: people used to think that the earth was flat. That was true, and still is today, of, say, Paris to Asnières.

But that does not alter the fact that science demonstrates that the earth as a whole is round, something nobody nowadays disputes.

For all that, people still persist in thinking that *life is flat* and runs from birth to death.

But life, too, is probably round, and much greater in scope and possibilities than the hemisphere we now know.

Future generations will probably be able to enlighten us on this very interesting subject, and then science itself - with all due respect - may reach conclusions that are more or less in keeping with Christ's sayings about the other half of our life.

Be that as it may, the fact is that we are painters in real life, and it's a matter of continuing to draw breath while one has breath left in one's body.

Oh, what a beautiful picture that is by Eug. Delacroix, Christ in the Boat on the Sea of Gennesaret! He - with his pale lemon-yellow aureole, sleeping, luminous in the dramatic purple, dark-blue, blood-red patch of the group of bewildered disciples - on that terrible emerald-green sea, rising, rising, right to the top of the frame. Ah, what an inspired conception! I would do a sketch of it for you, but because I've been drawing and painting a model - a Zouave - for three or four days now, I am all in. Writing, on the other hand, calms and diverts me.

What I've been doing looks very ugly - a drawing of a seated Zouave, a painted sketch of the Zouave against a completely white wall, and finally his portrait against a green door and some orange bricks in a wall. It is harsh, and taking it all in all, ugly and unsuccessful. Yet, because I was tackling a real difficulty with it, it may pave the way for the future.

Nearly all the figures I do look abominable in my own eyes, let alone the eyes of others. Yet the study of the figure is the most useful of all, provided one does it in a different way from that taught at, for instance, Monsieur Benjamin Constant's.

Your letter pleased me very much, the sketch is very, very interesting, and I thank you very much for it. One of these days I shall be sending you a drawing of mine. Tonight I am too exhausted, my eyes are tired even if my mind is not.

Tell me, do you remember the John the Baptist by Puvis? I find it staggeringly beautiful and as magical as Eugene Delacroix.

The passage about John the Baptist you tracked down in the Gospel means exactly what you have read in it… people crowding round a man: “Are you the Christ? Are you Elias?” As would happen today if you were to ask of impressionism or of one of its questing representatives, “Have you found it yet?” Exactly the same.

My brother is holding an exhibition of Claude Monets, 10 paintings done in

Antibes from February to May, apparently it's all very beautiful.

Have you ever read the life of Luther? Because Cranach, Dürer, Holbein belong with him. He - his personality - is the shining light of the Middle Ages.

I don't like the Sun King any more than you do - that Louis XIV was rather a killjoy, it seems to me - my God, what an utter bore that Methodist Solomon was. I don't like Solomon either and Methodists not at all. Solomon strikes me as a hypocritical heathen. I have really no respect for his architecture, an imitation of other styles, and none at all for his writings, for the heathens have done better.

Do tell me how things are going with your military service. Do you want me to speak to that second lieutenant in the Zouaves or not? Are you going to Africa or not? Do the years in Africa count double in your case or not? Try to make sure above all that your blood is all right - anaemia doesn't get you very far and your painting slows right down. You must try to acquire an iron constitution, a constitution that will allow you to grow old, you ought to live like a monk who goes to the brothel every two weeks - that's what I do myself, it isn't very poetic, but I feel it's my duty to subordinate my life to painting.

If I were at the Louvre with you, what I should very much like would be to go and see the primitives in your company. I still go, full of love, to look at the Dutch in the Louvre, Rembrandt first, Rembrandt, whom I used to study so much - and then, say, Potter, who paints a white stallion done in a meadow on a size 4 or 6 panel - a stallion neighing and aroused - forlorn under a heavy thundery sky, inconsolable in the soft green immensity of the damp meadow. In short, there are marvels among the old Dutchmen which cannot be compared to anything else.

With a handshake, and once again thanks for your letter and your sketch,

Ever yours, Vincent

P.S. The sonnets are doing well - that is to say, their colour is fine; the drawing is less strong, or rather less sure, the drawing is still hesitant - I don't know how to express it - their moral purpose is not clear.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 24 June 1888

My dear Bernard,
I don't know what I stuffed into my letter of yesterday instead of the enclosed sheet bearing on your last sonnet. The fact is that I am so worn out by work that in the evening, though writing is restful for me, I am like a machine out of gear, so much, on the other hand, has a day spent in the full sun tired me out. That's why I stuffed another sheet into my letter instead of this one.

Reading over yesterday's sheet, my Lord, I'm sending it to you just as it is, it seems legible to me, and so I'm sending it to you.

A day of hard toil again today.

If you saw my canvases, what would you say of them? You won't find the almost timid, conscientious brush stroke of Cézanne in them. But as I am now painting the same landscape, la Crau and Camargue - though at a slightly different spot - there may well remain certain connections in it in the matter of colour. What do I know about it? I couldn't help thinking of Cézanne from time to time, at exactly those moments when I realized how clumsy his touch in certain studies is - excuse the word clumsy - seeing that he probably did these studies when the mistral was blowing. As half the time I am faced with the same difficulty, I get an idea of why Cézanne's touch is sometimes so sure, whereas at other times it appears awkward. It's his easel that's reeling.

I have sometimes worked excessively fast. Is it a fault? I can't help it. For instance, I painted a size 30 canvas, the “Summer Evening” at a single sitting. Take it up again? - impossible; destroy it? - why should I! You see, I went out to do it expressly while the mistral was raging. Aren't we seeking intensity of thought rather than tranquillity of touch? But under the given conditions of working spontaneously, on the spot, and given the character of it, is a calm, well-regulated touch always possible? Goodness gracious - as little, it seems to me, as during an assault in a fencing match.

I have sent your drawing to my brother, and urgently begged him to buy something from you. If my brother can do it, he will, for he well knows how keen I must be on your selling something.

If you like, I will earmark for an exchange with you the head of the Zouave which I have painted. Only I won't speak of it unless I can let you sell something at the same time. It would be in response to your sketch of a brothel. If we two did a picture of a brothel, I feel sure that we would take my study of the Zouave for character. Ah! if only several painters agreed to collaborate on important things! The art of the future will show us examples of this perhaps. For the pictures that are *necessary* now, many would have to join hands in order to cope with the material difficulties. Alas! we haven't got as far as that yet; the art of painting doesn't move as fast as literature.

Just like yesterday, I am writing you now in a great hurry, greatly exhausted, and I am also unable to draw at the moment, my capacity to do so having been utterly exhausted by a morning in the fields.

How tired you get in the sun here! In the same way I am wholly unable to judge my own work. I cannot see whether the studies are good or bad. I have seven studies of wheat fields, all of them landscapes unfortunately, very much against my will. The landscapes yellow - old gold - done quickly, quickly, quickly and in a hurry, just like the harvester who is silent under the blazing sun, intent only on his reaping.

I cannot help thinking that you may well be surprised to see how little I like the Bible, although I have often tried to study it a little. There is only that kernel, Christ, who seems superior to me from an artistic point of view, at any rate rather different from Greek, Indian, Egyptian, Persian antiquity, though they were so far advanced. But Christ, I repeat, is more of an artist than the artists; he works in the living spirit and the living flesh, he makes *men* instead of statues. And then…I feel only too well that I am an ox - being a painter - I, who admire the bull, the eagle, Man, with a veneration that will prevent me from being ambitious.

A handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

P.S. As regards those sonnets, I add the explanation of what I mean by, their drawing is not very sure.

At the end you produce morality. You tell Society that it is infamous, because the whore reminds us of meat in the market place. That's all right, the whore is like meat in a butcher's shop. I, though, having become a mere brute, I understand, I feel it, I rediscover a sensation in my own life; I say, That is well spoken - for the sonorous rhythm of the colourful words evoke for me with great intensity the brutal reality of the slums, but on *me, the brute,* the reproaches directed against society, such hollow words as “le bon Dieu” - the good God - no longer make any impression. I say, That isn't the real thing - and I sink back into my brutish state; I forget poetry, which was powerful enough at first to dispel my stupefaction.

Is this true or not?

Establishing facts, as you do in the beginning, is cutting with the scalpel as the surgeon does when he explains anatomy. I listen, attentively and full of interest, but when the dissecting surgeon later starts moralizing at me like that, then I don't think his final tirade has the same value as his demonstration.

Studying, analyzing society means more than moralizing any time.

Nothing would seem queerer to me than saying, for instance, Here is that meat from the market place; now observe how, in spite of everything, it may be electrified for a moment by the stimulus of a more refined and unexpected love.

Just like the sated caterpillar that doesn't eat any more, that crawls on a wall instead of crawling on a cabbage leaf, so this sated female can no longer love, even if she does her best. She is seeking, seeking, seeking - does she herself know what? She is conscious, alive, sensitive, galvanized, rejuvenated for a moment - but impotent.

Yet she can still love, so she is alive - here no prevarication is possible - although she may be finished and dying the death of a terrestrial beast. Where will this butterfly emerge from the chrysalis? This butterfly that was a sated caterpillar, this cockchafer that was a white grub?

Well, this is where I have got to in my study of old whores. I too should like to know approximatively what I am the larva of myself, perhaps.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 June 1888

My dear Theo,
I suppose it was to convince me that, being myself one of the most absent-minded of mortals, I have no right whatever to reproach these Southerners with their carelessness. I was idiot enough once more to address my letter 54 Rue de Laval, instead of 54 Rue Lepic, so the post-office clerks, who sent me back the letter opened, have had the pleasure of edifying themselves by the contemplation of Bernard's brothel. I hasten to send on the letter as it is.

This morning I received part of the order for paints from Tanguy.

His cobalt is too bad for us to order any more of it from him. As his chromes are rather good, we can go on ordering those. But instead of carmine he sent some dark madder, which isn't too important, but not to have any more carmine at all would mean a very serious shortage in his poor old show. It is not his fault, but in the future I will put “Tanguy” beside the names of the paints that one can buy from him.

Yesterday and today I worked on the sower, which I have completely worked over. The sky is yellow and green, the ground violet and orange. There is certainly a picture of this kind to be painted of this splendid subject, and I hope it will be done someday, either by me or by someone else.

This is the point. The “Christ in the Boat” by Eugène Delacroix and Millet's “The Sower” are absolutely different in execution. The “Christ in the Boat” - I am speaking of the sketch in blue and green with touches of violet, red and a little citron-yellow for the nimbus, the halo - speaks a symbolic language through colour alone.

Millet's “Sower” is a colourless *grey*, like Israëls's pictures.

Now, could you paint the Sower in colour, with a simultaneous contrast of, for instance, yellow and violet (like the Apollo ceiling of Delacroix's *which is just that, yellow and violet*), yes or no? Why, *yes*. Well, do it then. Yes, that is what old Martin said, “The masterpiece is up to you.” But try it, and you tumble into a regular metaphysical philosophy of colour à la Monticelli, a mess that is damnably difficult to get out of with honour.

And it makes you as absent-minded as a sleepwalker. And yet if only one could do something good.

Well, let's be of good heart, and not despair. I hope to send you this attempt along with some others soon. I have a view of the Rhône - the iron bridge at Trinquetaille - in which the sky and the river are the colour of absinthe; the quays, a shade of lilac; the figures leaning on their elbows on the parapet, blackish; the iron bridge, an intense blue, with a note of vivid orange in the blue background, and a note of intense malachite green. Another very crude effort, and yet I am trying to get at something utterly heartbroken and therefore utterly heartbreaking.

Nothing from Gauguin. I certainly hope to get your letter tomorrow. Forgive my carelessness. A handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Many thanks for the paints. Goodbye for now.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 29 June 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter, for the 50-franc note and the package of Tasset's paints and canvases which has just arrived. He has put in his bill, which comes to 50.85 fr., so that I have been able to check his prices and compare them with Édouard's. They are considerably lower than Édouard's, so that with the 20% discount, we have nothing to complain of. As for his canvas at 4.50 fr., I shall probably now be able to find out the manufacturer's price per piece.

Your letter brings great news, namely that Gauguin agrees to our plan. Certainly the best thing would be for him to come rushing here at once. Instead of getting out of a mess, he will probably get into one if he goes to Paris first.

Perhaps he might make a deal with the pictures he will be bringing along with him, which would be great luck. Herewith the reply.

I only want to say this, that not only am I enthusiastic about painting in the South, but equally so about the North, because I am in better health than six months ago. So that if it is wiser to go to Brittany, where you get board and lodging so cheaply - from the point of view of expense I am certainly ready to come back to the North. But it would be good for him too to come to the Midi, especially as it will already be winter in the North in four months. And it seems so certain to me that two people doing precisely the same work ought, if circumstances prevent them spending more, to be able to live at home on bread, wine, and anything in short that you'd want to add. The difficulty is eating at home *alone*. The restaurants here are expensive because everybody eats at home.

Certainly the Picards and the Leonardo da Vinci too are not less beautiful because they are few, and on the other hand the Montcellis, the Daumiers, the Corots, the Daubignys and the Millets are not ugly because in so many cases they have been painted with very great rapidity and because there are relatively a good many of them. As for landscapes, I begin to find that some done more rapidly than ever are the best of what I do. For instance, the one I sent you the cartoon of, the harvest, and the stacks too. It is true that I have to retouch the *whole* to adjust the brushwork a bit, and to make the touch harmonious, but all the essential work was done in a single long sitting, and I change them as little as possible when I'm retouching.

But when I come home after a spell like that, I assure you my head is so tired that if that kind of work keeps recurring, as it has done since this harvest began, I become hopelessly absent-minded and incapable of heaps of ordinary things.

It is at times like these that the prospect of not being alone is not disagreeable.

And very often indeed I think of that excellent painter Monticelli - who they said was such a drinker, and off his head - when I come back myself from the mental labour of balancing the six essential colours, red - blue - yellow - orange - lilac - green. Sheer work and calculation, with one's mind strained to the utmost, like an actor on the stage in a difficult part, with a hundred things to think of at once in a single half hour.

After that, the only thing to bring ease and distraction, in my case and other people's too, is to stun oneself with a lot of drinking or heavy smoking. Not very virtuous, no doubt, but it's to return to the subject of Monticelli. I'd like to see a drunkard in front of a canvas or on the boards. It is too gross a lie, all the Roquette woman's malicious, Jesuitical slanders about Monticelli.

Monticelli, the logical colourist, able to pursue the most complicated calculations, subdivided according to the scales of tones that he was balancing, certainly over-strained his brain at this work, just as Delacroix did, and Richard Wagner.

And if perhaps he did drink, it was because he - and Jongkind too - having a stronger constitution than Delacroix, and more physical ailments (Delacroix was better off), well, if they hadn't drunk - I for one am inclined to believe - their nerves would have rebelled, and played them other tricks: Jules and Edmond de Goncourt said the very same thing, word for word - “We used to smoke very strong tobacco to stupefy ourselves” in the furnace of creation.

Don't think that I would maintain a feverish condition artificially, but understand that I am in the midst of a complicated calculation long *beforehand*. So now, when anyone says that such and such is done too quickly, you can reply that they have looked at it too quickly. Apart from that I am now busy going over all my canvases a bit before sending them to you. But during the harvest my work was not any easier than what the peasants who were actually harvesting were doing. Far from complaining of it, it is just at these times in artistic life, even though it is not the real one, that I feel almost as happy as I could be in the ideal, in that real life.

If all goes well, and Gauguin sees fit to join us, we could put the thing on a firmer footing by suggesting he put *all* his pictures together with mine, and share profit and loss. But either that will not happen, or it will happen of itself, according to whether he thinks my painting good or bad, and also according to whether or not we co-operate.

Now I must write to Russell and I am going to urge him to make an exchange with me. I must work hard to try to sell something on my part to help with the expenses, but we must be of good heart in spite of the difficulties, and working as we are to safeguard the artists' life, it will fire our blood.

A handshake, I'll write again soon. I'm going into the Camargue for two or three days to make some drawings there. I am glad that you are sending for our sister.

Ever yours, Vincent

I'll write Mourier one of these days, *you will read the letter*, you will see how I will talk to him - I can see the picture from here!!! the head like a Delaroche.

Have patience with M. a little longer. Perhaps he is going through a crisis.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 5 July 1888

My dear Theo,
Work engrosses me so much that I cannot manage to write letters. I should have liked to write Gauguin again, because I'm afraid that he is worse than he said; his last letter in pencil looked very much as though he were.

If it's true, what's to be done? I have had no reply from Russell yet. Yesterday at sunset I was on a stony heath where some very small and twisted oaks grow; in the background, a ruin on the hill, and wheat in the valley. It was romantic, you can't escape it, like Monticelli; the sun was pouring bright yellow rays on the bushes and the ground, a perfect shower of gold. And all the lines were lovely, the whole thing nobly beautiful. You would not have been a bit surprised to see knights and ladies suddenly appear, coming back from hunting or hawking, or to have heard the voice of some old Provençal troubadour. The fields looked violet, the distances blue. I brought back a study, but it is very far below what I tried to do.

Tasset did not send enough zinc white the other day. I get on very well using it, but it has the disadvantage of drying very slowly, so that the studies made at Stes.-Maries, for instance, are not yet dry. I was planning to go into the Camargue, but the veterinary surgeon who was to have taken me with him on his rounds has left me in the lurch. I don't much care, as I have only a moderate affection for wild bulls.

To my amazement I can already see the bottom of my purse, though it is true that I have had to pay my month's rent.

You must realize that when I take the money for food and lodging out of it, all the rest goes into canvases. Altogether these are pretty expensive, not counting the trouble they give.

I dare hope that someday we'll get back part of the money we spend, and if I had more money, I should spend even more to try to get a very rich colouring.

Here is a new subject. A corner of a garden with clipped shrubs and a weeping tree, and in the background some clumps of oleanders. And the lawn just cut with long trails of hay drying in the sun, and a little corner of blue sky at the top.

I am in the middle of reading Balzac, César Birotteau. I will send it to you when I have finished it - I think I shall read the whole of Balzac again.

When I came here I hoped it would be possible to make some connection with art lovers here, but up to the present I haven't made the least progress in people's affection. And Marseilles? I don't know, but that may very well be nothing but an illusion. In any case I have quite given up gambling much on it. Often whole days pass without my speaking to anyone, except to ask for dinner or coffee. And it has been like that from the beginning.

But up to now the loneliness has not worried me much because I have found the brighter sun and its effect on nature so absorbing.

Write me a day or two early if you can, the end of the week will be rather tough.

With a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 7 July 1888

My dear Theo,

If we take a whole length of ordinary canvas, this is the net price - I have just found it out by chance:

Ordinary rough yellow canvas, width two yards

No. 0, 10 yards in the piece, price 40 francs.

The discount is certainly 25 per cent, probably the factory price at first hand 33 1/3 Per cent.

So here is an opportunity to check Tasset's prices. Whether or not we set aside the five yards I ordered, it would be better to take a whole piece. As I have recently bought some canvases, the stretchers of which I shall keep, the advantage is considerable.

To make a size 30 canvas, not counting the stretcher I have, the canvas will cost me 1 fr. 50 (the price mentioned above) and at present, with the stretcher, it costs 4 Fr. Figure 1 fr. for the stretcher, which costs less, that makes a difference of 1.50 fr. and more on each size 30 canvas, the extra will go toward the carriage, which will be 5 francs.

Just see, if you can, what Tasset says when you ask him the price of the piece, but what I have just given you as the price per piece is correct, and you can compare.

Do you remember among the little drawings a wooden bridge with a washing place, and a view of the town in the distance? I have just painted that subject in a large size.

I must warn you that everyone will think that I work too fast.

Don't you believe a word of it.

Is it not emotion, the sincerity of one's feeling for nature, that draws us, and if the emotions are sometimes so strong that one works without knowing one works, when sometimes the strokes come with a continuity and a coherence like words in a speech or a letter, then one must remember that it has not always been so, and that in time to come there will again be hard days, empty of inspiration.

So one must strike while the iron is hot, and put the forged bars on one side.

I have not yet done half the 50 canvases fit to be shown in public, and I must do them all this year.

I know beforehand that they will be criticized as *hasty*.

I know also that I hope to stick to my argument of this winter, when we were talking about an association of artists. Not that I still have any great desire for it or hope to realize it, but as it was seriously thought out, it is our duty to go on taking it seriously and to retain the right to come back to the question.

If Gauguin won't come to work with me, then I have no other means than my work to set against my expenses. This prospect is only moderately alarming. If my health does not betray me, I shall polish off my canvases, and there will be some that will do among them.

I am almost reconciled to the orchard, the one not on stretchers, and its pendant with the stippling. They may pass muster in the crowd. But I have *less trouble* working in the full heat than I did in the spring. I shall soon send you some rolled-up canvases, and the others one by one, as it becomes possible to roll them.

I should very much like to double the order for the *zinc whites*. This zinc white is partly the reason why they dry so slowly, but it has advantages in mixing.

Wasn't it rather pleasant this winter at Guillaumin's to find the landing and even the staircase, not to mention the studio, quite full of canvases? You can understand, therefore, that I have a certain ambition - it's not the *number* of canvases, but just that the very mass of them represents real labour, on your part as well as on mine. The wheatfields have been a reason for working, just like the orchards in bloom. And I only just have time to get ready for the next campaign, that of the vineyards.

And between the two I'd like to do some more marines.

The orchards meant pink and white; the wheatfields, yellow; and the marines, blue. Perhaps now I shall begin to look around a bit for greens. There's the autumn, and that will give the whole scale of the lyre.

I am very curious to know what Gauguin will do. The great thing is not to discourage him, but I think all the same that his whole plan is nothing but a freak.

You do know what I want to repeat once again, that my personal wishes are subordinate to the interests of others, and I still think that someone else might profit from the money that I spend alone. Either Vignon, or Gauguin, or

Bernard, or someone else.

And that I am ready for some such combination, even if it means leaving here.

Two people who have some sort of understanding, or even three, do not spend much more than one.

Not even on paint.

So then, without counting the extra work done, you would have the satisfaction of keeping two or three going instead of one.

This sooner or later. And provided that I am as strong as the others, believe me there wouldn't be much chance of disappointment, seeing that if they had difficulties with their work, I should have been through those difficulties myself, and I'd know what it was all about. So that one would have a perfect right, it might even be one's duty, to urge them to work.

And that is what must be done.

If I am alone - I can't help it, but honestly I have less need of company than of furiously hard work, and that is why I am boldly ordering canvas and paints. It's the only time I feel I am alive, when I am drudging away at my work.

If I had company, I should feel it less of a necessity; or rather I'd work at more complicated things.

But alone, I only count on the exaltation that comes to me at certain moments, and then I let myself run on extravagances.

So the canvases that I bought here not so long ago are almost all used up, When I send you the rolled-up canvases, perhaps you could take a goodish lot of stuff that isn't very important off the stretchers, so that, by the end of the year, we may be able to show, say, 50 pieces to Pissarro and the others.

And the rest - I mean the studies - will be a stock for reference, and when they are properly dry, they can be kept in a portfolio or cupboard, without their taking up too much space.

A handshake for you and the comrades, if you see any of them.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 8 July 1888

My dear Theo,
Thank you for your letter and the 50-franc note enclosed. As for the Tanguy business, don't get mixed up in it. Only I beg you not to risk entrusting him with the new pictures, but withdraw them in answer to his presenting an account and asking for an advance.

Believe me, you have the *Tanguy woman* to deal with, and if not, *and if he himself is behaving like this, then he is playing me false*. Tanguy still has a study of mine which he himself expected to sell. *At the most* I owe him that, but I do not owe him a penny in money. To begin to argue about it would mean an argument with the old woman, which no mortal could stand. According to them (the Tanguys), Guillaumin, Monet and Gauguin must all owe them money - is that true or not? Anyway, if they do not pay, why should I pay? I am sorry I thought of getting paints from him again to please him. He can be sure that in the future I shall get no more. In dealing with the old woman, who is poisonous, it's deeds you want, not words. Do, I beg you, get back my new pictures. That is enough. Tanguy's zinc white at 40 centimes is just a little more expensive than Tasset's big tubes at 1.50 fr., which hold four times as much. Leave Tanguy the study he has of Asnières, a bank of the Seine - strictly speaking, it belongs to him, but kick him out afterward, and without mercy.

If you give them something on account, it would be acknowledging a debt that I make bold to deny. Never, *so do not let yourself be caught*. The *only* money I really owe is to Bing, in that I still have 90 francs' worth of Japanese stuff on commission. But when you think of how many people I have sent straight to Bing's, it is more profitable to him to let that go, and even if I were still on the spot to occupy myself with it, I'd rather increase the stock so as to be able to do more business with it.

And the real reason why I do not ask Bing for commission is that in case of any claim, I could bring it up. This is to let you know that any other claims are probably invalid. I am concentrating on making my pictures have some market value. You know that I have only one means of arriving at this end - and that is, by painting them. But I tell myself that if I can manage to do 50 studies at 200 francs this year, in a way I shall not have been very dishonest in having eaten and drunk as though I had a right to it.

Now this is pretty steep, because though I have at the moment about thirty painted studies, I do not value them all at that price. All the same, some of them must be worth it. But the cost of executing them leaves me very, very poor for all that; I should not harp on it if people like friend (?) Tanguy did not come along to ask for a settlement of a debt that is infinitely doubtful. Whatever money you might have to spare for that purpose, my Lord, I am in greater need of it here.

I stint myself in many things, not that I think that a hardship, but I think that the money which I shall need in the future depends rather on the vigour of my efforts now.

They made trouble at the post office, saying that the drawings which I was sending you were too big to be forwarded that way. I have two new big ones. When there are six of them I will send them in a roll by rail. I argue that if the studies have difficulty drying here in the heat, it would be a good deal harder for them to dry at your place, and so I delay sending them off.

I have scraped off a big painted study, an olive garden, with a figure of Christ in blue and orange, and an angel in yellow. Red earth, hills green and blue, olive trees with violet and carmine trunks, and green-grey and blue foliage. A citron-yellow sky. I scraped it off because I tell myself that I must not do figures of that importance without models.

Certainly it would be better to my way of thinking if Gauguin came here, with the winter coming on. Still no answer from Russell. Bock is staying with McKnight, and it seems that he is working very hard, but I have seen nothing yet. He is a young man whose appearance I like very much, a face like a razor blade, green eyes, and a touch of distinction. McKnight looks very common beside him.

After what you told me about him, I am going to see him this afternoon.

I read that Bing is giving a Japanese exhibition and publishing a review on Japanese art. Have you seen it? I find it dreadful sometimes not to be able to get hold of another batch of Japanese prints. Then better try to make some oneself. Have you read Loti's book Madame Chrysanthème? Very interesting.

I have exactly the same thing to tell you today as last Thursday, the end of the week will be very rough going. If you can send your next letter a day or two earlier, so much the better.

Have you been able to find that book of A. Cassagne's, the A B C D of Drawing? I really do need it.

Mourier certainly ought to buy one for himself. I'll write Russell again, though I think it would be better to wait for his reply. But anyway, I'll write this evening, and that is the real reason why I am going to see his friends McKnight and Bock, so as to be able to talk about them and have an excuse for writing him before he replies.

If the four other drawings that I have in mind are like the first two I have done, then you will have an epitome of a very beautiful corner of Provence. It was very nice of Guillaumin to come to look, I am very much obliged to him, but on the whole I myself am dissatisfied with everything I do.

Why move about much? When I see the orchards again, shan't I be in a better condition, and won't it be something new, a renewed attack on a new season, on the same subject. And the same for the whole year, for harvesttime, and the vineyards, for everything.

I would like to send you the 30 studies now, in case this might make it easier to find the money for Gauguin's coming.

Well done, Schoeffenecker! And old Thomas really ought to buy 100 francs' worth from me or from Gauguin, and then we'd almost have it. What is Bing's exhibition like?

If you see their manager there, tell him that I am here, and that I ask them to leave my deposit alone, and that if I were there, I should exert myself more for him. The Lautrecs have just come, I think they are beautiful. Good-by for the present. I'll write again soon, but don't get into a panic over the Tanguy woman, for there's no justice in it, and it annoys me to find old Tanguy behaving like this. You may be sure that if I owed him the money, I'd say so, but it was on different terms, that is to say that I never pay in cash, but that he has a lien on the pictures, and *even that only by agreement*.

Ever yours, Vincent

You can count on it that Bernard will have the same problem with the Tanguys, only worse.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 9 July 1888

Arles, c.9th. July 1888

My Dear Theo,

I have come back from a day at Mont Majour, and my friend the sub-lieutenant kept me company. The two of us explored the old garden and stole excellent figs there. If it had been bigger it would have made me think of Zola's Paradou, great reeds, vines, ivy, fig trees, olive trees, pomegranates with lusty flowers of the brightest orange, hundred-year-old cypresses, ash trees and willows, rock oaks, half-demolished flights of steps, ogive windows in ruins, blocks of white rock covered with lichen, and scattered fragments of collapsed walls here and there among the greenery. I brought back another big drawing, but not of the garden. That makes three drawings. When I have half a dozen of them I will send them.

Yesterday I went to Fontvieilles to pay a visit to Bock and Mac Knight, only these gentlemen had gone on a little trip to Switzerland for 8 days.

I think the heat is still doing me good, in spite of the mosquitoes and flies.

The grasshoppers — not like those at home, but like this, like those you see in Japanese albums;

and gold and green Cantharides in swarms on the olive trees. These grasshoppers (I think they are called cicada) sing at least as loud as a frog.

I have again been thinking that when you remember that I painted the portrait of père Tanguy, and that he also had the portrait of mother Tanguy (which they sold), and of their friend (it is true that for this latter portrait I was paid 20 francs by him), and that I have bought without discount 250 francs worth of paints from Tanguy, on which naturally he made something, and finally that I have been his friend no less than he has been mine, I have very serious reason to doubt his right to claim money from me; and it really is squared by the study he still has of mine, all the more so because there was an express arrangement that he should pay himself by the sale of a picture.

Xanthippe, Mother Tanguy, and some other ladies have by some queer freak of Nature heads of silex or flint. Certainly these ladies are a good deal more dangerous in civilized society they circulate in than the poor citizens bitten by mad dogs who live in the Pasteur Institute. And old Tanguy would be right a thousand times over to kill his lady…but he won't do it, any more than Socrates.

And for this reason old Tanguy has more in common — in resignation and long suffering anyhow — with the ancient Christian martyrs and slaves, than with the present day pimps of Paris.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to pay him 80 francs, but it is a reason for never losing your temper with him, even if he loses his, when, as you may do in this instance, you chuck him out, or at least send him packing.

I am writing to Russell at the same time. I think we know, don't we, that the English, the Yankees, have this much in common with the Dutch, that their charity…is very Christian. Now, the rest of us not being very good Christians… That's what I can't put out of my head writing again like this.

This Bock has a head rather like a Flemish gentleman of the time of the Compromise of the Nobles, of the time of Taciturn [William the Silent] and Marnix. I shouldn't wonder if he's a decent fellow.

I have written to Russell that I would send him my parcel in a roll direct to him, for our exchange, if I knew that he was in Paris.

That means he must in any case answer me soon. Now I shall soon need some more canvas and paints. But I have not yet got the address of that canvas at 40 francs for 20 meters.

I think it is well to work especially at drawing just now, and to arrange to have paints and canvas in reserve for when Gauguin comes. I wish paint was as little of a worry to work with as pen and paper. I often pass up a painted study for fear of wasting the colour.

With paper, whether it's a letter I'm writing or a drawing I'm working on, there's never a misfire — so many leaves of Whatman, so many drawings. I think that if I were rich I should spend less than I do now.

Well, old Martin would say, then it's up to you to get rich, and he is right, as he is about the masterpiece.

Do you remember reading in Guy de Maupassant the gentleman hunter of rabbits and other game, and who had hunted so hard for ten years, and was so exhausted by running after the game that when he wanted to get married he found he was impotent, which caused him the greatest embarrassment and consternation.

Without being in the same state as this gentleman as to its being either my duty or my desire to get married, I begin to resemble him in physique. According to the worthy master Ziem, man becomes ambitious once he becomes impotent. Now though it's pretty much all one to me whether I am impotent or not, I'm damned if that's going to drive me to ambition.

It is only the greatest philosopher of his place and time, and consequently of all places and all times, good old master Pangloss who could — if he were here

— give me advice and calm my soul.

There — the letter to Russell is in its envelope, and I have written as I intended. I asked him if he had any news of Reid, and I ask you the same question.

I told Russell I left him free to take what he liked, and from the first consignment I sent as well. And that I was only waiting for his explicit answer, to know whether he preferred to make his choice at his or your place; that if, in the former circumstance, he wanted to see them at his own house, you would send him along some orchards as well, and fetch the lot back again when he had made his choice. So he cannot quarrel with that. If he takes nothing from Gauguin it is because he cannot. If he can, I am hoping that he will.

I told him that if I ventured to press him to buy, it was not because nobody else would if he didn't, but because Gauguin, having been ill, and with the further complication of his having been laid up in bed and having to pay his doctor, it all fell rather heavily on us; and we were all the more anxious to find a purchaser for a painting.

I am thinking a lot about Gauguin, and I would have plenty of ideas for pictures, and about work in general.I have a charwoman now for 1 franc, who sweeps and scrubs the house for me twice a week. I am banking very much on her, counting on her to make our beds if we decide to sleep in the house. Otherwise we could make some arrangement with the fellow where I am staying now. Anyhow, we'll try to manage so that it would work out as an economy instead of more expense. How is your health now? Are you still going to Gruby?

What you tell me of that conversation at the Nouvelle Athènes is interesting. You know the little portrait by Desboutin that Portier has very well.

It certainly is a strange phenomenon that all the artists, poets, musicians, painters, are unfortunate in material things — the happy ones as well — what you said lately about Guy de Maupassant is a fresh proof of it. That brings up again the eternal question: is life completely visible to us, or isn't it rather that this side of death we see one hemisphere only?

Painters — to take them only — being dead and buried, speak to the next generation or to several succeeding generations through their work.

Is that all, or is there more besides? In a painter's life death is not perhaps the hardest thing there is.

For my own part, I declare I know nothing whatever about it. But to look at the stars always makes me dream, as simply as I dream over the black dots of a map representing towns and villages. Why, I ask myself, should the shining dots of the sky not be as accessible as the black dots on the map of France? If we take the train to get to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to reach a star. One thing undoubtedly true in this reasoning is this: that while we are alive we cannot get to a star, any more than when we are dead we can take the train.

So it doesn't seem impossible to me that cholera, gravel, pleurisy & cancer are the means of celestial locomotion, just as steam-boats, omnibuses and railways are the terrestrial means. To die quietly of old age would be to go there on foot.

Now I am going to bed, because it is late, and I wish you good night and good luck.

A handshake, Yours
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 13 July 1888

My dear Theo,

I have just send off to you by post a roll containing five big pen drawings. You have a sixth of that series from Mont Majour - a group of very dark pines and the town of Arles in the background. Afterward I want to add a view of the whole of the ruins (you have a hurried scratch of it among the small drawings).

Since I cannot help at all with money just at this moment when we are entering this combination with Gauguin, I have done all I could to show through my work that I have had the plan at heart. In my opinion the two views of the Crau and of the country on the banks of the Rhône are the best things I have done in pen and ink. If Thomas should happen to want them, he cannot have them for less than 100 fr. each. Even if in that case I had to *make him a present* of the *three* others, as we must get some money. But we cannot give them for less. Not everyone would have the patience to get themselves devoured by mosquitoes and to struggle against the nagging malice of this constant mistral, not to mention that I have spent whole days outside with a little bread and milk, since it was too far to go back to the town every once in a while.

I have already said more than once how much the Camargue and the Crau, except for the difference in colour and in the clearness of the atmosphere, remind me of the old Holland of Ruysdael's time. I think that these two I've spoken of, the flat countryside covered with vines and stubble fields, seen from a height, will give you an idea of it.

Believe me I am tired out by these drawings. I have begun a painting as well, but there is no way of doing it with the mistral blowing - there's absolutely nothing doing.

Well now, about this canvas, I have compared Tasset's new canvas at 4.50 fr. with the price of the same quality at Bourgeois' (I ferreted out the price of the ordinary canvas as 40 fr. for 20 square meters from his catalogue). Well, once more Tasset has been no more expensive, it was *exactly* the same price. It follows that in just the same way we ought to be able to get the ordinary canvas from Tasset at 2 francs the square meter, and in the future we could do well to get this, for it is certainly good enough for the studies.

Please let me have a line at once to say if the drawings have arrived in good condition. They swore at me again at the post office because they were too big, and I am afraid perhaps they may make trouble in Paris. They took them, however, I was glad of that, because after the celebrations of July 14 you may be pleased to refresh your eyes with the wide-open spaces of the Crau.

The fascination that these huge plains have for me is very strong, so that I felt no *weariness*, in spite of the really wearisome circumstances, mistral and mosquitoes. If a view makes you forget these little annoyances, it must have something in it. You will see, however, that there is no attempt at effect. At first sight it is like a map, a strategic plan as far as the *execution* goes. Besides, I walked there *with a painter*, and he said, “There is something that would be boring to paint.” Yet I went fully fifty times to Mont Majour to look at this flat landscape, and was I wrong? I went for a walk there with someone else who was *not a painter*, and when I said to him, “Look, to me that is as beautiful and as infinite as the sea,” he said - and he knows the sea - “For my part I like this *better* than the sea, because it is no less infinite, and yet you feel that it is *inhabited*.”

What a picture I would make of it if there was not this damn wind. That is the maddening thing here, no matter where you set up your easel. And that is largely why the painted studies are not so finished as the drawings; the canvas is shaking all the time.

It does not bother me when I am drawing.

Have you read *Mme*. Chrysanthème? It gave me the impression that the real Japanese have *nothing on their walls*, that description of the cloister or pagoda where there was *nothing* (the drawings and curiosities all being hidden in the drawers). That is how you must look at Japanese art, in a very bright room, quite bare, and open to the country.

Would you like to experiment with these two drawings of the Crau and the banks of the Rhône, *which do not look Japanese*, but which really are, perhaps more so than some others? Look at them in some café where it's clear and blue and nothing else in the way, or else outside. Perhaps they need a reed frame, like a thin stick. Here I work in a bare room, four white walls and a red paved floor. If I urge you to look at these two drawings in this way, it is because I so much want to give you a *true idea* of the simplicity of nature here. Well, as to Gauguin, suppose we show the drawings, and the harvest too, and the Zouave, to Thomas?

A handshake, and thank you for the two tubes of zinc white that Tasset has just sent. I am curious to know if Mourier will remember the spots.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 15 July 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

Perhaps you will be inclined to forgive me for not replying to your letter immediately, when you see that I am sending you a little batch of sketches along with this letter.

In the sketch “The Garden” maybe there is something like

“Des tapis velus
De fleurs et de verdures tissus”
[Shaggy carpets woven
Of flowers and greenery]

by Crivelli or Virelli, it doesn't matter much which.

Well, anyway, I wanted to answer your quotations with the pen, but not by writing down words. Today too I am hardly in a mood for discussions; I am up to my ears in work.

I have done some large pen-and-ink drawings. Two: an immense stretch of flat country, a bird's-eye view of it seen from the top of a hill - vineyards and fields of newly reaped wheat. All this multiplied in endless repetitions, stretching away toward the horizon like the surface of a sea, bordered by the little hills of the Crau.

It does not have a Japanese look, and yet it is really the most Japanese thing I have done; a microscopic figure of a ploughman, a little train running across the wheat field - this is all the animation there is in it.

Listen, one of the first days after I came to this spot I talked to a painter friend of mine, who said, “How boring it would be to do this.” I didn't say anything, but I thought it so astounding that I didn't even have the strength to give that idiot a piece of my mind. And I am still going there, over and over again. All right! I have done two drawings of it - of that flat landscape, where there was nothing but ... infinity - eternity.

All right! While I was drawing, there came along a fellow who is not a painter but a soldier [Milliet]. I said to him “Does it amaze you that I think this as beautiful as the sea?”

Now this fellow knew the sea. “No, it doesn't amaze me,” he said, “that you think this as beautiful as the sea, but I myself think it even more beautiful than the ocean; because it is *inhabited”*

Which of the two spectators was more of an artist, the first or the second, the painter or the soldier? Personally I prefer the soldier's eye - am I right or not?

Now it is my turn to say to you, Answer me quickly - this time by return mail - to let me know whether you will consent to make some sketches after your Breton studies for me. I have a package ready to be forwarded, but before it goes off I want to do at least halt a dozen new subjects for you, pen-and-ink sketches.

Having little doubt of what you will do for your friends, I myself shall start working all the same, even if I don't know whether or not you want to do it. You see, I am going to send these sketches to my brother to persuade him to take some of them for our collection. As a matter of fact I have already written to him on the subject; but we have started on an enterprise which leaves us absolutely without a penny. The fact is that Gauguin, who has been very ill, is probably going to spend next winter with me here, in the South. And it is the cost of his journey which causes us a lot of worry. Once he is here - my goodness, when you are two you spend less than when you are alone. All the more reason why I want to have some of your things here. Once Gauguin is here, the two of us will try to do something in Marseilles, and will probably have an exhibition there. Now I should like to have some things of yours too - without spoiling your chances of making a sale in Paris, however. At any rate I don't think you will lose by it, if I can persuade you to make a mutual exchange of sketches after painted studies. And we shall strike another bargain as soon as I can, but I am rather hard up at the moment.

I am sure of one thing - namely, if sooner or later Gauguin and I have an exhibition in Marseilles, Gauguin as well as I myself will invite you to participate in it. At last Thomas has bought Anquetin's study, “The Peasant.”

A cordial handshake; more before long,

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 15 July 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you very much for your letter and the 100-fr. note enclosed. I think now that you are right in this idea of settling Bing's bill, and for this reason I am sending you back 50 francs, But I think it would be a mistake “to have done” with Bing - ah no, on the contrary, I should not be surprised if Gauguin, like myself, wants to have some of those Japanese prints here. So do just as you think best about paying him the 90 francs of the deposit in full, and then take up a full 100 francs' worth later on. Or else Bing will only replace the stuff represented by the 50 francs enclosed.

If it were possible, seeing that the prints we have at our place are all beautiful, it would be better to take the whole stock. We get them so cheap, and can give pleasure to so many artists with them that altogether we must keep what favour we have with old Bing. I myself went to his place three times on New Year's Day to settle up, but probably because of the stock-taking, I found it shut up. Then a month later, before I left, I hadn't the money any more and I had also given a fair number of Japanese things to Bernard, when I exchanged with him.

Only, be sure to take the 300 Hokusai views of the holy mountain, as well as the pictures of Japanese life.

There is an attic in Bing's house with thousands of prints piled up, landscape and figures, and old prints too. He will let you choose for yourself some Sunday, so take plenty of old prints as well. He'll take some of them out when he goes through them, but he'll leave you many others.

As far as I could see, that manager is a very nice fellow, and decent to anybody who is genuinely interested in things.

I myself cannot understand why you do not keep the lovely Japanese things at the Boulevard Montmartre. He would give you some of the best on commission, I am sure.

However, that's none of my business anyhow, but I am keen on our own private stock. All the same, stress the point that we make *nothing* on it: that we take a good deal of trouble about it, and finally that we have sometimes been the means of sending people to him.

When I was in Paris, I always wanted to have a showroom of my own at a café, you know how that fell through.

The exhibition of prints that I had at the Tambourin influenced Anquetin and Bernard a good deal, but what a disaster that was!

As for the trouble we took over the second exhibition in the room on Boulevard de Clichy, I regret it even less: Bernard sold his first picture there, and Anquetin sold a study, and I made an exchange with Gauguin; we all got something out of it. If Gauguin likes, we could have an exhibition at Marseilles just like it. But we can't count on the Marseilles crowd any more than on Paris.

But please keep the Bing stock, it is too much of an advantage. I have rather lost than gained on it as far as money goes, but for all that, it gave me a chance to look at a lot of Japanese stuff long and composedly. Your rooms would not be what they are without the Japanese things always there.

Now the prints cost us 3 sous each, so for 100 francs, if we pay the 90 francs, we shall have a new stock of 650 prints, over and above whatever is left, or half that for the francs enclosed.

I did not count on a 100 note this month after having received 50's, thinking that you were up against the Gauguin business and our sister's visit. So I will manage on that this month.

I am working on some drawings for Russell to get him to send me some of his. I would willingly take Tanguy's flowers in exchange for another study if he despairs of the flowers. It just happens that we have hardly any more of these flowers, but his bill is as absurd as a bill which I might draw up as follows:

Portrait of Tanguy	50
Portrait of *Mme.* Tanguy	50
Portrait of *Mme.* Tanguy's friend	50
Money Tanguy has made on paints	50
Friendship, *etc.*	*50*
Total fr.	250

Settling this bill is not urgent. All the same, I should be obliged to have something on account. But that's enough.

A handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

By the way, about this book of Cassagne's, the difficulty of finding the publisher, if there is any, will be over if I tell you that the A B C D of Drawing by A. Cassagne is the *text* (sold separately, at 5 francs, I think) of Cassagne's Drawing for All, the 100 sections of which you surely know. It has just occurred to me that the book has the same publisher as the sections.

I have sent off a roll of drawings. If you went to see Thomas with these and added the (four, I think) other drawings of the same size, we might pick up a few pennies from Daddy Thomas, if you explained to him the rather exceptional reason we have at the moment for wanting to do a little business. Then again, Thomas might buy something from Gauguin if he knows of the combination we have planned.

If you pay the first deposit in full, why shouldn't we ask 200 franc's commission instead of less?

But on no account cancel the deposit. In a way all my work is founded on Japanese art, and if I have held my tongue about Bing, it is because I think that after my visit to the South, I may be able to take up the business more seriously.

Japanese art, decadent in its own country, takes root again among the French impressionist artists. It is its practical value for artists that naturally interests me more than the trade in Japanese things. All the same the trade is interesting, all the more so because of the direction French art tends to take.

Drop me a line to say if the drawings have reached you in good condition.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 15 July 1888

My dear Theo,
You will already have received my letter of this morning, in which I enclosed the 50-fr. note for Bing, and there is still more I want to write you about this Bing business! The point is that we do not know enough about Japanese prints.

Fortunately we know more about the Japanese of France, the impressionists.

So Japanese art proper, already interred in collections, already impossible to find in Japan itself, is becoming of secondary interest.

But that doesn't mean that if I had a single day to see Paris again, I should not call at Bing's to see those very Hokusais and other drawings of the great period. Besides, Bing himself used to say to me, when I was admiring the ordinary prints, that after a while I should come to see that there are quite different things still.

Loti's book *Mme.* Crysanthème taught me this much: the rooms there are bare, without decoration or ornaments. And that very thing wakened my interest in the excessively synthetic drawings of another period, which probably are to our prints what a sober Millet is to a Monticelli. You know well enough that I do not dislike Monticelli. Nor colour prints either, even when I am told, “You must get out of the habit of that.”

But at the stage we have reached, it seems to me very essential for us to recognise that sober quality which is the equivalent of the colourless Millets. That has little or nothing to do with the stock proper, which can quite well stay as it is. For I never tire of the figures and landscapes. And there are so many!

If I was not caught and absorbed in my work, how I should love to sell the whole pile. There isn't much to be made out of it. That's why no one takes it up. Nevertheless, in a few years all these prints will become very rare, and will bring higher prices. That's why we must not undervalue the small advantage we have now in rummaging through thousands of them to make our choice.

So now if you give a whole Sunday to it, and choose a 100 francs' worth of stock, you can tell yourself beforehand that you will not sell them, having chosen them yourself, unless they displease you. You can pay for them in installments, always filling in the gaps - and when the lot is finally paid for, you will still have as many more in stock. And the result will be that *whatever we like most* out of the bunch *will stay in our hands*. That is how it has come about that there are a good many old prints, already well worth a franc apiece, in what you actually have at the moment.

So please hang on to the stock and do not get rid of any fine prints - for that matter it would pay us better to get more. We already have some prints that are certainly worth 5 francs. Lord, I could not do as I liked, for I was as enthusiastic over that heap of 10,000 prints to rummage in as Thoré was over a sale of Dutch pictures, with interesting ones among them. My Lord, my work has pretty well got hold of me now, and I myself can do no more in that field, but let me commend that attic of Bing's to your attention.

I learned there myself, and I made Anquetin and Bernard learn there too. Now there is still something *to learn* at Bing's, and that is why I strongly advise you to hang on to your stock and our right to inspect the attic and cellars, and you will see how far I am from seeing it as a speculation. *Suppose* it does cost something (I myself do not think that we shall lose on it), it will not be anything tremendous.

Whatever is Reid doing??? Perhaps he has been there already on his own account, as well as Russell. I did not conceal the fact there were some at Bing's, only I said that they were 5 sous, which Bing himself had told me, or rather the manager. If you keep the stock, tell the latter again that we often send people direct to him, but that he must keep his prints at the stated price - 5 sous - not less.

I only tell you this because I have rummaged in the heap four or five times, the prints at home are the result of a stock already several times renewed.

Let's go on in the same way. It has already caused me much regret, knowing something of the heap, that I did not pay on New Year's Day and choose the new stock myself. Because there are so many one gets confused.

And there isn't the same stuff in the other shops, because people are afraid to go to Bing, thinking him expensive. The place where I haven't hunted is the *Library*, where there are hundreds, thousands of bound books.

Look here, the best thing you can do is to go and see the manager - I still cannot remember his name - give him my profound apologies please, but tell him that I went three times on New Year's Day to settle up, and that after that I went South.

Then that will get you a Claude Monet and other pictures, because if you take the trouble to ferret out the prints, you have a perfect right to use them as exchanges with painters for their pictures.

But to wind up our connection with Bing, oh never! Japanese art is a thing like the Primitives, like the Greeks, like our old Dutchmen, Rembrandt, Potter, Hals, Van der Meer, Ostade, Ruysdael. *They never pass away*.

If, however, I were seeing Bing's manager, I should tell him that when we give ourselves the trouble of finding purchasers for his prints, a whole day is gone before we know it, and at the end of it all, whether we sell or not, we lose money on it. And as for yourself, if you don't want to lose on it, I advise you to make some exchange with the painters you know; Bernard still owes you a study, to tell the truth.

But it's all to be expected, and the difficulty of working in Paris! Today I sent six drawings after painted studies to Bernard. I have promised him six more, and I have asked for some sketches after his painted studies in exchange.

And so here's General Boulanger up to his tricks again. Both sides, it seems to me, had reason enough to fight, seeing that they couldn't agree. And anyhow, at least this way there won't be any stagnation, and they can't help but get something out of it, both sides. Don't you think he speaks very badly? - Boulanger, I mean: he can make no impression speaking at all. I do not think the less of him for that, since he is in the habit of using his voice for practical purposes, for explaining things to the officers or to the arsenal superintendents. But he makes no impression whatever in public. All the same, it's a queer city, Paris, where you can only live by spilling your guts, and where you can do nothing or even less as long as you are not half dead.

I have just read Victor Hugo's L'Année Terrible. There is hope there, but… that hope is in the stars. I think it is true, and well told, and beautiful, and indeed I should be glad to believe it myself. But don't lets forget that this earth is a planet too, and consequently a star, or celestial orb. And if all the other stars were the same!!! That would not be much fun; nothing for it but to begin all over again. But in art, for which one needs *time*, it would not be bad to live more than one life. And it is rather attractive to think of the Greeks, the old Dutch masters, and the Japanese continuing their glorious school on other orbs. There, that's enough for today.

Well, here's another Sunday got through, writing you and writing Bernard. I must say, however, I haven't found it long.

A handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

If our sisters could again bring us some wood engravings and things like the Gavarni's Human Masquerade,100 lithographs, and the Charles Keenes, of which there are at least 200, it would not be a bad idea. Also there is a very fine book, Anatomy for Artists!

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 17 July 1888

My dear friend Bernard,

I've just sent you another 9 sketches after painted studies. So you'll see subjects from the scenery that inspires old man Cézanne, because the Crau near Aix is almost the same as the countryside round Tarascon or the Crau here. The Camargue is even plainer, for often there is nothing, nothing, other than poor soil and tamarisk bushes and the coarse grass that is to these bare pastures what esparto grass is to the desert.

Knowing how keen you are on Cézanne, I thought you might like these sketches of Provence; not that a drawing of mine and one by Cézanne have much in common. No, indeed, any more than Monticelli and I! But I too love the countryside they have loved so much, and for the same reasons, the colour and the logical composition.

My dear friend Bernard, by *collaboration* I did not mean to say that I think two or more painters would have to work on the same pictures. What I was driving at was paintings that differ from one another yet go together and complement one another.

Just take the Italian primitives or the German primitives or the Dutch school or the real Italians, in short, take the whole of the art of painting!

Whether they want it or not, their work forms a “group,” a “series.”

Well, now, at present the impressionists also form a group, despite all their disastrous civil wars, in which both sides have been trying to get at each other's throats with a dedication they would have done better to reserve for other ends.

In our northern school, you have Rembrandt, who heads that school because his influence may be seen in anyone who comes to know him more closely. Thus we find Paulus Potter painting rutting and excited animals in equally exciting landscapes - in a thunderstorm, in the sunshine, in the melancholy of autumn - while that selfsame Paulus Potter, before he came to know Rembrandt, was rather dry and over-fussy.

Here are two people, Rembrandt and Potter, who belong together like brothers, and even though Rembrandt probably never touched a picture by Potter with his brush, that doesn't alter the fact that Potter and Ruysdael owe him all that is best in them - the thing that moves us so deeply when we have learned how to look at a corner of old Holland as if through their temperament.

Moreover, the material problems of the painter's life make it desirable that painters should collaborate and unite (much as they did in the days of the Guilds of St. Luke). If only they would ensure their material well-being, and love one another like friends instead of making one another's life hell, painters would be happier, and in any case less ridiculous, less foolish and less culpable.

However, I shan't labour the point, because I realize that life carries us along so fast that we haven't the time to talk and to work as well. That is the reason why, with unity still a long way off, we are now sailing the trackless deep in our frail little boats, all alone on the high seas of our time.

Is it a renaissance? Is it a decline? We cannot judge, because we are too close to it not to be deceived by distorted perspectives. Contemporary events, our setbacks and successes, probably assume exaggerated proportions in our eyes.

A hearty handshake from me and I hope to hear something from you soon.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 19 July 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter, which gave me great pleasure, arriving just exactly at the moment when I was still dazed with the sun and the strain of wrestling with a rather big canvas.

I have a new drawing of a garden full of flowers, and two painted studies as well.

I must send you a new order for paints and canvas, rather a heavy one. Only it is not at all urgent. What really might be urgent is the canvas, because I have a batch of stretchers that I have taken the studies out of, and I ought to be putting new canvas on them between times.

You will see from this sketch the subject of the new studies. There is one vertical and another horizontal of the same subject, size 30 canvases. There really is a subject for a picture in it, as in other studies that I have. And I truly can't tell if I shall ever paint pictures that are peaceful and quietly worked out, for it seems to me it will always be headlong.

Have you had any news of Gauguin? I wrote him myself last week to ask how his health was and how the work was going. No reply from Russell, who cannot be in Paris according to what McKnight says; he has returned with Bock. Still a frosty silence about my work when they come.

It is true enough what you say about Prinsenhage, that it's the same story all over again, but when at long last the good soul isn't there any more, it will be one more gap and desolation for our small circle. And indeed, we shall feel it ourselves, for there is something poignant in having been influenced by him. And then to see someone whom you have always seen on the go reduced to such a condition of suspicious helplessness and continual suffering, it certainly doesn't give one a pleasant or cheery idea of human existence or heighten one's zest for life. Our mother in Breda must be getting very old too. Involuntarily - is it the effect of this Ruysdael country? - I keep thinking of Holland, and across the twofold remoteness of distance and time gone by these memories have a kind of heartbreak in them.

What you write about Reid isn't very cheering either. At times he would talk so much about turning painter and going off to an aunt in the country that it is just possible he may be in the act of carrying this plan out. What does Maria say? but perhaps she has disappeared too.

All the same, I think that the continual wind here must have something to do with the haggard look the painted studies have. Because you see it in Cézanne too.

What must make it easy for the Japanese to cram their works of art into drawers and cupboards is that the kakemonos can be rolled up, but our paintings cannot, for they would end up by scaling off. Nothing would help us to sell our canvases more than if they could gain general acceptance as decorations for middle-class houses. The way it used to be in Holland.

Down here in the South it would do one's heart good to see pictures on the white walls. But go and look - everywhere great coloured Julien medallions - horrors. And alas, we can do nothing to change this state of affairs.

However - there are the cafés - perhaps later on we'll get to decorate them.

Good-by for now - with a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 22 July 1888

My dear Theo,

If I were younger, I'm sure I'd want to suggest to old Boussod that he send you and me to London without any other salary than 200 francs a month credit, but you to get half the profit on the impressionist pictures, which they could deduct from this salary of 200 fr.

But our carcasses are no longer young, and to undertake a journey to London in order to scrape together some money for the impressionists would be a job for Boulanger, or Garibaldi, or Don Quixote. And besides, old Boussod would send us away with a flea in our ear if we suggested anything like that to him.

Only I would rather see you going to London than to New York.

These painter's fingers are growing supple, even though the carcass is going to pieces. And the merchant's head for selling - and a long job to learn it is - is getting more experience too. In our situation, which you may well say is so precarious, we must not forget our advantages, and let's try to hang on to our patience to do the right thing and see clearly. Isn't it true, for instance, that in any case it is better if someday they say to you, “Go to London,” than chuck you out, your services no longer being required?

I am getting older than you, and my ambition is to be less of a burden to you. And, if no actual obelisk of too pyramidal a catastrophe occurs, and there's no rain of frogs in the meantime, I hope to achieve it sometime.

I have just taken thirty painted studies from the stretchers. If it's only our living we're after in *business* affairs, would it be such a hardship to go to London, where I think there is more chance of selling than elsewhere? In any case, I tell myself that out of the thirty studies I shall send you, you will not be able to sell one in Paris. But then, as old Prinsenhage would say, “Everything gets sold.” And in our case, what I do is not *saleable* like the Brocharts for instance, but it can be sold to people who buy things because there is *nature* in them.

Why, a canvas I have covered is worth more than a blank canvas.

That - believe me my pretensions go no further - that is my right to paint, my reason for painting, and by the Lord, I have one!

All it has cost me is a carcass pretty well destroyed and wits pretty well crazed, and only to lead the same life I might lead if I were a philanthropist.

All it has cost you is, say, 15,000 francs, which you have advanced to me.

Well then…they've no reason to chuck us out.

Here's the conclusion of the whole matter: when dealing with this Boussod, keep cool and keep your head.

And if they talk to you about London, *don't* put the thing just as crudely to them as I did at the beginning of this letter. But you do well not to resist the powers that be (such powers!).

My dear brother, if I were not broke and crazy with this blasted painting, what a dealer I'd make just for the impressionists. But there, I am broke. London is good, London is just what we need, but alas I feel I cannot do what I once could. But broken down and none too well myself, I do not see *any* misfortune in your going to London; if there is fog there, well, that seems to be increasing in Paris too.

What's wrong - basically - is that we are getting older, and must behave accordingly; that's *all there is to it.* Yet there is something for as well as against, and we must make the best of it.

It seems queer that you have not had any news of Gauguin either. I suppose that he is sick and discouraged.

If I reminded you just now of what painting costs us, it is only to emphasize what we ought to tell ourselves - that we have gone too far to turn back, that's all I harp on. For, material existence aside, what else shall I ever need?

If Gauguin cannot pay his debts nor his fare, if he can guarantee me a cheaper life in Brittany - why shouldn't I go to him if we want to help him?

If he says, “I am at the height of my powers and my talent,” why shouldn't I say the same myself?

But then, we are not at the height of our finances, so we must do what comes cheapest.

Lots of painting, few expenses, that is the line we must take. So once again I tell you that I lay aside all preference, either for the North or the South. Whatever plans one makes, there's always a root of difficulty somewhere. It would all be plain sailing with Gauguin, but once you shift him, is he going to be content?

But since no plans can be made, I am not worrying about the precariousness of our position.

Knowing and feeling this will wake us up and make us get on with the job.

If we do this and make a mess of it, which I myself doubt, we shall have something left. But I can see nothing in the future when one sees people like Gauguin up against a blank wall. Let us hope that there will be a way out for him and for us.

If I were to think of and dwell on disastrous possibilities, I could do nothing. I throw myself headlong into my work, and come up again with my studies; if the storm within gets too loud, I take a glass too much to stun myself.

Cracked, of course; when you look at what one *ought to be*.

But in the old days I used to feel less of a painter, now painting is becoming a distraction for me, like rabbit hunting for the cracked-brained: they do it to distract themselves.

My concentration becomes more intense, my hand more sure.

That is why I almost dare to swear to you that my painting will improve. Because I have nothing left but that.

Have you read in de Goncourt's book that Jules Dupré gave them the impression that he was cracked too?

Jules Dupré had found a collector fellow who was paying him. If only I could find that, and not be such a burden on you!

After the crisis which I went through when coming down here, I can make no plans or anything; I am decidedly better now, but *hope*, the *desire to succeed* is gone, and I work *because I must*, so as not to suffer too much mentally, so as to distract my mind.

Yesterday McKnight broke his silence a little by saying that he liked my last two studies (the garden of flowers) very much, and talked about them for a very long time.

Well - but do you realize that if you were *on your own*, you might perhaps have to look for English business relations? That is to say, once more, would it really be such a great hardship to go to London - if it is inevitable, is there any need to be miserable about it? After all there is no comparison; except for the climate, it is infinitely better than the Congo.

A good handshake, and many thanks for your letter and the 50-fr. note.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 23 July 1888

My dear friend Bernard,

Many, many thanks for the drawings you sent me. I very much like the avenue of plane trees along the seashore with the two women talking in the foreground and people strolling about. And the woman under the apple tree, the woman with the umbrella. Then the four drawings of nude women, especially the one who is washing herself, a grey effect, enhanced with black, white, yellow, brown. It's charming.

Ah, Rembrandt! ...With all due admiration for Baudelaire, I venture to presume, especially going by those verses, that he knew virtually nothing about Rembrandt. Not long ago I found and bought a small etching after Rembrandt here, a study of a male nude, realistic and simple. He stands, leaning against a door or a pillar, in a dark interior, a shaft of light from above glancing across his bent head and thick red hair. A Degas, you would say, because the animality of the body is real and intensely felt. But listen, have you ever taken a *good* look at the “Ox” or the “Interior of a Butcher's Shop” in the Louvre? You haven't taken a really good look at them, have you, and Baudelaire infinitely less so. It would be a real treat for me to spend a morning with you in the Dutch Gallery. All those things are almost impossible to describe, but standing in front of the paintings I should be able to point out the miracles and mysteries which are the reason why the primitives do not necessarily take first place in my admiration.

But then, I am scarcely an eccentric; a Greek statue, a peasant by Millet, a Dutch portrait, a female nude by Courbet or Degas, these calm and perfectly modelled representations are the reason why very many other things, the primitives no less than the Japanese, give me the impression of having been *composed with the pen*. I find that immensely interesting, but anything complete and perfect renders infinity tangible, and the enjoyment of any beautiful thing is like coitus, a moment of infinity.

Do you, for instance, know a painter called Vermeer, who, among other things, painted a very beautiful and pregnant Dutch lady? The palette of this remarkable painter is blue, lemon yellow, pearl grey, black, white. Of course, all the riches of a full palette are there too, in his rarely encountered pictures, but the combination of lemon yellow, pale blue and pearl grey is as characteristic of him - black, white, grey and pink are of Velásquez.

Anyway, I know perfectly well that Rembrandt and the Dutch painters are scattered widely over museums and collections, and it isn't very easy to get an overall idea of them if you only know the Louvre. Yet it is the French, Charles Blanc, Thoré, Fromentin and several others, who have written about their art better than the Dutch have.

Those Dutch painters had hardly any imagination or fantasy, but an enormous amount of taste and a feeling for composition They did no paintings of Christ, Our Lord, *etc.* - Rembrandt did, of course, but he was the only one (and biblical subjects are relatively rare in his work). He was the only one who, exceptionally, painted figures of Christ, *etc.* And with him, they look quite unlike anything done by other religious painters, it is all metaphysical magic

This is how Rembrandt painted angels. He does a self-portrait, old, toothless, wrinkled, wearing a cotton cap, a picture from life, in a mirror. He is dreaming, dreaming, and his brush takes up his self-portrait again, but this time from memory, and the expression on the face becomes sadder and more saddening, He dreams, dreams on, and why or how I cannot tell, but - as Socrates and Mohammed had their guardian spirits, so Rembrandt paints a supernatural angel with a da Vinci smile behind that old man who resembles himself

I am showing you a painter who dreams and paints from the imagination, and I started by contending that it is characteristic of the Dutch that they do not invent anything, that they have neither imagination nor fantasy.

Am I being illogical? No.

Rembrandt did not invent anything, and that angel and that strange Christ came about because he knew them, felt that they were there.

Delacroix paints a Christ using the unexpected note of bright lemon yellow in such a way that the colourful and radiant note in the picture assumes the inexpressible strangeness and charm of a star in a corner of the firmament Rembrandt works with tonal values in the same way that Delacroix works with colours

Well now, there is a world of difference between the method used by Delacroix and Rembrandt and that of all other religious painters.

I'll write again soon. This is to thank you for the drawings, which have given me enormous pleasure. I have just finished a portrait of a girl of 12, brown eyes, black hair and black eyebrows, yellowish-grey flesh, white background, strongly tinged with Veronese green, a blood-red bodice with violet stripes. Blue skin with large orange polka dots, an oleander flower in the sweet little hand. It has exhausted me so much that I am hardly in a fit state to write. Goodbye for now, and once more many thanks,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Paul Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh

Pont-Aven, c.25 July 1888

My dear Vincent,

I have just read your interesting letter and I quite agree with you on how little importance exactness is in art.

Art is an abstraction, unfortunately one becomes more and more misunderstood. I would really like that we reach our goal: that is to say my journey to Provence. I always had the fancy to interpret the bullfights in my own way, as I understand them. I am starting to get the freedom of my faculties: my illness had weakened me and in my last studies I think that what I have done up to now is out of date.

Naturally this band of pigs here find me quite mad, and I that rather pleases me because it proves to me that I am not. I have just finished a Breton fight that you will like, I am sure.

[Gauguin drew a sketch of the Young Breton Wrestlers here.]

Two kids blue pants and vermilion pants. One at the top to the right is coming out of the water.

Green lawn / pure emerald [veronéze] going down to chromium yellow without execution as in Japanese crepons.

At the top a boiling cascade of water, pink-white and a rainbow on the side close to the frame.

At the bottom a white touch, a black hat and blue shirt.

About Russell. Granchi said to me that he had seen him 2 months ago in Paris and that Russell had great admiration for me and that he had gone to Belle Isle.

I really don't understand why a rich man wouldnýt buy what he admires. Letýs still hope.

Who is this Thomas you mentioned, is he Thomas de Bojano? Or is he the dealer who lives close to place Vendôme?

My friend Laval came back from Martinique; he bought back some very curious watercolours. I want to make you to see that what you love is art. I talk as if we were already together. I must tell you that once I make a resolution I am always in a hurry to put it to execution.

If it werenýt for this filthy money my trunks would soon be packed. I don't know why, but for about ten days I have painted a lot of madness in my head that I intend to execute in the Midi: I believe that is because of my state of health, which is flourishing again. I have a need of struggle; to carve with a club. After all the research that I have just done here I believe it will help me to go better than before.

Until we are together, an affectionate handshake,

Paul Gauguin.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 25 July 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your kind letter. If you remember, mine ended with “we are getting old, that is what it *is*, the rest is imagination and doesn't exist.” Well, I said that more for myself than for you. And I said it because I felt the absolute necessity of behaving accordingly, of working, perhaps not more, but with a deeper understanding.

Now you talk of the emptiness you feel everywhere, it is just the very thing I feel myself.

Considering, if you like, the time in which we live a great and true renaissance of art, the worm-eaten official tradition still alive but really impotent and inactive, the new painters isolated, poor, treated like madmen, and because of this treatment actually becoming so, at least as far as their social life is concerned.

Then remember that you are doing exactly the same work as these primitive painters, since you provide them with money and sell their canvases for them, which enables them to produce others. If a painter ruins his character by working hard at painting, a thing which leaves him useless for many other things, for family life, etc., etc., if therefore he paints not only with colours, but with self-denial and self-renunciation and with a broken heart - as far as you are concerned, your own work is not only no better paid than his, but it costs you exactly what the painter's cost him, this sacrifice of the individuality, half voluntary, half accidental.

That is to say that if you paint *indirectly*, you are more productive than I am, for instance. The more irrevocably you become a dealer, the more you become an artist.

And in the same way I hope the same thing for myself. The more I am spent, ill, a broken pitcher, by so much more am I an artist - a creative artist - in this great renaissance of art of which we speak.

These things are surely so, but this eternally living art, and this renaissance, this green shoot springing up from the roots of the old felled trunk, these are such abstract things that a kind of melancholy remains within us when we think that one could have created life at less cost than creating art.

If possible, you ought to make me feel that art is alive, you who love art perhaps more than I do. I tell myself that it depends not on art but on myself, that the only way to get back my confidence and peace of mind is to *improve my work.*

And there we are again, back at the end of my last letter - I am getting old, it's sheer imagination if I should think that art is old lumber too.

Now if you know what a “mousmé” is (you will find out when you read Loti's Madame Chrysanthème), I have just painted one. It took me a whole week, and I haven't been able to do anything else, because I still haven't been too well. This is what annoys me - but I felt well, I would have been able to run off some more landscapes in the meantime, but to do justice to my mousmé I had to conserve my mental energies. A mousmé is a Japanese girl - Provençal in this case - 12 to 14 years old. That makes two portraits now, the Zouave and her.

Take care of your health, above all take baths *if Gruby recommends it*, for in the four years by which I am older than you, you will see how necessary comparatively good health is for being able to work. Now for us who work with our brains, our one and only hope of not breaking down too soon is this artificial eking-out by an up-to-date hygienic regimen rigorously applied, as much as we can stand. Because I for one do not do everything I ought. And a bit of cheerfulness is better than all the other remedies.

I have had a letter from Russell. He says that he would have written me before if he hadn't been busy moving to Belle Ile. He is there now, and says that he would be pleased if sooner or later I would go and spend some time there. He still wants to repaint my portrait. He says too - “I should have gone to Boussod's to see Gauguin's `Negresses Talking' if the same thing had not prevented me from that too.”

In short, he does not refuse to buy one, but makes it clear he does not want anything inferior to the one we have. You see that at all events that is better than nothing.

I will write this to Gauguin and ask him for sketches of pictures. We must hurry things and give up R. for the moment, but regard it as a matter that will come off, but is in abeyance now.

And the same goes for Guillaumin.

I wish he [Russell] would buy a figure from G. He says that he has had a very beautiful bust of his wife done by Rodin, and that on this occasion he lunched with Claude Monet and saw the 10 pictures of Antibes. I am sending him Geffroy's article. He criticizes the Monets very ably, begins by liking them very much, the attack on the problem, the enfolding tinted air, the colour. After that he shows what there is to find fault with - the total lack of construction, for instance one of his trees will have far too much foliage for the thickness of the trunk, and so always and everywhere from the standpoint of the reality of things, from the standpoint of lots of natural *laws*, he is exasperating enough. He ends by saying that this quality of attacking the difficulties is what everyone ought to have.

Bernard has sent me 10 sketches like his brothel; three of them were à la Redon; I do not altogether share the enthusiasm he has for that. But there is a woman washing herself, very Rembrandtesque, an effect like Goya, and a landscape with figures, very strange. He expressly forbade me to send them to you, but all the same you will get them by the same post.

I think that Russell will buy something more from Bernard.

Meanwhile I have seen this Bock's work; it is strictly impressionistic, but not powerful, it is the stage where this new technique still preoccupies him so much that he cannot be himself. He will gain in force and then his individuality will break free, I think. But McKnight does water colours of the quality of those by Destrée, you remember that Dutchman we used to know. However, he has washed some small still lifes; a yellow pot on a violet foreground, a red pot on a green, an orange pot on blue, better, but very poor.

The village where they are staying is *real Millet*, poor peasants and nothing else, absolutely *rustic* and homely. This quality completely escapes them. I think that McKnight has civilized and converted to civilized Christianity his brute of a landlord. Anyway the swine and his worthy spouse, when you go there, shake hands with you - it is in a café, of course - when you ask for drinks, they have a way of refusing money - Oh! I could not take money from an artiss” - with two esses. Anyway, it is their own fault that it is so abominable, and this Bock must get pretty well stultified in McKnight's company.

I think that McKnight has some money but not much. So they contaminate the village; but for that, I'd go there to work often. What one ought to do there is not to talk to the civilized people; now they know the station master and a score of bores, and that is partly why they get nowhere. Naturally these simple and artless country folk laugh at them and despise them. But if they did their work without taking up with these village loungers with their starched collars, then they could go into the peasants' homes and let them earn a few pence. And then this blessed Fontvieilles would be a gold mine for them; but the natives are like Zola's poor peasants, innocent and gentle beings, as we know.

Probably McKnight will soon be making little landscapes with sheep for chocolate boxes.

Not only my pictures but I myself have become haggard of late, almost like Hugo van der Goes in the picture by Emil Wauters.

Only, having got my whole beard carefully shaved off I think that I am as much like the very placid priest in the same picture as like the mad painter so intelligently portrayed therein.

And I do not mind being rather between the two, for one must live, especially because it is no use ignoring the fact that there may be a crisis some day or other if you were to change your relations with the Boussods. Another reason for keeping up this connection with artists, on my part as much as on yours.

Besides, I think I have spoken the truth, but if I should succeed in replacing in goods the money spent, I should only be doing my duty. And then, something practical I can do is portrait painting.

As for drinking too much ... if it is bad, I can't tell. But look at Bismarck, who is in any case very practical and very intelligent, his good doctor told him that he was drinking too much, and that all his life he had overtaxed his stomach and his brain. Bismarck immediately stopped drinking. After that he got run down and couldn't pick up. Secretly he must be laughing heartily at his doctor, because fortunately for him he did not consult him sooner.

So much for that, a good handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Mind, as to Gauguin we must not give up the idea of coming to his aid if the suggestion is acceptable as it stands, but *we do not need him*. So do not think that working alone bothers me, and do not push the affair on my account, *be very sure of that*.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 25 July 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

I don't have the slightest doubt that you'll admit that neither you nor I can have a complete idea of Velásquez and Goya, of what they were as men and as painters, for neither of us has seen Spain, their country, and so many beautiful things which are still left in the South. But what one knows of them is already something nevertheless.

Of course as for the people of the North, Rembrandt first of all, it is highly desirable, when judging these painters, to know their work as a whole as well as their country, and also the somewhat intimate and concise history of the period and of the customs of the old country.

I emphatically repeat that neither Baudelaire nor you has a sufficiently clear idea of Rembrandt.

As for you, I cannot encourage you strongly enough to spend a long time looking at the great and minor Dutchmen before forming a fixed opinion. It is not merely a question of gems, but a question of selecting marvels among the marvels.

And then there is not a little paste among the diamonds.

So, as for me, who have been studying the school of my country for twenty years now, I shouldn't even answer if it were being discussed, because in general I hear too much talk which is beside the point, when the painters of the North are under discussion.

So that my only answer to you is, Bah! look a little closer than that; it will truly repay your trouble a thousandfold.

Look here, for instance, if I declare that the Ostade in the Louvre representing “The Painter's Family” (man, wife and a dozen children) is a picture infinitely worthy of study and reflection, as well as “The Peace of Munster” by Terborch - and then, when those pictures in the gallery of the Louvre which I personally prefer and think most astonishing are overlooked very often by artists, even by those who have come to see the Dutchmen, then I am not very surprised, as I know that my choice in that gallery is based on a knowledge of this subject which the majority of the French could not possibly share.

But if I disagreed with you, for instance, about these subjects, I should confidently expect you to grant that I was right later on. But what pains me so terribly in the Louvre is to see their Rembrandts going to ruin and the idiots of the administration letting so many beautiful pictures decay. So the annoying yellow tone of certain Rembrandts is the result of deterioration from moisture or some other causes; in some cases I could point it out to you with a wet finger.

It is as difficult to say what Rembrandt's colour is as it is to give a name to Velásquez' grey. For want of a better name one might call it “Rembrandt gold.” And this is what they have done, but it is pretty vague.

Coming to France as a foreigner, I, perhaps better than Frenchmen born and bred, have felt Delacroix and Zola, and my sincere and wholehearted admiration for them is boundless.

Since I had a somewhat complete notion of Rembrandt, one, Delacroix, got his results by colours, the other, Rembrandt, by tonal values, but they are on a par. [In his haste Vincent must have left part of this sentence out, but his meaning is clear nonetheless.]

In their quality as painters of a society, of a nature in its entirety, Zola and Balzac produce rare artistic emotions in those who love them, just because they embrace the whole of the epoch they depict.

When Delacroix paints humanity, life in general, instead of an epoch, he belongs no less to the same family of universal geniuses.

I very much like the last words of, I think, Silvestre, who ended a masterly article in this way: “Thus died - almost smiling - Delacroix, a painter of a noble race, who had a sun in his head and a thunderstorm in his heart, who turned from the warriors to the saints, from the saints to the lovers, from the lovers to the tigers, and from the tigers to the flowers.”

Daumier is also a great genius.

And then Millet, the painter of a whole race and the environment it lives in.

It is possible that these great geniuses are only madmen, and that one must be mad oneself to have boundless faith in them and a boundless admiration for them. If this is true, I should prefer my insanity to the sanity of the others. Perhaps the most direct road is to approach Rembrandt indirectly. Let's talk about Frans Hals. He never painted Christs, annunciations to the shepherds, angels, crucifixions or resurrections; he never painted nude, voluptuous and bestial women.

He did portraits, and nothing, nothing else.

Portraits of soldiers, gatherings of officers, portraits of magistrates assembled to debate the affairs of the republic, portraits of matrons with pink or yellow skins, wearing white caps and dressed in wool and black satin, discussing the budget of an orphanage or an almshouse. He painted the portraits of middle-class men in their homes: the man, the woman, the child. He painted the drunken toper, an old fishwife in a mood of witch-like hilarity, the pretty gypsy whore, babies in their diapers, the dashing, self-indulgent nobleman with his mustache, top boots and spurs He painted himself, together with his wife, young, deeply in love, on a bench on a lawn, after the first wedding night. He painted vagabonds and laughing urchins, he painted musicians and he painted a fat cook.

He does not know greater things than that; but it is certainly worth as much as Dante's Paradise and the Michelangelos and the Raphaels and even the Greeks. It is as beautiful as Zola, healthier as well as merrier, but as true to life, because his epoch was healthier and less dismal.

And now what is Rembrandt?

The same thing absolutely: a painter of portraits.

One must first of all have a healthy, broad, clear notion of these two brilliant Dutchmen, equal in value, before going any further into the subject. When we have understood this thoroughly - this whole glorious republic, depicted by these two prolific portraitists, reconstructed in bold outlines - then we still keep a very large margin for landscapes, domestic scenes, animals, philosophical subjects.

But I implore you, follow this straightforward reasoning carefully, for I am doing my best to present it to you in a very, very simple way.

Hammer into your head that master Frans Hals, that painter of all kinds of portraits, of a whole gallant, live, immortal republic. Hammer into your head the no less great and universal master painter of portraits of the Dutch republic: Rembrandt Harmensz [son of Harmen] van Rijn, that broad-minded naturalistic man, as healthy as Hals himself. And then we see issuing from this source, Rembrandt, a line of direct and true pupils: Vermeer of Delft, Fabritius, Nicholaes Maes, Pieter de Hooch, Bol, and those whom he influenced: Potter, Ruysdael, Ostade, Terborch. I mention Fabritius here although we know only two canvases of his, and I don't mention a lot of good painters, and especially not the paste among these diamonds, that paste so solidly crammed into the vulgar French noodles.

Am I very incomprehensible, my dear comrade Bernard? I am just trying to make you see the great simple thing: the painting of humanity, or rather of a whole republic, by the simple means of portraiture. This first and foremost. When later on - in the case of Rembrandt - we happen to meet with mysticism, with Christs, with nude women, then it is very interesting but it is not the main thing. Let Baudelaire hold his tongue in this domain; his words are sonorous but then infinitely shallow.

Let us take Baudelaire for what he is, a modern poet, just as Musset is another, but let him stop being a nuisance when we are speaking about painting. I don't like your drawing “Lechery” as much as the others. I like “The Tree,” however;

it is very smart.

A handshake,

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 26 July 1888

My dear Theo,

Enclosed I am sending Gauguin's letter; fortunately he has recovered his health.

How is yours?

I wish Russell would do something. However, he has a wife and children, a studio, and a house being built, and I can quite see how a man, even a rich one, cannot always spend 100 francs - no more than that - on pictures. I think it would make a tremendous difference to me if Gauguin were here, for now the days go by without my speaking a word to anyone. Oh well. In any case his letter gave me tremendous pleasure.

If you are alone in the country too long, you get stupid, and though not yet - still this winter - I may become sterile because of this. Now if he came, there would be no danger of this, because there would be no lack of ideas.

If the work goes well and our courage does not fail, we may hope to see more very interesting years yet.

Is Mourier still with you?

Would it be possible for me to have your letter on Sunday, I'm not counting on it though, knowing that it is the end of the month.

It's just that I shall probably have a model this week.

I need some studies of figures very much. Just now I have a sort of exhibition at home, that is to say I have taken all the studies from the stretchers, and have nailed them up on the wall to get thoroughly dry. You will see that when there are a lot of them and one can choose among them, it comes to the same thing as if I had studied them more and worked on them longer. Because to paint and repaint a subject on the same or several canvases comes to the same thing in the end. I am in rather a hurry, so a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 31 July 1888

My dear Theo,
So at last our uncle's sufferings are over. I received the news this morning from our sister. It appears that they were more or less expecting you to be at the funeral, so perhaps you will indeed be there.

How short life is and how like smoke. Which is no reason for despising the living, on the contrary.

So we are right to care more for the artists than for the pictures.

I am working hard for Russell, I thought that I would do him a series of drawings after my painted studies; I believe that he will look upon them kindly, and that, at least I hope so, will help to bring him to make a deal.

McKnight came again yesterday to see me, and he also liked the portrait of the girl, and said besides that he liked my Garden. I really do not know if he has money or not.

I am now at work with another model, a postman in a blue uniform trimmed with gold, a big bearded face, very like Socrates. A violent Republican like Tanguy. A man more interesting than most.

If we prod Russell, perhaps he will take the Gauguin that you bought, and if there is no other way of helping Gauguin, what should be done?

When I write him, sending the drawings, it will of course be to urge him to make up his mind.

I shall say to him - Look here, you all like our picture, but I believe that we shall see *still* better work from the artist; why don't you do as we do, who have faith in the whole man such as he is, and admire everything he does? Then I want to add that certainly it is all one to us to give up the big picture if necessary, but since Gauguin will often be in want of money, it is in *his* interest that we do not keep it until his prices have trebled or quadrupled, a thing which we believe will happen.

If after this Russell likes to make a real definite offer, my word…we shall see! And Gauguin in this case must say that if he sold it to you as a friend at such a price, he is determined that it should not be sold to another collector at that same price. Anyway, let's finish the drawings - I have 8 and shall do 12 - and let's wait to hear what he says.

I am very curious to know whether or not you have been able to go to

Holland. I shall not write any more for the moment.

The change I am going to try to make in my painting is to do more figures.

Altogether it is the only thing in painting that excites me to the depths of my soul, and which makes me feel the infinite more than anything else. The seventeenth of this month my friend the 2nd lieutenant of Zouaves is going to Paris. He offered to take charge of the parcel I have for you, and I think I shall accept; in this way you will get it on the eighteenth without having to pay carriage.

I am writing our sister today; their grief will be great.

Did Bernard's sketches reach you?

As our sister said, from the moment people are gone, you remember only their good moments and their good qualities. But the great thing is to try to see these while they are still with us. It would be so simple and would account so much for the terrible things in life, which now amaze and wound us so, if life had yet another hemisphere, invisible it is true, but where one lands when one dies. To those who make this interesting and solemn journey, our best wishes and sympathy.

If you go to Holland, many kind messages from me to our mother and sister.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

This week will be *pretty tough*, because of my having to pay the rent and the model. I hope to do these sketches after the studies for you as well. You will see that they have something of a Japanese air.

I must thank you again for yesterday's 50-fr. note, and answer your letter.

It was a good thing to send the paints and canvases, as my stock was exhausted all along the line.

About Bing, as for being in a hurry, no, but far from breaking off relations with him, we must have another deposit of pictures as soon as we can settle up.

I saw a magnificent and strange effect this evening. A very big boat loaded with coal on the Rhône, moored to the Quay. Seen from above it was all shining and wet with a shower; the water was yellowish-white and clouded pearl gray; the sky, lilac, with an orange streak in the west; the town, violet. On the boat some poor workmen in dirty blue and white came and went carrying the cargo on shore. It was pure Hokusai. It was too late to do it, but one day when that coal boat comes back, I must give it a try. I saw it in a railway coalyard, a spot I have just found, and where there will be plenty of other things to do.

With a handshake, because if I want to write to Holland too, I must make haste.

I shall have difficulty getting through this week. But I hope to get the series of figures going.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, 31 July 1888

W05
Arles, 31 July 1888
Dear Sister,
I will answer your letter of this morning without delay.
I shall probably hear from Paris by tomorrow what Theo is going to do, whether he will be able to get away. I don't doubt that he will go to you if he can. It is not always admirable for a person one knows to set out on the great journey to that other hemisphere of life whose existence we only surmise. But it goes without saying that my best wishes are with today's traveler.

I am working very hard now, and I think the summer here extremely beautiful, more beautiful than I ever saw it in the North, but people here are complaining loudly that it is not the same as usual. Now and then some rain in the morning or the afternoon, but infinitely less than in our country. The harvest was gathered long ago. There is much wind here, however, a very ill-natured, whining wind - le mistral - very troublesome for the most part, when I have to paint in it, in which case I put my canvas down flat on the ground, and work on my knees. For the easel does not stand firm.

I have a study of a garden one meter wide, poppies and other red flowers surrounded by green in the foreground, and a square of bluebells. Then a bed of orange and yellow Africans, then white and yellow flowers, and at last, in the background, pink and lilac, and also dark violet scabriosas, and red geraniums, and sunflowers, and a fig tree and an oleander and a vine. And in the distance black cypresses against low white houses with orange roofs - and a delicate green-blue streak of sky.

Oh, I know very well that not a single flower is drawn completely, that they are more dabs of colour, red, yellow, orange, green blue, violet, but the impression of all these colours in their juxtaposition is there all right, in the painting as in nature. But I suppose you would be disappointed, and think it unbeautiful, if you saw it. But you see that the subject is rather summery.

Uncle Cor has seen work of mine more than once, and he thinks it execrable.

I am now engaged on a portrait of a postman in his dark-blue uniform with yellow. A head somewhat like Socrates, hardly any nose at all, a high forehead, bald crown, little grey eyes, bright red chubby cheeks, a big pepper-and-salt beard, large ears. The man is an ardent republican and socialist, reasons quite well, and knows a lot of things. His wife was delivered of a child today, and he is consequently feeling as proud as a peacock, and is all aglow with satisfaction.

In point of fact I greatly prefer painting a thing like this to doing pictures of flowers.

But since this can be done without ignoring the other, I am taking advantage of the opportunities as they come

I also have a portrait of a twelve-year-old girl, brown eyes, black hair and eyebrows, yellowish matte complexion. She is sitting in a cane chair, a blood-red-and-violet-striped bodice, a deep blue skirt with little orange dots, a branch of oleander in her hand. The background light green, nearly white.

I am always looking for the same thing - a portrait; a landscape; a landscape and a portrait.

I shall also get to paint the baby born today, at least I hope so. I have also got a garden without flowers, that is to say a lawn, newly mown, bright green with the grey hay spread in long streaks. A weeping ash and a number of cedars and cypresses, the cedars yellowish and spherical in form, the cypresses rising high into the air, blue-green. At the back oleander and a patch of green blue sky. The blue shadows of the shrubs on the grass.

Also a portrait bust of a Zouave, in a blue uniform with red and yellow trimmings, with a sky-blue sash, a blood-red cap with a blue tassel, and face sunburned - black hair cropped short - eyes leering like a cat's - orange and green - a small head on a bull's neck. In this one the background is a harshly green door and some orange bricks of the wall and the white stucco.

Now as regards what you ask, as to whether it is hot here, and whether I am going to live with somebody else. Well, this rather probably, and with a very clever painter too who, like the other impressionists, is leading a life full of cares, and who is the proud owner of a liver complaint besides. Some time ago Theo bought a large picture from him portraying Negresses in pink, blue, orange and yellow cotton dresses under tamarind, coconut and banana trees with the sea in the distance. Like Le mariage de Loti, that description of Otaheite. The fact is that he has been in Martinique, and has painted amid the tropical scenery there. We have a second painting of his besides, which he exchanged for one of my studies, a dried river with violet mud and pools of water, mirroring the pure cobalt blue of the sky, green grass, a Negro boy with a red-and-white cow, a Negress in blue, and a patch of green forest. He is a fellow who works like one possessed and he does all sorts of things; he is in Brittany at the moment.

We shall probably go live together for the sake of economy, and to give each other company. He will come here if he or I can sell something one of these days so that he can pay for his journey. It is not impossible that some obstacle will crop up, but on the whole it is quite probable that it will happen. And even if it should not happen and I had to go on working alone, yet working in the same direction as the other fellows, although every one of them maintains his own style, brings about something of a comradeship, and at times leads to an interesting correspondence.

How is your health? Good, I hope. Above all you should try to get into the country as much as possible. Here I am afflicted now and then with an inability to eat, something of the sort you suffered from at the time. But on the whole I manage to steer clear of the rocks. When your body forsakes you, use your brains - you and I with our constitutions should take this to heart. For that matter work, if we are making headway, can help a lot.

I think it exquisitely beautiful here in summer; the green is very deep and rich; the air is thin and astonishingly clear. But for all that the wide plain might often remind me very strongly of the Dutch scenery - here where there are hardly any mountains or rocks - if the colour were not so different. But what pleases me very much is the gaily coloured clothes, the women and girls dressed in cheap simple material, but with green, red and pink, Havana-yellow, violet or blue stripes, or dots of the same colours. White scarves; red, green and yellow parasols. A vigorous sun, like sulphur, shining on it all, the great blue sky - sometimes it is as enormously gay as Holland is gloomy.

What a pity that not everybody has these two extremes.

Now I must stop. Uncle's death is a big event for you and Mother, and particularly for our aunt. The impression it makes on me is very *strange*, because in my mind there is an image of the man made up of memories of so long ago, of a great many years ago, and I think it so peculiar that a man one once knew at such close range should have become *such* a stranger. I suppose you will be able to understand this. Looked at from this point of view, life is so much like a dream; and from the moment things are simplified again, and the sick man undertakes his great journey, one understands it better, and it is a certain fact that my feelings about it are similar to yours. Theo will feel it very much too; he has had much more intercourse with Uncle than I.

How is Mother these days?

I often think of you both, and it is from the bottom of my heart that I give you my best wishes.

Vincent

I am up to my ears in work, and it happens so seldom that I have anything else in mind.

My address is:

2 Place Lamartine

Arles.
B.d.Rh.

If you *can* manage it, don't lose sight of those books and prints of mine that I wrote you about.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 3 August 1888

My dear Theo,

I more or less presume that you have gone to Holland. I am rather inclined to think that they were expecting you in Holland, from the letter I received from our sister, and also because I have not heard from you about this business.

I have had a letter from Gauguin, in which he talks about painting, and complains of not having enough money to come here, but nothing new or different.

I have sent Russell 12 drawings after painted studies, and so had an opportunity to speak to him about it again.

It will soon be Michaelmas, and I have only taken the house till then. Am I to take it for a half-year again or not, that is what I would very much like to decide, after G. had seen it, and not without him.

I could not pay my rent on the first, as I had the model all week. I am working on two portraits of the same model, which are more important to me than anything else. But it was just when I put my fellow off till next Monday for the month's rent that he said something about being able to find another tenant for the house if I had not decided to keep it. I'm not much surprised, since I have had it repaired myself, and it is worth more.

In my last letter I forgot to answer your question about the new canvas from Tasset at 5.50 fr. It is very good and just what I wanted. If I do a portrait, or indeed anything that I am anxious to make lasting, he may be sure that I'll use it. But not much of it, as I have just made up my mind to use cheap canvas for the studies.

If your package has not been sent off, I should very much like you to add 4 small tubes of geranium lake. If, indeed, I haven't already ordered this colour, but I don't think I ordered any reds except carmine.

So now I am working on two figures, one the head, and one a half length with the hands of an old postman in a dark blue uniform. He has a head like Socrates, interesting to paint.

There is no better or shorter way of improving your work than doing figures. And I always feel confident when I am doing portraits, knowing that this work has much more depth - it isn't the right word perhaps, but it is what makes me cultivate whatever is best and deepest in me.

Good-by for the present, and a good handshake.
Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 4 August 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

I see I forgot to answer your question as to whether Gauguin is still in Pont-Aven. Yes, he is still there, and if you should like to write to him, I am inclined to think he will be pleased. He has been staying there till now, but he will probably join me here before long, as soon as he himself or both of us can get the money for the journey.

I don't believe that this question of the Dutch painters, which we are discussing at the moment, is without interest. As soon as virility, originality, naturalism of whatever kind come into question, it is very interesting to consult them. But I must speak to you again first of all about yourself, the two still lifes you have done and the two portraits of your grandmother. Have you ever done anything better than that, and have you ever been more *yourself* and a personality? I think not. The profound study of the first thing which came to hand, of the first person who came along was enough to *create* really. Do you know why I like these three or four studies so much? Because of that unknown quality of deliberateness, of great wisdom, that inexpressible quality of being steady and firm and self-assured of which they give evidence. You have never been closer to Rembrandt, old fellow, than in these studies.

In Rembrandt's studio that incomparable sphinx, Vermeer of Delft, found this extremely solid technique which has never been surpassed, which at present… we are burning … to find. Oh, I know we are working and reasoning with *colours*, just as they were with *chiaroscuro, tonal values*.

But what do these differences matter, when the great thing after all is to express oneself strongly?

At present you are studying the methods of the Italian and German primitives, the symbolic significance which the abstract mystical drawing of the Italians may contain. *Go ahead*. I myself rather like that anecdote about Giotto. There was a contest for painting some picture or other representing a Virgin. A lot of cartoons were submitted to the Administration of Fine Arts of the time. One of these cartoons, signed Giotto, was simply an oval, an egg shape. The Administration, perplexed - and confident - entrusted the Virgin in question to Giotto. I don't know whether it is true or not, but I like that anecdote quite a lot.

However, let us return to Daumier and your grandmother.

When are you going to show us studies of such vigorous soundness again? I urgently invite you to do it, although I most certainly do not despise your researches relating to the property of lines in opposite motion - as I am not at all indifferent, I hope, to the simultaneous contrasts of lines, forms. The trouble is - you see, my dear comrade Bernard - that Giotto and Cimabue, as well as Holbein and Van Dyck, lived in an obeliscal - excuse the word - solidly framed society, architecturally constructed, in which each individual was a stone, and all the stones clung together, forming a monumental society. When the socialists construct their logical social edifice - which they are still pretty far from doing - I am sure mankind will see a reincarnation of this society. But, you know, we are in the midst of downright laisser-aller and anarchy. We artists, who love order and symmetry, isolate ourselves and are working to define *only one thing*.

Puvis [de Chavannes] knows this all right, and when he, so just and so wise - forgetting his Elysian Fields - was so good as to descend amiably into the intimacy of our time, he painted a fine portrait indeed: the serene old man in the clear light of his blue interior, reading a novel with a yellow cover - beside him a glass of water with a watercolour brush and a rose in it. Also a fashionable lady, as de Goncourts have depicted them.

Now we see that the Dutch paint things just as they are, apparently without reasoning, just as Courbet painted his beautiful nude women. They painted portraits, landscapes, still lifes. Well, one can be stupider than that, and commit greater follies.

If we don't know what to do, my dear comrade Bernard, then let's do as they did if only not to let our rare intellectual power evaporate in sterile metaphysical meditations which cannot possibly put the chaos into a goblet, as chaos is chaotic for the very reason that it contains no glass of our caliber.

We can - and this was done by these Dutchmen who are so desperately naughty in the eyes of people with a system - we can paint an atom of the chaos, a horse, a portrait, your grandmother, apples, a landscape.

Why do you say Degas is impotently flabby? Degas lives like a small lawyer - and does not like women, for he knows that if he loved them and fucked them often, he, intellectually diseased, would become insipid as a painter.

Degas's painting is virile and impersonal for the very reason that he has resigned himself to be nothing personally but a small lawyer with a horror of going on a spree. He looks on while the human animals, stronger than himself get excited and fuck, and he paints them well, exactly because he doesn't have the pretension to get excited himself.

Reubens! Ah, that one! he was a handsome man and a good fucker, Courbet too. Their health permitted them to drink, eat, fuck … As for you, my poor dear comrade Bernard, I already told you in the spring: eat a lot, do your military exercises well, don't fuck too much; when you do this your painting will be all the more spermatic.

Ah! Balzac, that great and powerful artist, has rightly told us that relative chastity fortifies the modern artist. The Dutchmen were *married men and begot children*, a fine, very fine craftsmanship, and deeply rooted in nature.

One swallow does not make a summer. I don't say that among your new Breton studies there are none which are virile and sound; I have not seen them yet, so I could not possibly discuss them. But what I have seen were those virile things: the portrait of your grandmother, those still lifes. But judging from your drawings, I have vague misgivings that your new studies will not have the same vigor, exactly in point of virility.

Those studies, which I am speaking about first, are the first swallow of your artistic spring.

If we want to be really potent males in our work, we must sometimes resign ourselves to not fuck much, and for the rest be monks or soldiers, according to the needs of our temperament. The Dutch, once more, had peaceful habits and a peaceful life, calm, well regulated.

Delacroix - ah! that man! -“I found,” he says, “my style of painting when I had neither teeth nor breath left!” - and those who saw this famous artist paint said, “When Delacroix paints, it is like a lion devouring his piece [of meat].”

He did not fuck much, and only had easy love affairs, so as not to curtail the time devoted to his work.

If you discover in this letter, which seems more incoherent than I should have liked it to be, considered by itself in relation to your correspondence and especially to the friendship which preceded it - if you discover in this letter some uneasiness - or at any rate solicitude - about your health, with a view to the severe trial you will have to undergo when you do your military service - obligatory, alas! - then you will read it correctly. I know that the study of the Dutch painters can only do you good, for their works are so virile, so full of male potency, so healthy. Personally I feel that continence is good for me, that it is enough for our weak, impressionable artists' brains to give their essence to the creation of our pictures. For when we reflect, calculate, exhaust ourselves, we spend cerebral energy.

Why exert ourselves to pour out all our creative sap where the well-fed professional pimps and ordinary fools do better in the matter of satisfying the genital organs of the whore, who is in this case more submissive than we are ourselves?

The whore in question has more of my sympathy than my compassion.

Being a creature exiled, outcast from society, like you and me who are artists, she is certainly our friend and sister.

And in this condition of being an outcast she finds - just as we ourselves do - an independence which is not without its advantages after all, when you come to think of it. So let's beware of assuming an erroneous attitude by believing that we can do her a service by means of a social rehabilitation which for that matter is hardly practicable and would be fatal to her.

I have just done a portrait of a postman, or rather even two portraits. A Socratic type, none the less Socratic for being somewhat addicted to liquor and having a high colour as a result. His wife had just had a child, and the fellow was aglow with satisfaction. He is a terrible republican, like old Tanguy. God damn it! what a motif to paint in the manner of Daumier, eh!

He kept himself too stiff when posing, which is why I painted him twice, the second time at a single sitting. A blue, nearly white background on the white canvas, all the broken tones in the face - yellows, greens, violets, pinks, reds. The uniform Prussian blue, with yellow adornments.

Write me soon if you feel like it, I am overburdened with work, and haven't found time yet for figure sketches. A handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

PS. Cézanne is a respectable married man just like the old Dutchmen; if there is plenty of male potency in his work it is because he does not let it evaporate in merrymaking.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 6 August 1888

My dear Theo,
I think you were right to go to our uncle's funeral, since Mother seemed to be expecting you. The best way to tackle a death is to swallow the image of the illustrious dead, whatever he was, as the best man in the best of all possible worlds, where everything is always for the best. Which not being contested, and consequently incontestable, it is doubtless allowable for us to return afterwards to our own affairs. I am glad that our brother Cor has grown bigger and stronger than the rest of us. And he must be stupid if he does not get married, for he has nothing but that and his hands. With that and his hands, and that and what he knows of machinery, I for one would like to be in his shoes, if I had any desire at all to be anyone else.

And meanwhile I am in my own hide, and my hide within the cog-wheels of the Fine Arts, like corn between the mill-stones.

Did I tell you that I had sent the drawings to friend Russell? At the moment I am doing practically the same ones again for you, there will be twelve likewise. You will then see better what there is in the painted studies in the way of drawing. I have already told you that I always have to fight against the mistral, which makes it absolutely impossible to be master of your stroke. That accounts for the “haggard” look of the studies. You will tell me that instead of drawing them, I ought to paint them again on fresh canvases at home. I think so myself now and then, for it is not my fault in this case that the execution lacks a livelier touch. What would Gauguin say about it if he were here, would he advise seeking a more sheltered place?

I now have another unpleasant thing to tell you about the money, which is that I shall *not* manage this week, because this very day I am paying out 25 Frs.; I shall have money for five days, but not for seven. This is Monday; if I get your next letter on Saturday morning there will be no need to increase the enclosure. Last week I did not one only but two portraits of my postman, a half-length with the hands, and a head, life size. The good fellow, as he would not accept money, *cost more* eating and drinking with me, and I gave him besides the “Lantern” by Rochefort. But that is a trifling and immaterial evil, considering that he posed very well, and that I expect to paint his baby very shortly, for his wife has just been brought to bed.

I will send you, at the same time as the drawings that I have in hand, two lithographs by de Lemud, “Wine” and “The Café”; in “Wine” there is a sort of Mephistopheles, rather reminiscent of C.M. when younger, and in “The Café”… it is Raoul exactly, you know that old Bohemian student type, whom I knew last year. What a talent that de Lemud had, like Hoffman or Edgar Poe. And yet he is one who is little talked of. Perhaps you will not care tremendously for these lithographs at first, but it is just when you look at them for a long time that they grow on you.

I have come to the end both of paints and canvas and I have already had to buy some here. And I must go back for still more. So please do send the letter so that I'll have it on Saturday morning.

Today I am probably going to begin on the interior of the café where I have a room , by gas light, in the evening.

It is what they call here a “café de nuit” (they are fairly frequent here), staying open all night. “Night prowlers” can take refuge there when they have no money to pay for a lodging, or are too drunk to be taken in. All those things - family, native land - are perhaps more attractive in the imaginations of such people as us, who pretty well do without native land or family either, than they are in reality. I always feel I am a traveller, going somewhere and to some destination. If I tell myself that the somewhere and the destination do not exist, that seems to me very reasonable and likely enough.

The brothel keeper, when he kicks anyone out, has similar logic, argues as well, and is always right, I know. So at the end of my career I shall find my mistake. So be it. I shall find then that not only the Arts, but everything else as well, were only dreams, that one's self was nothing at all. If we are *as flimsy as that*, so much the better for us, for then there is nothing against the unlimited possibility of future existence. Whence comes it that, in the present instance of our uncle's death, the face of the dead was calm, peaceful, and grave, while it is a fact that while living he was scarcely like that, either in youth or age. I have often observed a like effect as I looked at the dead as though to question them. And that for me is one proof, though not the most serious, of a life beyond the grave.

And in the same way a child in the cradle, if you watch it at leisure, has the infinite in its eyes. In short, I know *nothing* about it, but it is just this feeling of *not knowing* that makes the real life we are actually living now like a one-way journey in a train. You go fast, but cannot distinguish any object very close up, and above all you do not see the engine.

It is rather curious that Uncle as well as Father believed in the future life. Not to mention Father, I have several times heard Uncle arguing about it.

Ah - but then, they were more assured than us, and were affirmers who got angry if you dared to go deeper.

Of the *future* life of artists *through their works* I do not think much. Yes, artists perpetuate themselves by handing on the torch, Delacroix to the impressionists, *etc.* But is that all?

If the kind old mother of a family, with ideas that are pretty well limited and tortured by the Christian system, is to be immortal as she believes, and seriously too - and I for one do not gainsay it - why should a consumptive or neurotic cab horse like Delacroix and de Goncourt, with broad ideas, be any less immortal?

Granted that it seems just that the most destitute should feel the most the springing of this unaccountable hope.

Enough. What is the good of worrying about it? But living in the full tide of civilization, of Paris, of the Arts, why should not one keep this “Ego” of the old women, if women themselves without their instinctive belief that “*so it is*,” would not find strength to create or to act?

Then the doctors will tell us that not only Moses, Mahomet, Christ, Luther, Bunyan and others were mad, but also Frans Hals, Rembrandt, Delacroix, and also all the dear narrow old women like our mother.

Ah - that's a serious matter - one might ask these doctors; where then are the sane people?

Are they the brothel keepers who are always right? Probably. Then what to choose? Fortunately there is no choice.

With a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 8 August 1888

My dear Theo,

I have just sent off three big drawings, as well as some other ones, and the two lithographs by de Lemud.

The little cottage garden done vertically is, I think, the best of the three big ones. The one with the sunflowers is a little garden of a bathing establishment, the third garden, horizontal, is the one from which I made some painted studies as well.

Under the blue sky the orange, yellow, red splashes of the flowers take on an amazing brilliance, and in the limpid air there is a something or other happier, more lovely than in the North. It vibrates like the bouquet by Monticelli which you have. I reproach myself for not painting flowers here. And although I've knocked off some fifty drawings and painted studies here, I seem to have done absolutely nothing. I'd gladly content myself with being a pioneer for the other painters of the future who come to work in the South.

Now the Harvest, the Garden, the Sower, and the two marines are sketches after painted studies. I think that all these ideas are good, but the painted studies lack clearness of touch. That is another reason why I felt it necessary to draw them.

I wanted to paint a poor old peasant, whose features bear a very strong resemblance to Father, only he is coarser, bordering on a caricature.

Nevertheless, I should have been very keen to do him exactly like the poor peasant that he is.

He promised to come, and then he said that he wanted to have the picture for himself, so that I should have had to do two the same, one for him and one for myself. I said No. Perhaps he will come back someday.

I am curious to hear if you knew the de Lemuds.

At the moment there are still many fine lithographs to be had, Daumiers, reproductions after Delacroix, Décamps, Diaz, Rousseau, Dupré, *etc.* But soon these will be exhausted, and what a great pity it is that this art tends to disappear.

Why doesn't one hold what one has, like the doctors and the engineers; once a thing is discovered and invented, they retain the knowledge; in these wretched

Fine Arts everything is forgotten, nothing is kept.

Millet gave the synthesis of the peasant, and now, yes, there is Lhermitte, certainly there are a few others, *Meunier*…Then have we in general learned to see the peasant now? *No*, hardly anyone knows how to pull one off.

Doesn't the fault really lie a little with Paris and the Parisians, changeable and faithless as the sea?

Well, you have damn good reason to say: Let's go quietly on our way, working for ourselves. You know, whatever this sacrosanct impressionism may be, all the same I wish I could paint things that the generation *before* Delacroix, Millet, Rousseau, Diaz, Monticelli, Isabey, Décamps, Dupré, Jongkind, Ziem, Israëls, Meunier, a lot of others, Corot, Jacque, etc., could understand.

Ah, Manet has come very near, very near to it, and Courbet, the wedding of form to colour. I would very much like to keep silent for ten years, doing nothing but studies, and then do one or two pictures of figures. The old plan, so often recommended, is so seldom put into practice.

If the drawings I send you are too hard, it is because I have done them in such a way as to be able later on, if they're still around, to use them as guides for painting.

The little cottage garden done vertically has in itself amazing colours: the dahlias are a rich and sombre purple; the double row of flowers is pink and green on one side, and orange with hardly any leaves on the other. In the midst a white dwarf dahlia, and a little pomegranate with flowers of the most vivid reddish-orange, with yellowish-green fruits. The ground gray, the tall reeds, “canes,” blue-green, the fig trees emerald, the sky blue, the houses white with green windows and red roofs, in the morning full in the sunshine, in the evening drowned in the shadows thrown by the fig trees and the reeds.

If only Quost were here, or Jeannin! What's to be done? To include it all requires a whole school of men working together in the same country, complementing one another like the old Dutchmen, portrait painters, “genre” painters, landscape, animal, still-life painters.

Moreover I must tell you that I made a very interesting round of the farms with someone who knows the country. But you know in the real Provence there is more poor peasantry à la Millet than anything else.

McKnight and Bock see nothing but the heat, or rather nothing at all. Now even if I begin to see things a little more clearly, it will take a very long stay to do them.

At times, however, it seems likely that it is I who shall have to make the journey if Gauguin does not succeed in getting out of the mess and we want to carry out our plan. Well then, so be it, I shall be among peasants just the same, it's all one. I should even advise our trying to hold ourselves in readiness to go to him, for I think that soon he may find himself in terrible trouble again, for instance if his landlord is not willing to give him any more credit. That is so likely to happen, and his difficulties might be so great that starting the combination might become urgent. For me there is only the cost of the one-way trip, and the prices there which he has quoted are in every instance considerably lower than what we are bound to spend here.

I count on having your letter on Saturday morning; I have bought two more canvases, so that already, on Wednesday evening, I have exactly 5 francs left.

Only here there is still one advantage over the North during days of penury, that is the fine weather (for even the mistral is fine weather *to look at*). Perfectly glorious sunshine in which Voltaire let himself dry as he drank his coffee. You can't help feeling Zola and Voltaire everywhere. It is so alive! Like Jan Steen, like Ostade.

Certainly there would be a chance for a school of painting here, but you will tell me that nature is beautiful everywhere if you go into it deeply enough.

Have you read Madame Chrysanthème yet, have you already made the acquaintance of that so amazingly obliging ruffian M. Kangarou? And of the sugared peppers, and the fried ices, and the salted sweets?

I am feeling very, very well these days. In the long run I think I shall come to belong to the country altogether.

In a cottage garden I saw a figurehead of a woman carved in wood, from the bow of a Spanish ship. It was in a little grove of cypresses, and absolutely Monticelli.

Oh, these farm gardens, with their lovely big red Provençal roses, and the vines and the fig trees! It is all a poem, and the eternal bright sunshine too, in spite of which the foliage remains very green.

There is a cistern running clear water which irrigates the farm along trenches in a complete little system of canals. A horse, an old white animal from the Camargue, sets the machinery in motion.

No cows on these little farms.

My neighbor and his wife (grocers) are amazingly like the Buteaux.

But here farms and low pubs are less dreary and less dramatic than in the North, since the warmth, etc., makes poverty less harsh and melancholy.

I do wish you had seen this country. Well, first we must see how the Gauguin business will turn out.

I haven't yet told you that I had a letter from Koning. I wrote him a week ago. I can easily see him coming back. Is Mourier still there?

I'd be astonished if that book of Cassagne's were out of print. They ought to know it, or know where it could be got, at Lalouche's or at the colour shop in the Chaussée d'Antin. If I ever come to give lessons in drawing, or to have to speak to painters on the principles of technique, I must have it at hand. It is the *only* really practical book I know, and I know pretty well from experience how useful it is. Mourier, McKnight, even Bock, all need it, and how many others too. McKnight is always dropping in.

I have again been working on a portrait of a Zouave sitting on a bench against a white wall, which makes a fifth figure.

This morning I was at a washing place with figures of women, as big as Gauguin's Negresses, one especially in white, black, red, and another one all in yellow; there were at least thirty of them, old and young.

I am hoping to send you some more sketches after the painted studies.

I hope to hear from you soon, with a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 9 August 1888

Arles, 9 August 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you very much for sending me the canvas and paints, which have just arrived. This time there was 9.80 fr. carriage to pay, so I shan't go and get them out till I get your next letter, having no cash at the moment. But we must make sure that Tasset, who generally pays the forwarding charges in advance and does not fail to note this prepayment on his bill, has omitted it this time. In the same way on the last consignment but one I paid 5.60 fr., so if forwarding charges were put down on the last bill but one, it would be an overcharge. If he had made two separate parcels (usually the cost of carriage is about 3 francs) we should only have had to pay 5.60 fr.

Provided that on the 10 meters of canvas I paint only masterpieces half a meter in size and sell them cash down and at exorbitant prices to distinguished connoisseurs of the Rue de la Paix, nothing will be easier than to make a fortune on this package.

I think it is likely that we are going to have great heat now without wind, since the wind has been blowing for six weeks. If so, it is a very good thing that I have a supply of paints and canvas, because I already have my eye on half a dozen subjects, especially that little cottage garden I sent you the drawing of yesterday. I am thinking about Gauguin a lot, and I am sure that in one way or another, whether it is he who comes here or I who go to him, he and I will like practically the same subjects, and I have no doubt that I could work at Pont-Aven, and on the other hand I am convinced that he would fall in love with the country down here. Well, by the end of the year, supposing he gives you one canvas a month, which would make altogether a dozen a year, he will have made a profit on it, not having incurred any debts and working steadily without interruption; certainly he won't have been the loser, as the money which he will have had from us would be largely made good by the economies that will be possible if we set up house in the studio instead of both of us living in cafés. Besides that, provided we keep on good terms and are determined not to quarrel, we shall be in a stronger position as far as reputation goes.

If we each live alone, it means living like madmen or criminals, in appearance at any rate, and also a little in reality. I am happier to feel my old strength returning than I ever thought I could be. I owe this largely to the people at the restaurant where I have my meals at the moment, who really are extraordinary. Certainly I have to pay for it, but it is something you don't find in Paris, really getting something to eat for your money. And I should very much like to see Gauguin here for a good long time.

What Gruby says about doing without women and eating well is true, for if your very brain and marrow are going into your work, it is pretty sensible not to exhaust yourself more than you must in love-making. But it is easier to put into practice in the country than in Paris.

The desire for women that you catch in Paris, isn't it rather the effect of that very enervation which Gruby is the sworn enemy of than a sign of vigour? So you feel this desire disappearing at the very moment you are yourself again. The root of the evil lies in the constitution itself, in the fatal weakening of families from generation to generation, and besides that, in one's unwholesome job and the dreary life in Paris. The root of the evil certainly lies there, and there's no cure for it.

I think that when the day comes for you to free yourself of those futile accounts and the absurdly complicated management at Goupil's, you would gain enormously in influence with the collectors; these complicated systems of management are the very devil, and I think that no brain exists, no temperament, whoever the man on the job is, that does not lose 50 per cent over it. Our uncle was quite right in what he said about it: much business with few employees and not little business with a lot of them. Unluckily for him he was himself caught in the wheels.

This job of working among people so as to make sales is a job that requires observation and coolness. But if you are forced to give too much attention to the books, you lose your poise.

I do want to know exactly how you are. Anyway, provided the impressionists produce good stuff and make friends, there is always the chance and the possibility of a more independent position for you later on. It's a pity that it cannot be from now on. No letter from Russell yet, but now that he has got the drawings, he is bound to reply. This restaurant where I am is very queer; it is grey all over; the floor is of grey bitumen like a street pavement, grey paper on the walls, green blinds always drawn, a big green curtain in front of the door which is always open, to stop the dust coming in. So it already has a Velásquez grey — like in the “Spinning Women” — and even the very narrow, very fierce ray of sunlight through a blind, like the one that slants across Velásquez's picture, is not wanting. Little tables of course, with white cloths. And behind this room in Velásquez grey you see the old kitchen, as clean as a Dutch kitchen, with floor of bright red bricks, green vegetables, oak chest, the kitchen range with shining brass things and blue and white tiles, and the big fire a clear orange. And then there are two women waitresses, both in grey, a little like that picture of Prevost's you have in your place - you could compare it point for point.

In the kitchen, an old woman and a short, fat servant also in grey, black, white. I don't know if I describe it clearly enough for you, but it's here, and it's pure Velásquez.

In front of the restaurant there is a covered court, paved with red brick, and on the walls wild vine, convolvulus and creepers.[Vincent is describing the Restaurant Venissac at 28 Place Lamartine.]

It is still the real old Provençal, whereas the other restaurants are so much modeled on Paris that even when they have no kind of concierge whatever, there's his lodge just the same and the notice “Apply to the Concierge!”

It isn't all brilliant here. I saw a stable with four coffee-coloured cows, and a calf of the same colour. The stable bluish-white hung with spiders' webs, the cows very clean and very beautiful, and a great green curtain in the doorway to keep out flies and dust.

Grey again - Velásquez's grey.

There was such quiet in it - the cafe-au-lait and tobacco colours of the cows' hides, with the soft bluish grey-white of the walls, the green hanging and the sparkling sunny golden-green outside to make a startling contrast. So you see there's something still to be done, quite different from anything I have done so far.

I must go to work. I saw another very quiet and lovely thing the other day, a girl with a coffee-tinted skin, if I remember correctly, ash-blonde hair, grey eyes, a print bodice of pale pink under which you could see the breasts, shapely, firm and small. This against the emerald leaves of some fig trees. A woman as simple as the herds, every line of her virgin.

It isn't altogether impossible that I shall get her to pose in the open air, and her mother too - a gardener's wife - earth colour, dressed just then in soiled yellow and faded blue.

The girl's coffee-tinted complexion was darker than the pink of her bodice.

The mother was amazing, the figure in dirty yellow and faded blue standing out in strong sunlight against a square of brilliant snow-white and citron-yellow flowers. A perfect Van der Meer of Delft, you see.

It's not a bad place, the South.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 11 August 1888

Arles, 11 August 1888
My dear Theo,
Shortly you are going to make the acquaintance of Mr. Patience Escalier, a sort of man with a hoe, former drover of the Camargue, now gardener at a farm in the Crau. Today I am sending you the drawing I made after this painting, as well as the drawing of the portrait of the postman Rollin [sic]. The colouring of this portrait of the peasant is less black than the potato eaters of Nuenen, but our highly civilized Parisian *Portier* - probably so called because he chucks pictures out - will be bothered by the same old problem. You have changed since then, but you still see that he has not, and it really is a pity that there are not more paintings *en sabots* in Paris. I don't think that my peasant would do harm to the Lautrec that you have and I even dare say that the Lautrec would become even more distinguished by the mutual contrast, and that my own would gain by the odd comparison, because the sunlit and sunburned quality of the huge sun and the open air would show to advantage beside the rice powder and the chic dressing table.

What a mistake Parisians make in not having a palate for crude things, for Monticellis, for common earthenware. But there, one most not lose heart because Utopia is not coming true. It is only that what I learned in Paris is leaving me, and I am returning to the ideas I had in the country before I knew the impressionists. And I should not be surprised if the impressionists soon find fault with my way of working, for it has been fertilized by Delacroix's ideas rather than by theirs. Because instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I have before my eyes, I use colour more arbitrarily, in order to express myself forcibly. Well, let that be, as far as theory goes, but I'm going to give you an example of what I mean.

I should like to paint the portrait of an artist friend, a man who dreams great dreams, who works as the nightingale sings, because it is his nature. He'll be a blond man. I want to put my appreciation, the love I have for him into the picture. So I paint him as he is, as faithfully as I can, to begin with.

But the picture is not yet finished. To finish it I am now going to be the arbitrary colourist. I exaggerate the fairness of the hair, I even get to orange tones, chromes and pale citron-yellow.

Behind the head, instead of painting the ordinary wall of the mean room, I paint infinity, a plain background of the richest, intensest blue that I can contrive, and by this simple combination of the bright head against the rich blue background, I get a mysterious effect, like a star in the depths of an azure sky.

Similarly in the portrait of the peasant I have worked this way, but in this case without wishing to evoke the mysterious brilliance of a pale star in the infinite blue. But imagine the terrible man that I have to do in the full furnace of the harvest at high noon. Hence the flashing orange colours like a red-hot fire, hence the tones of old gold luminous in the gloom.

Ah, my dear boy - - and the good folk will not see in this exaggeration anything but a caricature.

But what has that to do with us? We've read La Terre and Germinal, and if we are painting a peasant, we want to show that in the end what we have read has come very near to being part of us.

I do not know if I can paint the postman *as I feel him*; this man is like old Tanguy in so far as he is a revolutionary, he is probably thought a good republican because he wholeheartedly detests the republic which we now enjoy, and because on the whole he is beginning to doubt, to be a little disillusioned, as to the republican principle itself.

But I once watched him sing the “Marseillaise” and I thought I was watching `89, not next year, but the old 99 years ago. It was a Delacroix, a Daumier, straight from the old Dutchmen.

Unfortunately he cannot pose, and yet to make a picture you must have an intelligent model.

And now I must tell you that these days, as far as material things go, are cruelly hard. Life, no matter what I do, is pretty expensive here, almost like Paris, where you can spend 5 or 6 francs a day and have very little to show for it.

If I have models, I suffer a good deal for it. But it doesn't matter, and I'm going to continue. And I can assure you that if you should happen to send me a little extra money sometimes, it would benefit the pictures, but not me. The only choice I have is between being a good painter and a bad one. I choose the first. But the needs of the painting are like those of a wasteful mistress, you can do nothing without money, and you never have enough of it. That's why painting ought to be done at the public expense, instead of the artists being overburdened with it.

But there, we had better hold our tongues, because *no one is forcing us to work*, fate having ordained that indifference to painting be widespread and by way of being eternal.

Fortunately my digestion is so nearly all right again that I have lived for three weeks in the month on ship's biscuits with milk and eggs. It is the blessed warmth that is bringing back my strength, and I was certainly right in *going at once* to the South, instead of waiting until the evil was past remedy. Yes, really, I am as well as other men now, which I have never been except for a short while in Nuenen for instance, and it is rather pleasant. By other men I mean something like the navvies, old Tanguy, old Millet, the peasants. When you are well, you must be able to live on a piece of bread while you are working all day, and have enough strength to smoke and to drink your glass in the evening, that's necessary under the circumstances. And all the same to feel the stars and the infinite high and clear above you. Then life is almost enchanted after all. Oh! those who don't believe in this sun here are real infidels.

Unfortunately, along with the good god sun three quarters of the time there is the devil mistral.

Saturday's post has gone, damn it, and I never doubted but I should get your letter. However, you see I am not fretting about it.

With a handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 13 August 1888

Arles, c. 13 August 1888
My dear Theo,

I have to thank you for a lot of things, first for your letter and the 50-fr. note enclosed, but also just as much for the package of paints and canvas, which I have been to the station to get (the geranium lake has come too), and lastly for the Cassagne book, and for La Fin de Lucie Pellegrin.

If Tasset divided his parcels better, it would make a difference in the cost of carriage; there were three parcels this time, two of them weighing more than 5 kilos. If he had kept back a few tubes, the whole would have cost about 5 francs. But I am very glad to have them all the same.

Lucie Pellegrin is very fine, it is quick with life and is still exquisite and moving, because it keeps the human touch. Why should it be forbidden to handle these subjects, unhealthy and overexcited sexual organs seek sensual delights such as da Vinci's. Not I, who have hardly seen anything but the kind of women at 2 francs, originally intended for the Zouaves. But the people who have leisure for love-making, they want the da Vinci mysteries. I realize that these loves are not for everyone's understanding. But from the point of view of what is allowed, one could write books treating worse aberrations of perversion than Lesbianism, just as it would be permissible to write medical documents on this sort of story, surgical disquisitions.

At all events, law and justice apart, a pretty woman is a living marvel, whereas the pictures by da Vinci and Correggio only exist for other reasons. Why am I so little an artist that I always regret that the statue and the picture are not alive? Why do I understand the musician better, why do I see the raison d'être of his abstractions better?

At the first opportunity I will send you an engraving after a drawing by Rowlandson, representing two women, as beautiful as a Fragonard or a Goya. Just now we are having a glorious strong heat, with no wind, just what I want. There is a sun, a light that for want of a better word I can only call yellow, pale sulphur yellow, pale golden citron. How lovely yellow is! And how much better I shall see the North!

Oh! I keep wishing for the day when you will see and feel the sun of the

South!

As to studies, I have two studies of thistles in an uncultivated field, thistles white with the fine dust of the road. Then a little study of a roadside inn, with red and green carts; and also a little study of Paris-Lyons-Mediterranée carriages; these last two studies have been approved of as having “quite the modern touch” by the young rival of good old General Boulanger, the very resplendent 2nd lieutenant of Zouaves.

This valiant warrior has given up the art of drawing, into the mysteries of which I endeavored to initiate him, but it was for a plausible reason, namely that he had unexpectedly to take an examination, for which I am afraid he was anything but prepared.

Always supposing the aforesaid young Frenchman always speaks the truth, he has astonished his examiners by the confidence of his answers, a confidence he had reinforced by spending the eve of the examination in a brothel.

As François Coppée, I think, says in a sonnet, one might have “a despairing doubt” on the subject of “my lieutenant to be,” for, Coppée goes on, “my thoughts are on our defeat.” The fact remains that I have nothing to complain of in him, and if it is true that he will shortly be a full-fledged lieutenant, one must anyhow acknowledge his luck. He is literally like the good old general in that he has often frequented the pretty ladies of the so-called café-chantant type. It will be enough for me to write you, or rather he will send you a wire telling you by what train he will arrive on the 16th or 17th. Then he will hand over the painted studies, which will save us the cost of carriage. He owes me all that anyhow for my lessons. He will only stay in Paris one or two days, as he is going North, but on his return he will stop there longer.

After such coolness it is rather kind of Uncle to have left you a legacy, but I cannot easily get it into my head that C. M. and he did not actually condemn you to penal servitude for life that time they refused to lend you the capital necessary to set you up in business for yourself. This will always remain a grave error on their part. But I won't harp on that. All the more reason for trying to do the utmost in art, even if we shall always be in comparatively straitened circumstances as far as money is concerned. Well, my boy, at the time you were *ready for your part* to set up in business, and consequently you have a perfect right to feel that you are doing *your duty for your part*. Considered as a whole, you have taken up this business of the impressionists with their help. Without their help the thing can't go on; or will go on in some different way. If you have made no profit yet, you have deserved something, and if the Dutch confound these two very different things, having only their word “verdienen” for both meanings, so much the worse for them.

I am writing a line to Mourier too - you can read it - and I give you a hearty handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

With regard to Gauguin, however much we appreciate him, I think that we must behave like the mother of a family and calculate the actual expenses. If one listened to him, one would go on hoping for something vague in the future, and meantime stay on at the inn, and go on living in a hell with no way out.

I would rather shut myself up in a cloister like the monks, free as the monks are to go to the brothel or the wine shop if the spirit moves us. But for our work we need a home. Altogether Gauguin leaves me quite in the dark about Pont-Aven; he tacitly accepts my suggestion of coming to him if necessary, but he writes nothing about any means of finding a studio of our own, or about what it would cost to furnish it. And I can't help feeling there's something queer about it.

So I have decided not to go to Pont-Aven, unless we could find a house there at a low rent like the one here (15 fr. per month is what mine costs) and could arrange it so that we could sleep in it.

I am going to write our sister this evening if I can find time.

A handshake. Vincent

Have you got the drawings of the gardens, and the two figure drawings? I think that the picture of the old peasant's head is as strange in colour as the Sower, but the Sower is a failure, and the peasant is more what it should be. Oh, as to that - I will send it to you all by itself as soon as it is dry, and I am going to put a dedication to you on it.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 14 August 1888

Arles, c. 14 August 1888

My dear Theo,

I spent yesterday evening with the 2nd lieutenant; he expects to leave here on Friday, then he will stop a night at Clermont, and from Clermont he will send you a wire to tell you by what train he will arrive Sunday morning. The roll he is bringing contains 35 studies, among which there are many I am desperately dissatisfied with, but which I am sending anyway, since at all events they will give you a vague idea of the very fine subjects there are in this country.

For instance, there is a rough sketch I made of myself laden with boxes, props, and canvas on the sunny road to Tarascon. There is a view of the Rhone in which the sky and the water are the colour of absinthe, with a blue bridge and figures of little black urchins; there is the sower, and a washing place, and others as well, which have not come off at all and are unfinished, especially one big landscape with brushwood.

What has happened to the Souvenir de Mauve? Not having heard any word about it, I have been inclined to think that Tersteeg must have said something disagreeable to you about it, to the effect that it would be refused, or some such unpleasantness. Needless to say, I shan't fret over it if this is so.

Just now I am working on a study like this

[Here appears the sketch of “Men Loading Boats.”]

of boats seen from the quay above, the two boats are pink tinged with violet, the water is bright green, no sky, a tricolour on the mast. A workman with a barrow is unloading sand. I have a drawing of it as well.

Have you received the three drawings of the garden? In the end they'll refuse to take any more of them at the post office, because they are too big.

I am afraid that I shall not get a rather beautiful model; she promised, but then - as it appears - picked up some change by going on a long weekend, and now has something better to do. She was extraordinary, the expression like that one by Delacroix, the figure primitive and strange.

I endure these things with patience, failing any other way of bearing them, but this continual difficulty with models is maddening. One of these days I hope to make a study of oleanders. If I painted prettily like Bouguereau, people would not be ashamed to let themselves be painted, but I think that I have lost models because they thought that they were “badly done,” because “it was only pictures full of painting” that I did. The poor little souls are afraid of being compromised and that people will laugh at their portraits. But it is almost enough to make you lose heart when you think that you could do something if people had more good will. I cannot resign myself to saying - “sour grapes” -it does not console me for not having more models.

Well, I must have patience and look around again for others.

Our sister will soon be coming now to spend some time with you. I am sure she will enjoy herself.

It is a gloomy enough prospect to have to say to myself that perhaps the painting I am doing will never be of any value whatever. If it was worth what it cost to do, I could say, “I never bothered my head about money.”

But as things are, on the contrary it absorbs me. But there it is, and anyhow I must go on and try to do better.

Very often I think that it would be wiser to go to Gauguin, instead of recommending the life here to him. I am so afraid that after all he will complain of having been upset. Would it really be possible for us to live at home here, and could we make both ends meet, seeing that it is a new experiment? We can figure what it would cost in Brittany, whereas I haven't the slightest idea about here. I still find life pretty expensive, and you don't get anywhere complaining to the people here. Beds and some furniture would have to be bought here, and then there would be the cost of his journey and everything he owes.

It seems to me to be risking more than we ought, when Bernard and he spend so little in Brittany. Anyway, we must decide soon, and I for my part have no preference. It is simply a question of deciding where we have the best likelihood of living cheaply. I must write Gauguin today to ask him what he pays for models, and if he has any.

You see, when one is getting old, one must really rule out illusions, and count the cost before embarking on things. And if when one is younger one can believe that it's possible to get a living by unremitting work, it becomes more and more doubtful now. I already told Gauguin in my last letter that if we painted like Bouguereau we could hope to make money by it, but that the public will never change, and it likes only easy, pretty things. With a more austere talent, you cannot count on profit from your work; most of the people intelligent enough to like and understand impressionist pictures are and will remain too poor to buy them. Will Gauguin or I work the less for that? - no - but we shall be forced to submit deliberately to poverty and social isolation. And to begin with, let's settle down where life costs the least. If success comes, so much the better, so much the better if we find ourselves in easier circumstances someday.

What touches me most deeply in Zola's L'Œuvre is the figure of Bongrand-Jundt. What he says is so true. “You think, you poor souls, that when an artist has established his talent and his reputation, he is safe. On the contrary, henceforth he is denied producing anything which is not perfect. His reputation itself forces him to take more pains over his work, as the chances of selling grow fewer. At the least sign of weakness, the whole jealous pack will fall on him and destroy that very reputation and the faith that the changeable and treacherous public has temporarily had in him.”

Even stronger than this is what Carlyle says “You know the glowworms in Brazil that shine so that in the evening ladies stick them into their hair with pins; well, fame is a fine thing, but look you, to the artist it is what the hairpin is to the insects.

“You want to succeed and shine, but do you know what it is you desire?”

So I have a horror of success, I am afraid of “the morning after the night before” of an impressionist success, even these difficult days will later seem to us “the good old times!”

Well, Gauguin and I must look ahead, we must contrive to have a roof over our heads, beds, in short, the absolute necessities, to stand the siege of failure which will *last all our lives* and we must settle down in the cheapest place. Then we shall get the quiet which is necessary if we are to produce much, even if we sell little or nothing.

But if our expenses exceed our income, we should be mistaken if we hoped that all could be put right by selling our pictures. On the contrary, we should be obliged to get rid of them at any price and at the wrong moment.

To conclude, we must live almost like monks or hermits, with work for our master passion, and surrendering our ease.

Nature and fine weather are the advantages of the South; but I think that Gauguin will never give up the fight in Paris, he has it too much at heart, and believes in a lasting success more than I do. That will do me no harm; on the contrary, perhaps I am too pessimistic. Let's leave him this illusion then, but let's realize that what he will always need is his daily bread and shelter and paints. That is the crack in his armour, and it is because he is getting into debt now that he will be knocked out in advance.

If we two come to his aid, we are in fact making his victory in Paris possible.

If I had the same ambitions as he, we probably should not agree. But I neither care about success for myself nor about happiness; I do care about the permanence of this vigorous attempt by the impressionists, I do care about this question of shelter and daily bread for them. And I think it's a crime that I should have it when two could live on the same money.

If you are a painter, they think you are either a fool or a rich man; a cup of milk costs you a franc, a slice of bread two, and meanwhile your pictures are not selling. That is what makes it necessary to combine as the old monks did, and the Moravian Brothers of our Dutch heaths.

I can already see that Gauguin is hoping for success, he cannot do without Paris, he does not realize the *eternity* of poverty. You understand that under the circumstances it is all the same to me whether I stay or go. We must let him fight his battle, he is sure to win. He would feel that he was doing nothing if he were too far from Paris, but for our own part let's keep our utter indifference to success or failure.

I had begun to sign canvases, but I soon stopped, because it seemed too foolish. On one marine there is an excessively red signature, because I wanted a red note in the green. But you will see them soon. The end of the week will be a little difficult, so I hope to get your letter a day earlier rather than a day late.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 15 August 1888

[Telegram]
VANGOGH, 54 RUE LEPIC, PARIS.
MILLIET WILL DELIVER PICTURES FRIDAY MORNING 7 OCLOCK PRECISELY CERCLE MILITAIRE AVENUE OPÉRA - VINCENT.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 15 August 1888

My dear Theo,

You will have got my wire telling you that 2nd lieutenant Milliet will arrive in Paris on Friday morning; he will arrive at the Gare de Lyon at 5:15 in the morning and go from there straight to the Cercle Militaire in the Avenue de l'Opéra. It would be simplest for both of you if you went to see him there at 7 o'clock sharp in the morning.

Of course you could also meet him at the Gare de Lyon itself, but to begin with that is farther off, and then you would have to get up very early. He has been very nice to me, particularly these last few days. He will return to Paris for a week, but he is spending the greater part of his leave in the North.

I am very glad to have these pictures sent off, and in this way our sister will see my studies, and that makes a difference to me, for by this she will share in something that is essentially part of our life in France, crude and casual as it may be. I mean, she will see painting in the raw. But to do me a great favour, show her one or two studies put on stretchers and framed in white. You can take some of the earlier ones out of their stretchers and frames. Don't let my stuff take up too much room, so don't get encumbered with stretchers and frames for my sake. For the comrades will see well enough what it is like just as it stands, and you even more. Later on - when the hundred are done - we will choose ten or fifteen of them to be framed. I have kept the big portrait of the postman, and the head which I included was done at a *single sitting*.

But that's what I'm good at, doing a fellow roughly in one sitting. If I wanted to show off, my boy, I'd always do it, drink with the first comer, paint him, and that not in water colours but in oils, on the spot in the manner of Daumier.

If I did a hundred like that, there would be some good ones among them. And I'd be more of a Frenchman and more myself, and more of a drinker. It does tempt me so - not drinking, but painting tramps. What I gained by it as an artist, should I lose that as a man? If I had the faith to do it, I'd be a notable madman; now I am an insignificant one, but you see I am not sufficiently ambitious for that fame to set a match to the powder. I would rather wait for the next generation, which will do in portraiture what Claude Monet does in landscape, the rich, daring landscape à la Guy de Maupassant.

But then I know that I am not - not their equal - but didn't the Flauberts and

Balzacs make the Zolas and Maupassants? So here's to - not us, but to the generation to come. You are a good enough judge of painting to see and understand what I may have of originality, and also to see the uselessness of presenting what I am doing to the modern public, because the others surpass me in clearness of touch. That is more the fault of wind and circumstances, compared to what I could do without the mistral and without the fatal conditions of vanished youth and comparative poverty. For my part I am in no way set on changing my condition, and I count myself only too happy to be able to go on as I do.

No answer from friend Russell, and Gauguin certainly deserved one.

I have put in this package a drawing after a picture which I am working on now - the boats with the man unloading sand. If some studies are not quite dry, so much the worse for them. They must be left to dry out, then washed with plenty of water, and retouched if necessary. But they cannot come to much harm, and it was a good opportunity for sending them.

A good handshake, and I do hope to hear from you by Friday or Saturday.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 18 August 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your kind letter, and the 100-fr. note enclosed.

And it's very good of you to promise the two of us, Gauguin and me, that you'll put us in the way to carrying out our combination.

I have just had a letter from Bernard, who went some days ago to join Gauguin, Laval and somebody else at Pont-Aven. It was a very decent letter, but not one syllable in it about Gauguin intending to join me, and not a syllable either about wanting me to come there. All the same it was a very friendly letter.

From Gauguin himself not a word for almost a month.

I myself think that Gauguin would rather try to fight his way through with his friends in the North, and if by good luck he sells one or more pictures, he may have other plans for himself than coming to join me.

But haven't I, with less desire than he for the struggle in Paris, the right to go my own way? Look here. As soon as you can, would you, not give, but lend me 300 francs in one lump sum for a year? Then, if I take it that at present you send me 250 francs a month, you will only send me 200 after this, until the 300, paid out at once, would be paid off.

Then I should buy two decent beds all complete at 100 francs each, and 100 franc's worth of other furniture.

That would mean that I could sleep at home, and could put up Gauguin or anybody else.

That would mean a gain of 300 francs a year, for I pay a franc a night to my landlord.

I should feel what it was like to have more of a fixed abode, and really, it is only on this condition that one can work.

This would not increase my expenses for the whole year, but it would provide me with some furniture and the possibility of making both ends meet.

Then whether Gauguin comes or not is his own business, and as soon as we are ready to have him, and his bed and room are there, we shall be keeping our promise.

I insist on this, the plan remains just as real and solid whether Gauguin comes or not, seeing that our object doesn't change - to deliver me and one of the comrades from this cancer that is gnawing at our work, this being forced to live in these ruinous inns without any profit to ourselves.

It is pure madness.

To be carefree, to hope that someday or another one will be free from want, what a dream! I should think myself very happy if I could work for a wage just sufficient to keep me in peace in my studio, all my life.

Well, though I repeat once more that I don't much care whether I settle in Pont-Aven or in Arles, I intend to be immovable on this point - of having a fixed studio, and sleeping there and not at an inn.

If you are kind enough to enable Gauguin and myself to settle down like that, I only say that if we do not take this opportunity to escape from lodging-keepers, we are throwing all your money, and our means of resisting this besieging poverty, into the gutter.

On this my mind is quite made up, and I will not yield on that point.

Under the present conditions, though I am spending money, I haven't even what is necessary, and I do not feel I have strength enough left to go on like this for long. If Gauguin can find the same opportunity at Pont-Aven, it's all right; but I'll tell you this, once here and this expense over, the work would be done. The sun here counts for a good deal. As it is, I am going to pieces and killing myself.

Well, I've said my say. I am not coming to Pont-Aven if I have to stay at the inn with the English and the people from the École des Beaux-Arts that you argue with every evening. It's a storm in a teacup.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 18 August 1888

My dear Bernard,

I want to do figures, figures and more figures. I cannot resist that series of bipeds from the baby to Socrates, and from the woman with black hair and white skin to the woman with yellow hair and a sunburned brick-red face.

In the meantime I am mostly doing other things.

Thanks for your letter. This time I am writing in a great hurry and greatly exhausted.

I am very pleased you have joined Gauguin.

Ah! I have another figure all the same which is an absolute continuation of certain studies of heads I did in Holland. I showed them to you one day along with a picture from that period, “The Potato Eaters”; I wish I could show you this one. It is still a study, in which colour plays a part such as the black and white of a drawing could not possibly reproduce.

I wanted to send you a very large and very careful drawing. Very well! It turned out quite different, though it is correct. For this time again the colour suggests a blazing air of harvest time right in the South, in the middle of the dog days, and without that it's another picture.

I dare believe that Gauguin and you would understand it; but how ugly people will think it! *You* know what a peasant is, how strongly he reminds one of a wild beast, when you have found one of the true race.

I also have “Men Unloading a Sand Barge” - that is to say, there are two boats of a violet-kind of pink in veronese green water [loaded] with grey sand, wheelbarrows, planks and a little blue-and-yellow fellow.

All of it seen from the quay above it, looking down at a bird's-eye view. No sky; it is only an attempt or rather a quick study, done during the full violence of the mistral.

I am also attempting dusty thistles with a great swarm of butterflies whirling over them [Unknown painting].

Oh! that beautiful midsummer sun here. It beats down on one's head, and I haven't the slightest doubt that it makes one crazy. But as I was so to begin with, I only enjoy it.

I am thinking of decorating my studio with half a dozen pictures of “Sunflowers,” a decoration in which the raw or broken chrome yellows will blaze forth on various backgrounds - blue, from the palest malachite green to *royal blue*, framed in thin strips of wood painted with orange lead.

Effects like those of stained-glass windows in a Gothic church.

Ah! my dear comrades, let us crazy ones take delight in our eyesight in spite of everything, yes, let's!

Alas, nature takes it out of the animal, and our bodies are despicable and sometimes a heavy burden. But it has been like that ever since Giotto, that man with his poor health.

Ah! and what a feast for the eyes all the same, and what a smile of the old lion Rembrandt, with a piece of white cloth around his head, his palette in his hand!

How much I would like to spend these days in Pont-Aven; however, I find comfort in contemplating the sunflowers.

A hearty handshake, till soon again.

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 21 August 1888

My dear Theo,

I write in great haste to tell you that I have had a note from Gauguin, saying that he has not written much, but that he is quite ready to come South as soon as the opportunity arises.

They are enjoying themselves very much painting, arguing and fighting with the worthy Englishmen; he speaks well of Bernard's work, and B. speaks well of Gauguin's.

I am hard at it, painting with the enthusiasm of a Marseillais eating bouillabaisse, which won't surprise you when you know that what I'm at is the painting of some big sunflowers.

I have three canvases going - 1st, three huge flowers in a green vase, with a light background, a size 15 canvas; 2nd, three flowers, one gone to seed, having lost its petals, and one a bud against a royal-blue background, size 25 canvas; 3rd, twelve flowers and buds in a yellow vase (size 30 canvas). The last one is therefore light on light, and I hope it will be the best. Probably I shall not stop at that. Now that I hope to live with Gauguin in a studio of our own, I want to make decorations for the studio. Nothing but big flowers. Next door to your shop, in the restaurant, you know there is a lovely decoration of flowers; I always remember the big sunflowers in the window there.

If I carry out this idea there will be a dozen panels. So the whole thing will be a symphony in blue and yellow. I am working at it every morning from sunrise on, for the flowers fade so soon, and the thing is to do the whole in one rush.

You were quite right to tell Tasset that he must give us some tubes of colour for the 15 francs carriage not prepaid on the two packages. When I have finished these sunflowers, I may need yellow and blue perhaps. If so I will send a small order accordingly. I very much like the ordinary canvas of Tasset's which was 50 centimes more expensive than Bourgeois's; it is very well prepared.

I am very glad that G. is well.

I am beginning to like the South more and more.

I am working on another study of dusty thistles, with an innumerable swarm of white and yellow butterflies.[Painting lost]

I have again missed some models which I had hoped to have these last few days. Koning has written saying that he is going to live in The Hague, and that he means to send you some studies.

I have heaps of ideas for new canvases. I saw again today the same coal boat with the workmen unloading it that I told you about before, at the same place as the boats loaded with sand which I sent you a drawing of. It would be a splendid subject. Only I am beginning more and more to try a simple technique which is perhaps not impressionistic. I would like to paint in such a way that everybody, at least if they have eyes, would see it. I am writing in a hurry, but I wanted to enclose a few words to our sister.

A handshake, I must get back to work.

Ever yours, Vincent

Gauguin said that Bernard has made an album of my sketches and has shown it to him.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, c. 21 August 1888

W6

Arles, c. 21 August 1888

Dear Sister,

I write you these few words in a hurry, as I don't want to postpone telling you how pleased I am that you are in Paris, and I suppose you are going to see a lot of things in the days to come. It is not quite impossible that next year, when I shall be living with my friend Gauguin, you will happen to go as far as the Mediterranean. I am convinced you too will think it beautiful here.

What is your opinion of that picture of Gauguin's, the one with those Negresses which Theo has? - I could imagine you might understand it. At the moment I am working on a bunch of twelve sunflowers in a yellow earthenware pot, and I intend to decorate the whole studio with nothing but sunflowers.

I hope you will go often to the Luxembourg, and also to go see the modern pictures in the Louvre, so that you will gain an understanding of what a Millet, a Jules Breton, a Daubigny, a Corot is. I make you a present of all the rest - except Delacroix.

Although at present they are working in quite a different manner, the work of Delacroix, and Millet, and Corot will last, and the changes in style will not affect it.

I hope when you go back to Holland you will take along some study of mine to decorate your room.

If I can get the mother and father to allow me to do a picture of it, I am going to paint a baby in a cradle one of these days. The father has refused to have it baptized - he is an ardent revolutionary - and when the family grumbled, possibly on account of the christening feast, he told them that the christening feast would take place nonetheless, and that he would baptize the child himself. Then he sang the “Marseillaise” in a frightful voice, after which he called the child Marcelle, after the daughter of “le brav général Boulanger,” to the great indignation of this innocent baby's grandmother and some other members of the family.

I am getting to think the country here more and more beautiful. Have you read

Tartarin de Tarascon by Daudet? You should, you know, and Tartarin sur les Alpes, for they are certainly not among the least of Daudet's novels.

I am sure you will observe that in summer the sun is a great deal hotter in Paris than at home.

I think I should not object to going even a bit farther, I mean where the country is less flat, seeing that in point of fact I never saw a mountain in my life. As soon as Gauguin is here, I suppose we shall do it. But until then I am going to stay in Arles. And after he has come I should like to go on a walking tour with him all over Provence.

I am very busy working on my sunflowers, and in reality I have nothing to say.

So I had better stop. Wishing you and Theo truly nice days and fine weather,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 27 August 1888

My dear Theo,

Would you like to ask Tasset's opinion on the following question? To me it seems as though the more finely a colour is brayed, the more it becomes saturated with oil. Now needless to say, we don't care overmuch for oil.

If we painted like M. Gérôme and the other delusive photographers, we should doubtless ask for very finely brayed colours. But we on the contrary do not object to the canvas having a rough look. If then, instead of braying the colour on a stone for God knows how many hours, it was brayed just long enough to make it manageable, without worrying too much about the fineness of the powder, you would get fresher colours which would perhaps darken less. If he wants to make a trial of it with the three chromes, the malachite, the vermilion, the orange lead, the cobalt, and the ultramarine, I am almost certain that at much less cost I should get colours which would be fresher and more lasting. Then what would the price be? I'm sure this could be done. Probably also with the reds and the emerald, which are transparent.

I enclose an order which is urgent.

I am now on the fourth picture of sunflowers. This fourth one is a bunch of 14 flowers, against a yellow background, like a still life of quinces and lemons that I did some time ago.

Only as it is much bigger, it gives a rather singular effect, and I think that this one is painted with more simplicity than the quinces and lemons.

Do you remember that one day we saw a very extraordinary Manet at the Hotel Drouot, some huge pink peonies with their green leaves against a light background? As free in the open air and as much a flower as anything could be, and yet painted in a perfectly solid impasto, and not the way Jeannin does it.

That's what I'd call simplicity of technique. And I must tell you that nowadays I am trying to find a special brushwork without stippling or anything else, nothing but the varied stroke. But someday you'll see.

What a pity painting costs so much! This week I had fewer worries than other weeks, so I let myself go. I shall have spent the 100-fr. note in a single week, but at the end of this week I'll have my four pictures, and even if I add the cost of all the paint I have used, the week will not have been sheer waste. I have got up very early every day, I have had a good dinner and supper, and so I have been able to work hard and long without feeling myself weaken. But there, we live in days when there is no demand for what we are making, not only does it not sell, but as you see in Gauguin's case, when you want to borrow on the pictures, you can't get anything, even if it is a trifling sum and the work, important. And that is why we are the prey of every happening. And I am afraid that it will hardly change in our lifetime. But if we are preparing richer lives for the painters who will follow in our footsteps, it will be something.

But life is short, and shorter still, the number of years you feel bold enough to face everything.

And in the end it is to be feared that as soon as the new painting is appreciated, the painters will go soft.

But anyway, this much is positive, it is not we of the present time who are decadent. Gauguin and Bernard talk now of “painting like children” - I would rather have that than “painting like decadents.” How is it that people see something decadent in impressionism? It is very much the reverse.

I enclose a line for Tasset. The difference in price ought to be considerable, and needless to say, I hope to make less and less use of the finely brayed colours.

With a handshake.

One of the decorations of sunflowers on royal blue ground has “a halo,” that is to say each object is surrounded by a glow of the complementary colour of the background against which it stands out. Goodbye for now.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, c. 27 August 1888

Arles, c. 27 August 1888

My dear sister,

It will really simplify the writing of my letter if you will let me write in French.

I am quite delighted to hear that you get more excited by sculpture than by painting - all the more since Theo assures me that your judgment of pictures is sound too.

Of course this cannot yet be a fixed taste that would never waver; but having intuition, instinct, is already a great thing, and it is exactly what not everybody always has. But all the same I am very curious to know what impression the Luxembourg will make on you.

It is true that at moments, when I am in a good mood, I think that what is alive in art, and eternally alive, is in the first place the painter and in the second place the picture.

Never mind, it is of no importance - however, to *see* fellows *work* is still something one will not find under glass in museums.

Poor Miss Harriet in Guy de Maupassant's book was perhaps in the right. But did the painter do wrong when he went with the servant girl from the farm? Perhaps not. There is always some pretty annoying fatality in life. Well, painters die, or go mad with despair, or are paralyzed in their production, because nobody likes them personally.

Have you read the American poems by *Whitman*? I am sure Theo has them, and I strongly advise you to read them, because to begin with they are really fine, and the English speak about them a good deal. He sees in the future, and even in the present, a world of healthy, carnal love, strong and frank - of friendship - of work - under the great starlit vault of heaven a something which after all one can only call God - and eternity in its place above this world. At first it makes you smile, it is all so candid and pure; but it sets you thinking for the same reason.

The “Prayer of Columbus” is very beautiful.

What is your opinion of the bunch of flowers by Monticelli which is at Theo's, and also of the “Spanish Woman” by Prévost? These are truly two pictures of the South.

I think of Monticelli terribly often here. He was a strong man - a little cracked or rather very much so - dreaming of the sun and of love and gaiety, but always harassed by poverty - of an extremely refined taste as a colourist, a thoroughbred man of a rare race, continuing the best traditions of the past. He died at Marseilles in rather sad circumstances, and probably after passing through a regular Gethsemane. Now listen, for myself I am sure that I am continuing his work here, as if I were his son or his brother.

We just spoke of the hour of fatality which seems sad to us. But isn't there another fatality which is charming? And what do we care whether there is a resurrection or not, as long as we see a living man arise immediately in the place of the dead man? Let us take up the same cause again, continuing the same work, living the same life, dying the same death.

When my friend Gauguin is here, and we two go to Marseilles, it is my firm intention to go saunter in the Cannebiére there, dressed exactly like him, Monticelli, as I have seen his portrait, with an enormous yellow hat, a black velvet jacket, white trousers, yellow gloves, a bamboo cane, and with a grand southern air.

And there I shall find Marseillais who used to know him when he was alive, and if you have read in Tartarin what fên de brût means …

And there will be noise du bruit, on that occasion. Monticelli is a painter who did the South all in yellow, all in orange, all in sulphur. The great majority of the painters, because they aren't colourists in the true sense of the word, do not use these colours there, and they call a painter mad if he sees with eyes other than theirs.* Of course all this is only to be expected. So I myself too have already finished a picture all in yellow - of sunflowers (fourteen flowers in a yellow vase and against a yellow background, which is certainly different from the previous one with twelve flowers on a blue-green background).

And I expect that I shall one day exhibit the former at Marseilles, and then there will be some Marseillais or other who will remember what Monticelli said and did in his time.

Did Theo show you the tansy? It is very beautiful.

Enjoy yourself as much as possible; I embrace you in thought.

Yours, Vincent

* You will see Monthenards in the Luxembourg which are not yellow at all, and that I like very much nevertheless, but it is likely that Monthenard would think the things I do despicable.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 27 August 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and for the 50-fr. note it contained. Certainly it is not out of the question that later on our sister might come and live with us. It speaks well for her taste that she likes sculpture; I was very glad to hear it. Painting as it is now promises to become more subtle - more like music and less like sculpture - and above all it promises *colour*. If only it keeps this promise.

The sunflowers are getting on, there is a new bunch of 14 flowers on a greenish-yellow ground, so it is exactly the same effect - but in a larger size, a 30 canvas - as the still life with the quinces and lemons, which you already have - but in the sunflowers the painting is much more simple. Do you remember that we saw a bunch of peonies by Manet at the Hotel Drouot one day? The flowers were pink, the leaves bright green painted in thick impasto, not glazed like Jeannin's, standing out against a plain white background, I think.

That was a very sound piece of work.

As for stippling and making halos and other things, I think they are real discoveries, but we must already see to it that this technique does not become a universal dogma any more than any other. That is another reason why Seurat's “Grande Jatte,” the landscapes with broad stippling by Signac and Anquetin's boat, will become in time even more personal and even more original.

About my clothes, certainly they were beginning to be the worse for wear, but only last week I bought a black velvet jacket of fairly good quality for 20 francs, and a new hat, so there is no hurry.

But I consulted that postman I painted, who had often furnished and refurnished his little home moving from place to place, as to the approximate price of the necessary furniture, and he said that you could not get a good bed here which would last for less than 150 francs - if *you want to get something substantial*, of course.

However, that hardly upsets the calculation that by saving the money spent on lodging, at the end of a year we should find ourselves in possession of some furniture, without having spent any more during the year. And as soon as I can, I shall not hesitate to do it.

If Gauguin and I do not take the opportunity to fix ourselves up like this, we may drag on year after year in small lodgings where we cannot fail to go to seed.

I have pretty well done that already, for it has been going on for a very long time. And now it has even ceased to be unpleasant, and perhaps at first I shall not feel at home when I am home. Never mind. However, we must not forget Bouvard and Pecuchet, we must not forget “*à Veau l'eau,*” for it is all true, most profoundly true.

Au Bonheur des Dames and Bel Ami are no less true, however. They are different ways of looking at things - with the first there is less risk of behaving like Don Quixote perhaps, with the second you go the whole hog.

This week I have had the old peasant once again.

Oh - McKnight has left at last - I am not sorry. His friend the Belgian did not seem very upset either when he came here yesterday to tell me, and we spent the evening together. He has very sensible ideas, and at least he knows what he wants.

At present he is painting a kind of timid impressionism, but very orderly and very exact. And I told him that it was the best thing he could do, because although he would lose two years perhaps suppressing his individuality, yet it is as necessary to have a regular course in impressionism now as it was formerly to have a course in a Parisian studio. He agreed with this entirely, just because in this way you offend no one, and cannot be accused afterward of knowing nothing about the problem. He is seriously thinking of going to paint the miners of the Borinage, and if he is still here when Gauguin comes, it is not impossible that we will ask him to do for us in the North what we would do for him in the South, that is, do our utmost to enable him to live more cheaply than he would do alone.

Goodbye for the present.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 29 August 1888

My dear Theo,

I shall have to pay my rent on September 1, and if you could send the week's money the day you get your month's pay, I could pay the rent on time, then the outlay would be spread over two weeks. And if you could send the money on Sunday by letter or by a telegraph order, I should not be sorry to gain a day in this way.

I have two models this week: an Arlésienne and the old peasant. I am doing him this time against a background of vivid orange which, although it does not pretend to be the image of a red sunset, may nevertheless give a suggestion of one.

Unfortunately I am afraid that the little Arlésienne will not turn up for the rest of the picture. As a matter of fact, the last time she came, she asked me for all the money I had promised her for posing in advance, and as I made no objection to that, she has made off and I have not seen her again. But some day or other she is bound to come back; it would be a little too thick if she failed me altogether.

I am also working on a bunch of flowers, and a still life of an old pair of shoes.

I have heaps of ideas for my work, and if I go on with figure painting very industriously, I may possibly find more. But what's the use? Sometimes I feel too feeble to fight against existing circumstances, and I should have to be cleverer and richer and younger to win.

Fortunately for me, I do not hanker after victory any more, and all that I seek in painting is a way to make life bearable.

Still no reply from Russell. He can't have a penny just now.

I hope our sister has seen the Luxembourg again by now.

We have had two or three perfect days here, very hot and no wind. The grapes are beginning to ripen, but I hear that they will not be good.

I must work again today. I have qualms about the last days of this week, because of those models.

I am negotiating with some other people to pose for me. There is something always driving me on to do as many figure studies as ever I can.

In the future things may well be worse again, and then whatever comes, once I have made myself master of the figure, I think the work will seem deeper.

A handshake for you and our sister,

Ever yours, Vincent

Difficulties with models continue with exactly the same tenacity as the mistral here. It is not cheering.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 1 September 1888

My dear Theo,

A hasty note to thank you tremendously for the prompt dispatch of your letter. As it happened my good fellow had already arrived that morning very early for his rent. I had of course to commit myself today as to whether or not I would keep the house (because I have rented it till Michaelmas, and one has to renew or cancel the agreement in advance). I told my good fellow that I would take it again for three months only or else by the month again. So supposing friend Gauguin comes and does not like it, we shall not have a very long lease on our hands.

My heart often despairs when I think of what Gauguin will say about the country in the end. The isolation of this place is pretty serious, and all the time you have to hack each step in the ice as you go from one day's work to the next. Then there is the difficulty with the models, but patience and above all a few pennies ready in your pocket will naturally get you somewhere. But it is a real difficulty.

I feel that even so late in the day I could be a very different painter if I were capable of getting my own way with the models, but I also feel the possibility of going to seed and of seeing the day of one's capacity for artistic creation pass, just as a man loses his virility in the course of his life.

That is inevitable, and naturally in this as in the other, the one thing to do is to be of good heart and strike while the iron is hot.

And I often get downhearted. But Gauguin and so many others are in exactly the same position, and above all we must seek the remedy within ourselves, in good will and patience, and at the same time struggle to be something more than mediocrities. Perhaps we shall be preparing a new road while we do this.

I am very curious to get your next letter giving a fuller account of your visit to Bing. I am not surprised at what you say, that after our sister went away you felt a void. You must try to fill it. And what is there to prevent Gauguin's coming to stay with you? In this way he could get his heart's desire of Paris, and work at the same time.

Only in that case it would only be fair for him to pay back the equivalent of what you would be doing for him in pictures. It is a constant grief to me that comparatively I can do so little with the money I spend.

My life is disturbed and restless, but then if I make a change and move about much, I shall perhaps only make things worse.

It is a terrible handicap for me that I don't speak the Provençal patois.

I keep thinking seriously of using coarser colours, which will not be any less sound for being less brayed.

Often now I hesitate before planning a picture because of what the colours would cost us. You see all the same this is rather a pity, for the simple reason that we may have the power to work today, but we do not know if it will hold out till tomorrow.

All the same, far from losing my physical strength, I am regaining it, and my stomach especially is stronger.

I am sending you three volumes of Balzac today. He is really a bit out of date, etc., but like the Daumiers and the Lemuds, none the worse for belonging to a period which is over.

At the moment I am reading Daudet's L'Immortel, which I find *very beautiful*, but not particularly heartening. I think I shall have to read a book on elephant hunting, or of absolute lies about adventures which are categorically impossible, like Gustave Aimard for instance, to get rid of the heartbreak that L'Immortel is going to leave me with. It is exactly because it is so beautiful and so true that it makes you feel the emptiness of the civilized world. I must say though that I prefer his Tartarin for real power.

Many regards to our sister, and thank you again for your letter.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 3 September 1888

My dear Theo,

I spent yesterday with the Belgian, who also has a sister among the “vingtistes.” The weather was not fine, but a very good day for talking; we went for a walk and anyway saw some very fine things at the bullfight and outside the town. We talked more seriously about the plan, that if I keep a place in the south, he ought to set up a sort of post among the collieries. Then Gauguin and I and he, if the importance of a picture made it worth the journey, could change places - and so be sometimes in the north, but in familiar country with a friend in it, and sometimes in the south.

You will soon see him, this young man with the look of Dante, because he is going to Paris, and if you put him up - if the room is free - you will be doing him a good turn; he is very distinguished in appearance, and will become so, I think, in his painting.

He likes Delacroix, and we talked a lot about Delacroix yesterday. He even knew the violent study for the “Bark of Christ.”

Well, thanks to him I have at last a first sketch of that picture which I have dreamt of for so long - the poet. He posed for me. His line head with that keen gaze stands out in my portrait against a starry sky of deep ultramarine; for clothes, a short yellow coat, a collar of unbleached linen, and spotted tie. He gave me two sittings in one day.

Yesterday I had a letter from our sister, who has seen a great deal. Ah, if she could marry an artist it would not be so bad. Well, we must go on inducing her to develop her personality rather than her artistic abilities.

I have finished L'Immortel by Daudet. I rather like the saying of the sculptor Védrine, that to achieve fame is something like ramming the lighted end of your cigar into your mouth when you are smoking. But I certainly like L'Immortel less, far less than Tartarin.

You know, it seems to me that L'Immortel is not so fine in colour as Tartarin, because it reminds me with its mass of true and subtle observations of the dreary pictures of Jean Bérend which are so dry and cold. Now Tartarin is *really great*, with the greatness of a masterpiece, just like Candide.

I do strongly ask you to keep my studies of this place as open to the air as possible, because they are not yet thoroughly dry. If they remain shut up or in the dark the colours will get devalued. So the portrait of “The Young Girl,” “The Harvest”(a wide landscape with the ruin in the background and the line of the Alpilles), the little “Seascape,” the “Garden” with the weeping tree and clumps of conifers, if you could put these on stretchers it would be well. I am rather keen on those. You will easily see by the drawing of the little seascape that it is the most thought out.

I am having two oak frames made for my new peasant's head and for my Poet study. Oh, my dear boy, sometimes I know so well what I want. I can very well do without God both in my life and in my painting, but I cannot, ill as I am, do without something which is greater than I, which is my life - the power to create.

And if, defrauded of the power to create physically, a man tries to create thoughts in place of children, he is still very much part of humanity.

And in a picture I want to say something comforting as music is comforting. I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to confer by the actual radiance and vibration of our colourings.

Portraiture so understood does not become like an Ary Scheffer, just because there is a blue sky behind as in the “St. Augustine.” For Ary Scheffer is so little of a colourist.

But it would be more in harmony with what Eug. Delacroix attempted and brought off in his “Tasso in Prison,” and many other pictures, representing a *real* man. Ah! portraiture, portraiture with the thought, the soul of the model in it, that is what I think must come.

The Belgian and I talked a lot yesterday about the advantages and disadvantages of this place. We quite agree regarding both. And on the great advantage it would be to us if we could *move* now North, now South.

He is going to stay with McKnight again so as to live more cheaply. That, however, has I think one disadvantage, because living with a slacker makes one slack.

I think you would enjoy meeting him, he is still young. I think he will ask your advice about buying Japanese prints and Daumier lithographs. As to these - the Daumiers - it would be well to get some more of them, because later there will be none to be got.

The Belgian was saying that he paid 80 francs for board and lodging with McKnight. So what a difference there is in living together, since I have to pay 45 a month for nothing but lodging. And so I always come back to the same reckoning, that with Gauguin I should not spend more than I do alone, and be no worse off. But we must consider that they were very badly housed, not for sleeping, but for the possibility of work at home.

So I am always between two currents of thought, first the material difficulties, turning round and round to make a living; and second, the study of colour. I am always in hope of making a discovery there, to express the love of two lovers by a marriage of two complementary colours, their mingling and their opposition, the mysterious vibrations of kindred tones. To express the thought of a brow by the radiance of a light tone against a sombre background.

To express hope by some star, the eagerness of a soul by a sunset radiance. Certainly there is nothing in that of trompe d'oeil realism, but isn't it something that actually exists?

Good-by for the present. I will tell you another time when the Belgian may be leaving,, because I shall see him again tomorrow.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

The Belgian says that his people at home have a de Groux, the study for the “Benedicité” in the Brussels Museum.

The portrait of the Belgian is something like the portrait of Reid which you have, in execution.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 4 September 1888

My dear Theo,
I am writing you as I wait for Bock, the Belgian, who is leaving early this morning. He is already thirty-three; he has spent ten years in Paris and in travelling; his sister is older than he is. Although so far he hasn't been up to much as a painter, if on his return to his own country he can at last shake off his slackness, brought about by the enervating influence of Paris and hanging about with slackers, he will be fairly on the threshold of a real painter's career.

He is very much a Belgian, for in his conversation and his manners I can easily recognize the accent of his country, the timidity of those miners, whom I still think of often. You will probably see the two pictures he is taking along with him; the drawing is feeble, but the colour is already beginning to live.

His sister may be travelling in Holland, and I have thought vaguely that I would like her and our sister to meet. I always hope that through us W. will manage to marry an artist. To bring that about, she ought to be a little in the movement. If Bock's sister really does go to Holland, we have only to say to Bock that of she wishes to make some studies at Breda, she can stay with our mother and sister. It wouldn't cause them a great deal of expense at home, they put up plenty of useless people, but altogether it would be an opportunity for them to become acquainted. But we must not press it too hard.

But the thing is that the Bock's home is a painter's house, both children being in that line, and besides, they aren't exactly penniless.

It is just a week since I sent you an order for paints and a letter to Tasset asking him if he could supply coarsely brayed colours more cheaply. I find that I have now almost used up my entire stock of paints. Altogether I have only a dozen and a half of various tubes left. So that I have had to replace the order in question by another, which you will find herewith. If Tasset cannot do the colours more cheaply I must use the double tubes as usual, but I shall need twice as much of this size tube.

While I am without them I must draw, because I am cleaned out as far as colours are concerned.

Neither Gauguin nor Bernard has written again. I think that Gauguin doesn't care a damn about it, because it isn't going to be done at once, and I for my part, seeing that Gauguin has managed to muddle along by himself for six months, am ceasing to believe in the urgent necessity of helping him.

So let's be prudent. If it does not suit him here, he may be forever reproaching me with, “Why did you bring me to this rotten country?” And I don't want any of that.

Naturally we can still remain friends with Gauguin but I see only too clearly that his mind is elsewhere. So I say, let's behave as if he were not there; then if he comes, so much the better - if he doesn't, so much the worse.

How I'd like to settle down and have a home! I keep thinking that even it we had spent 500 francs on furniture at the start, we should already have recovered all of it and I should have the furniture and should already have been delivered from innkeepers. I do not insist on it, but there is no sense in what we are doing now.

Here there will always be artists coming and going, anxious to escape from the severity of the North. And I think myself that I shall always be one of them. It's true that it would probably be better to go a little lower down where we'd be more sheltered. It's true that it wouldn't exactly be easy to find, but that's another reason for settling here, for the cost of moving from here to Bordighera, for instance, or else somewhere near Nice, could not be enormous. Once settled, we would stay there all our lives. It's a poor way of doing things to wait till one is very rich, and that is what I do not like about the de Goncourts, that whatever the truth of it may be, they ended by buying their home and their tranquillity for 100,000 francs. But we'd have it at less than a thousand, so far as having a studio in the South where we could give someone a bed goes.

But if we must make a fortune first…we shall be complete nervous wrecks when we enter upon our rest, that is, worse than our present condition, in which we are still able to stand the racket. But let's be sensible enough to realize that we are going to seed all the same.

It is better to put other people up than to have nowhere to put oneself up, especially here where lodging with a landlord doesn't get you the sort of place where you can feel at home, even when you pay for it.

As for Gauguin, perhaps he is letting himself drift with the current, not thinking of the future. And perhaps he thinks that I shall always be here and that he has our word. But it is not too late to withdraw, and really I am strongly tempted to do so, because failing him, I should naturally think of another partnership, whereas at present we are bound. All the same, if Gauguin can find enough to live on, have we the right to bother him? I avoid writing Gauguin for fear of saying too bluntly - “Look how many months we have managed to get the wherewithal to keep us in lodgings, and yet all the time pretended we couldn't afford to join hands, and meantime wearing ourselves out for the time to come.

“If you wanted me to, why didn't you tell me to come North, I should have done so by now.

“It would have cost a one-way ticket at 100 francs, whereas now, during the months this has been hanging fire, I have already paid the price of the ticket to my landlord, and you have had to do the same to yours, or else you are in his debt up to 100 francs. That means a dead loss of at least 100 francs for nothing at all.”

That is what I have on my mind and that is what makes me feel that he and I both are really behaving like fools. Is it true or not? Certainly the truth is still more serious. If it is not necessary for him to alter his way of life, he has either a lot more money than I or considerably better luck. Being ruined costs more than being successful, and certainly it is our own fault if we do not have more peace.

With a handshake and good-by for now. I hope very much that you will find time later on to tell me more about our sister's stay with you. Bock will be with you in a week or ten days probably. Counting the sunflowers, I have at the moment another fifteen new studies here.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 8 September 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you a thousand times for your kind letter and the 300 francs it contained; after some worrying weeks I have just had a much better one. And just as worries do not come singly, neither do the joys. For just because I am always bowed down under this difficulty of paying my landlord, I made up my mind to take it gaily. I swore at the said landlord, who after all isn't a bad fellow, and told him that to revenge myself for paying him so much money for nothing, I would paint the whole of his rotten shanty so as to repay myself. Then to the great joy of the landlord, of the postman whom I had already painted, of the visiting night prowlers, and of myself, for three nights running I sat up to paint and went to bed during the day. I often think that the night is more alive and more richly coloured than the day.

Now, as for getting back the money I have paid to the landlord by my painting, I do not dwell on that, for the picture is one of the ugliest I have done. It is the equivalent, though different, of the " Potato Eaters."

I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green.

The room is blood red and dark yellow with a green billiard table in the middle; there are four lemon-yellow lamps with a glow of orange and green. Everywhere there is a clash and contrast of the most alien reds and greens, in the figures of little sleeping hooligans, in the empty dreary room, in violet and blue. The blood-red and the yellow-green of the billiard table, for instance, contrast with the soft tender Louis XV green of the counter, on which there is a rose nosegay. The white clothes of the landlord, watchful in a corner of that furnace, turn lemon-yellow, or pale luminous green.

I am making a drawing of it with the tones in watercolour to send to you tomorrow, to give you some idea of it.

I wrote this week to Gauguin and Bernard, but I did not talk about anything but pictures, just so as not to quarrel when there is probably nothing to quarrel about.

But whether Gauguin comes or not, if I were to get some furniture, henceforth I should have, whether in a good spot or a bad one is another matter, a pied à terre, a home of my own, which frees the mind from the dismalness of finding oneself in the streets. That is nothing when you are an adventurer of twenty, but it is bad when you have turned thirty-five.

Today in the Intransigeant I noticed the suicide of M. Bing Levy. It can't be the Levy, Bing's manager, can it? I think it must be someone else.

I am greatly pleased that Pissarro thought something of the “Young Girl.” Did Pissarro say anything about the “Sower”? Afterwards, when I have gone further in these experiments, the “Sower” will still be the first attempt in that style. The “Night Café” carries on from the “Sower,” and so also do the head of the old peasant and of the poet, if I manage to do this latter picture.

It is colour not locally true from the point of view of the trompe d'oeil realist, but colour to suggest some emotion of an ardent temperament.

When Paul Mantz saw at the exhibition the violent and inspired sketch by Delacroix that we saw at the Champs Elysées - the “Bark of Christ” - he turned away from it, exclaiming in his article: “I did not know that one could be so terrible with a little blue and green.”

Hokusai wrings the same cry from you, but he does it by his *line*, his *drawing*; as you say in your letter - “the waves are claws and the ship is caught in them, you feel it.”

Well, if you make the colour exact or the drawing exact, it won't give you sensations like that.

Anyhow, very soon, tomorrow or next day, I will write to you again about this and answer your letter, and send you the sketch of the “Night Café.”

Tasset's parcel has arrived. I will write tomorrow on this question of the coarse grained colour. Milliet is coming to see you and pay his respects to you one of these days, he writes to me that he is coming back.

Thank you again for the money you sent. If I went first to look for another place, would it not very likely mean fresh expense, equal at least to the expense of a removal? And then should I find anything better all at once? I am so very glad to be able to do the furnishing, and it can't but help me on. Many thanks then, and a good handshake, till tomorrow.

Yours, Vincent.

Letter from Paul Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh

Brittany, 7 - 9 September 1888

c. 7 - 9 September 1888

My dear Vincent,

I recieved your letter just when I was going to write you. Forgive me if I write so seldom and so little. I am terribly bored and I have stomach problems; we constantly have rain. I work and I don't do anything, in the sense that I draw with my hand, my head, and my heart with an eye toward what I want to do later. Yes, you're right to want painting with colouring suggestive of poetic ideas, and in this sense I agree with you, with one difference. I don't know any *poetic ideas*; it's probably a sense I'm lacking. I find *everything* poetic, and it's in the corners of my heart, which are sometimes mysterious, that I perceive poetry. Led harmoniously, forms and colours in themselves produce poetry. Without letting myself be surprised by the motif, I feel a sensation in front of someone else's painting that brings me to a poetic state, depending on the painter's intellectual forces, which emanate from it. Useless to go on about this, we'll talk at length about it another time. On this matter, I'm quite sad to be held here in Pont-Aven; each day my debts increase and make my trip more and more unlikely. What a long Calvary an artist's life is! And that's perhaps what makes us go on living. Passion gives life, and we die when it's no longer nourishing. Let's abandon these paths lined with thorny bushes, although they have their savage poetry…

I study little Bernard, who I know less than you; I know that you want to do something good for him, and he needs it. He has naturally suffered, and he started life filled with gall, driven to see the bad side of man. I hope that, with his intelligence and his love of art he will one day perceive that goodness is a strength against the other, and a consolation for our own misfortunes. He likes you and values you, therefore you can have a good influence on him. We very much need to be united in heart and intelligence if we want the future to put us in our true places.

Is your brother away on a journey? I don't have any news of him anymore.

Yours sincerely, Gauguin.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 9 September 1888

My dear Theo,
I have just mailed the sketch of the new picture, the “Night Café,” as well as another that I did some time ago. I shall end perhaps by making some crépons.

Well now, yesterday I was busy furnishing the house. Just as the postman and his wife told me, the two beds, to be really substantial, will come to 150 fr. apiece. I found everything that they told me about prices was true. So I had to change my tack, and this is what I have done. I have bought one walnut bed and another in white deal which will be mine and which I'll paint later.

Then I got bedclothes for one of the beds, and two mattresses.

If Gauguin comes, or someone else, there is his bed ready in a minute. I wanted to arrange the house from the start not for myself only, but so as to be able to put someone else up too. Naturally this has swallowed up the greater part of the money. With the rest I have bought 12 chairs, a mirror and some small necessities. Altogether it means that next week already I shall be able to go and live there.

For a visitor there will be the prettier room upstairs, which I shall try to make as much as possible like the boudoir of a really artistic woman.

Then there will be my own bedroom, which I want extremely simple, but with large, solid furniture, the bed, chairs and table all in white deal.

Downstairs will be the studio, and another room, a studio too, but at the same time a kitchen.

Someday or other you shall have a picture of the little house itself in bright sunshine, or else with the window lit up, and a starry sky.

Henceforth you can feel that you have your country house in Arles. For I am very anxious to arrange it so that you will be pleased with it, and so that it will be a studio in an absolutely individual style; that way, if say a year from now you come here and to Marseilles for your vacation, it will be ready then, and the house, as I intend it, will be full of pictures from top to bottom.

The room you will have then, or Gauguin if he comes, will have white walls with a decoration of great yellow sunflowers.

In the morning, when you open the window, you see the green of the gardens and the rising sun, and the road into the town.

But you will see these great pictures of the sunflowers, 12 or 14 to the bunch, crammed into this tiny boudoir with its pretty bed and everything else dainty. It will not be commonplace.

And in the studio, the red tiles of the floor, the walls and ceiling white, rustic chairs, white deal table, and I hope a decoration of portraits. It will have a feeling of Daumier about it, and I dare predict it will not be commonplace.

And now do look for some lithographs of Daumier's for the studio, and some Japanese things, but there is no hurry at all for that; it's only when you find duplicates of them. And some things of Delacroix's, and ordinary lithographs by modern artists.

There is not the slightest hurry, but I have my own plan. I want to make it really *an artists' house* - not precious, on the contrary nothing *precious*, but everything from the chairs to the pictures having character.

About the beds, I have bought country beds, big double ones instead of iron ones. That gives an appearance of solidity, durability and quiet, and if it takes a little more bedding, so much the worse, but it must have character.

I am very lucky to have a faithful charwoman; except for that I should not have dared to begin living at home; she is quite old and has many and varied offspring, and she keeps my tiles clean and red.

I cannot tell you how much pleasure it gives me to find a big serious job like this. For it's going to be, I hope, a real scheme of decoration that I'm starting on now.

As I already told you, I am going to paint my own bed; there will be three subjects on it. Perhaps a nude woman, I haven't yet decided, or perhaps a child in a cradle, I don't know, but I shall take my time over it.

I don't feel any hesitation now about staying here, because ideas for my work are coming to me in abundance. I intend to buy something for the house every month. And with some patience the house will be worth something because of the furniture and the decorations.

I must warn you that soon I shall have to send a big order for paints for the autumn, which I think is going to be absolutely amazing. On second thought I am sending you the order enclosed.

In my picture of the “Night Café” I have tried to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad or commit a crime. So I have tried to express, as it were, the powers of darkness in a low public house, by soft Louis XV green and malachite, contrasting with yellow-green and harsh blue-greens, and all this in an atmosphere like a devil's furnace, of pale sulphur.

And all with an appearance of Japanese gaiety, and the good nature of Tartarin.

But what would Monsieur Tersteeg say about this picture when he said before a Sisley - Sisley, the most discreet and gentle of the impressionists - “I can't help thinking that the artist who painted that was a little tipsy.” If he saw my picture, he would say that it was delirium tremens in full swing.

I see absolutely nothing to object to in your suggestion of exhibiting once at the Revue Indépendente, provided, however, that I am no obstacle to the others who usually exhibit there.

Only then we ought to tell them that I should like to reserve for myself a second exhibition after this first one, of studies proper. Then next year I will give them the decorations of the house to exhibit when they are complete. Not that I am so keen on it, but in order that the studies should not be confused with finished compositions, and so as to announce in advance that the second exhibition will be one of *studies*. For so far hardly any of them except the “Sower” and the “Night Café” are attempts at finished pictures.

Just as I'm writing to you, the poor peasant who is like a caricature of Father happens to have come into the café. The resemblance is terrible, all the same. Especially the uncertainty and the weariness and the vagueness of the mouth. I still feel it is a pity that I have not been able to do it.

I add to this letter an order for paints which is not exactly urgent. But I have so many plans in my head, and the autumn promises to give so many magnificent subjects, that I simply do not know if I am going to start five canvases or ten. It will be just as it was in the spring with the orchards in bloom, there will be no end of subjects.

If you gave old Tanguy the coarser colour, he would probably do it well.

The other fine colours are really inferior, especially the blues.

I hope to have improved a little in quality when I prepare the next batch. I am doing comparatively less, and going back over them longer.

I have kept 50 francs for the week, so there have been 250 for the furnishing already. But all the same I shall recover them, carrying on like this. And now you can tell yourself that you have a sort of country house, though unfortunately rather far away. But it would cease to be very, very far if there were a permanent exhibition in Marseilles. Perhaps in a year's time we shall see that.

With a handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 11 September 1888

My dear Theo,

Enclosed is a letter from Gauguin, which arrived at the same moment as the letter from Bernard. It is just a cry of distress. “I am getting deeper into debt every day.”

I won't enlarge upon what he ought to do. You offer him hospitality here and accept the only means of payment that he has - his pictures. But if over and above that he demands that you pay his journey, he is going a bit too far, and at least he ought to make you an ample offer of pictures, and address himself to you as well as me in terms less vague than, “Every day I go deeper into debt, and the journey becomes more and more out of the question.” It would be more to the point if he said - “I would rather leave my pictures in your hands since you are kind to me, and incur debts with you who are my friend, than live with my landlord.”

But his stomach is all wrong, and when one has stomach-ache and indigestion, one has no will power.

Now I myself have nothing wrong with my stomach at the moment, consequently my brain is freer and, I hope, clearer. I think it is absolutely unfair that you who have just sent money - which you yourself had to borrow - for the furnishing of the house, should also have to bear the expense of the journey, especially when the journey is complicated by the payment of a debt. Unless Gauguin pooled everything and let you have all his work, so that we'd keep no accounts but make common cause together. If we had a common purse and make common cause, I think myself that after a few years' working in common we should all profit.

Because if the combination were arranged this way, you yourself would feel, I do not say happier, but a better artist, and more productive than with me alone.

Both he and I will feel strongly that we must succeed because the honour of all three of us is at stake, and that each is not working for himself alone. That's how it looks to me. And I believe that even if collapse is in the nature of things and bound to come, we must still act in the same way. But more and more I reject the idea of this collapse, when I think of the serenity you see on the faces in the Frans Halses and the Rembrandts, such as the portrait of old Six, or his self-portrait, or those Frans Halses in Haarlem that we know so well: pictures of old men and women.

It is better to have serenity than to be too timorous.

Why then such a noise about this Gauguin business? He will do well to come to us, and we would like him to come.

But neither he nor we are to let ourselves be crushed.

On the whole there was a fine calm about that letter of his, although he left his intentions where we are concerned in the air.

Only if this thing is really to come off, we must have loyalty on his part.

I am rather curious to know what he will say to you himself. I reply to him exactly as I feel, but I do not want to say depressing or dismal or malicious things to so great an artist. But from the money point of view the business is taking on serious proportions - there is the journey, there is the debt, and there is also the furnishing, which is not yet complete.

However, it is already complete enough so that if Gauguin turned up here unexpectedly, we should be able to manage until we had time to turn around. Gauguin is married, and we must thoroughly realize in advance that in the long run it is not certain that our various interests will be compatible.

That is why in any case of association, the conditions must be very clearly stated, so as not to quarrel afterward.

If all goes well with Gauguin, you can see at this point that he will make it up with his wife and children. Certainly I should wish that for him. Well then, we must have more faith in the value of his pictures that his landlord has, but he must not overestimate them so much to you that you get only the burden and expense of the association, instead of some profit. That must not be, and anyhow will not be. But you should have his best work from him.

I ought to warn you that I intend to keep several studies at the studio here instead of sending them to you. I think that if I carry on steadily with this plan of making the house here something really artistic, you will have a series of studies later on which will have a lasting value.

By the way, Russell has replied in the negative about buying a Gauguin, but he asks me to go and stay with him for a while, but first and last are the travelling expenses. I do not say however that he will not buy a Gauguin, for he will realize himself that he isn't being very benevolent just now. But after all in building a house, provided that he puts people up in it, he is doing a very necessary work, against the time when our landlords kick us out.

Good-by for now and a good handshake!

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 12 September 1888

My dear Theo,

If Gauguin were working with me and if for his part he were fairly generous with pictures, doesn't it mean that you would be giving work to two artists who could do nothing without you? And while admitting that I think you are perfectly justified in saying that as far as money is concerned, you see no advantage in it, yet on the other hand you would be doing the same sort of thing as Durand Ruel, who bought pictures from Claude Monet in the days before anybody else had recognized his individuality. And Durand Ruel made nothing on it; at one time he was overloaded with the pictures and could not pass them on, but still, what he did remains well done, and now he can always say that he carried the day. If, however, I saw it would mean losing money, I wouldn't suggest it. But Gauguin must be loyal, and now that I see that his friend Laval's arrival has temporarily opened a new resource to him, I think that he is hesitating between Laval and us.

I don't blame him; but if Gauguin does not lose sight of his own interest, it is only fair that you should not lose sight of yours, from the point of view of repayment in pictures. Already we can see that Gauguin would already have left us completely in the lurch if Laval had had ever so little money. I am very curious to know what he will say to you in his next letter, which you will certainly get soon.

Well, I am sure that our friendship with him will endure whether he comes or not, but also that we on our part must show some firmness. He will not find anything better, unless indeed it were by taking advantage of what you have tried to do for him. But that he will not dare do. Only you must understand that if I see that he isn't coming, I shall not be the least upset, and I shall not work the less for it; if he comes, he will be very welcome, but I see clearly that counting on him would be just the thing to do us in. Faithful he will be if it is to his advantage; if he does not come, he will find something else, but he will find nothing better, and he would lose nothing by not letting us down.

I'll need another 5 meters of ordinary canvas at 2.50 fr., but of course when Tasset is figuring the weight of the parcel, he should send a meter more or a meter less so as not to double the carriage.

I think now is a good opportunity for you to ask Gauguin bluntly when he writes to you, “Are you coming or not? If you have not made up your mind one way or the other, we shall not feel bound to carry out the scheme.”

If the plan of a more serious combination cannot be carried out, all right, but then each should regain his freedom of action. I have sent off my letter to Gauguin; I asked them for an exchange. If they are willing, I would very much like to have here the portrait of Bernard by Gauguin and that of Gauguin by Bernard.

I enclose an article which will interest you. You would be very wise to go and see this.

Ideas for my work are coming to me in swarms, so that though I'm alone, I have no time to think or to feel, I go on painting like a steam engine. I think there will hardly ever be a standstill again. And my view is that you will never find a live studio ready-made, but that it is created from day to day by patient work and going on and on in one place.

I have a study of an old mill painted in broken tones like the oak tree on the rock, that study you were saying you had had framed along with the “Sower.”

The idea of the “Sower” continues to haunt me all the time. Exaggerated studies like the “Sower” and like this “Night Café” usually seem to me atrociously ugly and bad, but when I am moved by something, as now by this little article on Dostoievsky, then these are the only ones which appear to have any deep meaning. I have a third study now, of a landscape with a factory, and a huge sun in a red sky above red roofs, a day with a wicked mistral when nature seems to be in a fury.[Painting lost]

As for the house, the thought that it's going to be habitable continues to soothe me. Will my work really be worse because, by staying in the same place, I shall see the seasons pass and re-pass over the same subjects, seeing again the same orchards in the spring, the same fields of wheat in summer? Involuntarily I shall see my work cut out for me beforehand, and I shall be better able to make plans. Then if I keep some studies here to make a coherent whole, it will mean work of a deeper calm at the end of a certain time.

I feel that as far as that goes, we have done pretty much the right thing. Only I wish you were living nearer. Seeing that I cannot bring the North nearer the South, what's to be done? Then I tell myself that by myself I am not able to do sufficiently important painting to justify your coming South two or three times a year. But if Gauguin came and if it was fairly well known that we were staying here and helping artists live and work, I still do not see at all why the South should not become another native land to you as well as to me.

I am very glad to have finished my letter to Gauguin without having said that his wavering between staying with Laval or with me has left me rather at sea. It would be unfair not to leave him perfectly free to choose and to do the best he can. But I did write that I was convinced that even if he did not come here because of the journey's being impossible, he should not stay in a hotel any longer. And that this would then mean two fixed studios instead of one.

I always come back to this, that once settled, one works more tranquilly, and in that position one can always on occasion be more of a help to other people. Bernard says it grieves him to see how Gauguin is often prevented from doing what he could otherwise do for purely material reasons, paints, canvas, *etc*. Well, in any case, that can't go on. The worst that can happen to him is that he will be obliged to leave his pictures in pledge for what he owes his landlord, and to take refuge either with you or with me by making the one-way journey. But in this case, if he does not want to lose his pictures, he must definitely tackle his landlord. A case like that, in which the goods are at all events worth more than the debt, might be tried *expressly* by the *president of the civil tribunal of the arrondissement*, assuming the landlord should want to keep the whole, which he has no right to do.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, 9 and 16 September 1888

Arles, 9 and 16 September 1888
My dear sister,

Your letter gave me a great deal of pleasure, and today I have the leisure to calmly reply. So your visit to Paris was quite a success. I should very much like you to come here next year too. At the moment I am furnishing the studio in order to always be ready to put somebody up. Because there are 2 little rooms upstairs looking onto a very pretty public garden, and from which one can see the sun rise in the morning. I will arrange one of these rooms to accomodate a friend, and the other will be for me.

In it I want nothing but straw-bottomed chairs and a table and a whitewood bed. The walls whitewashed, the tiles red. But I want a great wealth of portraits and painted studies of figures in it, which I intend to do in the course of time. I already have one to begin with, the portrait of a young Belgian impressionist. I have painted him a little like a poet, the head fine & nervous standing out against a background of a deep ultramarine night sky with the twinkling of stars.

However, I want to have the other room just as elegant with a walnut bedstead and a blue coverlet. And all the rest, the dressing table as well as the cupboard, in dull walnut. In this very tiny room I want to put, in the Japanese manner, at least 6 very large canvases, particularly the enormous bouquets of sunflowers. You know that the Japanese instinctively look for contrasts and eat sweet peppers, salted candy, fried ices and iced fried things. So it follows, according to the same system, that in a large room there should only be very small pictures and in a very small room one should hang very large ones. I hope the day will come when I shall be able to show you this beautiful country here.

I have just finished a canvas representing the interior of a night café illuminated by lamps. A few poor night wanderers are asleep in a corner. The room is painted red, and there under the gaslight the green billiard table casts an immense shadow on the floor. There are 6 or 7 different reds in this canvas, from blood red to delicate pink, contrasting with as many pale or deep greens. I sent Theo a sketch of it today which is like a Japanese crepe print.

Theo wrote me that he had given you Japanese pictures. This is surely the practical way to arrive at an understanding of the direction which painting in bright clear colours has taken at present.

For my part I don't need Japanese pictures here, for I always tell myself *that here I am in Japan*. Which means that I have only to open my eyes and paint the effect of what is right in front of me.

Have you seen a very little mask of a smiling fat Japanese woman at Theo's? It is surprisingly expressive, that little mask. Did you think of taking a painting of mine there for yourself? I hope so, and I am very curious to know which one you chose. I am inclined to think that you took the white cabins surrounded by green plants under a blue sky, which I made at Saintes-Maries on the coast of the Mediterranean.

I ought to have gone back to Saintes-Maries again, as there are now people on the beach. But never mind, I have such a lot to do here. At present I absolutely want to paint a starry sky. It often seems to me that night is still more richly coloured than the day; having hues of the most intense violets, blues and greens. If only you pay attention to it you will see that certain stars are lemon-yellow, others pink or a green, blue and forget-me-not brilliance. And without my expatiating on this theme it is obvious that putting little white dots on the blue-black is not enough to paint a starry sky.

My house here is painted the yellow colour of fresh butter outside with raw green shutters; it stands in the full sunlight on a square which has a green garden with plane trees, oleanders and acacias. And it is completely whitewashed inside, and the floor is made of red bricks. And over it the intensely blue sky. There I can live and breathe, think and paint. And it seems to me that I might go farther into the South, rather than go back up to the North again, seeing that I am greatly in need of a strong heat, so that my blood can circulate normally. Here I feel much better than I did in Paris.

You see, I can hardly doubt that you on your part would also like the South enormously. The fact is that the sun has never penetrated us people of the North enough.

It is already a few days since I started writing this letter, and now I will continue it. In point of fact I was interrupted these days by my toiling on a new picture representing the outside of a café at night. On the terrace there are the tiny figures of drinkers. An immense yellow lantern illuminates the terrace, the façade and the sidewalk, and even casts its light on the pavement of the streets, which takes a pinkish violet tone. The gables of the houses in the street stretching away under a blue sky spangled with stars are dark blue or violet with a green tree. Here you have a night picture without black in it, done with nothing but beautiful blue and violet and green, and lemon-yellow. It amuses me enormously to paint the night right on the spot. They used to draw and paint the picture in the daytime after the sketch. But I find satisfaction in painting the thing immediately.

Of course it's true that in the dark I may mistake a blue for a green, a blue-lilac for a pink-lilac, for you cannot distinguish the quality of a hue very well. But it is the only way to get rid of the conventional night scenes with their poor sallow whitish light, when even a simple candle gives us the richest yellows and orange tints.

I also made a new portrait of myself, a study, in which I look like a Japanese.

So far you have not told me whether you have read Bel Ami by Guy de Maupassant, and what in general you think of his talent now. I say this because the beginning of Bel Ami happens to be a description of a starlight night in Paris with the brightly lighted cafés of the Boulevard, and this is approximately the same subject I just painted.

Speaking of Guy de Maupassant, I want to tell you that I very much admire what he does, and I strongly urge you to read everything that he has written. You ought to read Zola, de Maupassant, de Goncourt as completely as possible in order to get something of a clear insight into the modern novel. Have you read Balzac? I am reading him again here.

My dear sister, it is my belief that it is actually one's duty to paint the rich and magnificent aspects of nature. We need gaiety and happiness, hope and love.

The more ugly, old, mean, ill, poor I get, the more I want to take my revenge by producing a brilliant colour, well arranged, resplendent. Jewellers too get old and ugly before they learn how to arrange precious stones properly. And arranging the colours in a painting in order to make them vibrate and to enhance their value by their contrasts is something like arranging jewels properly or designing costumes. You will see that by making a habit of looking at Japanese pictures you will love to make up bouquets and to do things with flowers all the more. I must finish this letter now if I want to get it off today. I shall be very happy to have the picture of Mother that you speak of, so don't forget to send it to me. Give my dearest love to Mother, I often think of you two, and it pleases me very much that you know our life a little better now.

I'm afraid Theo will feel too lonely now, but he will be visited by a Belgian impressionist painter one of these days, the one I told you about at the beginning of this letter, and who is going to spend some time in Paris. And there will be a lot of other painters who will return to Paris with the studies they did during the fine season …

I embrace you and Mother.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 16 September 1888

My dear Theo,

Probably I shall hear from you tomorrow morning, but I have time to write tonight, and the week has been rather eventful.

I expect to go to live in the house tomorrow, but as I have bought some more things and have still more to add to them, and I am only speaking of what is strictly necessary - you must again send me 100 francs instead of 50.

If I reckon 50 francs for myself for the past week and deduct them from the 300 francs you sent, all that is left, even with another extra 50 francs, is no more than the exact price of the two beds. So you will see that in spite of that I have already bought many other things beside the beds and the bedding, I have already spent the greater part of the 50 francs for the week, and I have partly economized on both beds by having one of them somewhat plainer.

I am convinced that in the end we shall do well by furnishing the studio. And I already feel freer in my work, and less harried by unnecessary annoyances than I have been.

Only if, as I hope, I take more pains with the style and quality of my work, it will go a little more slowly, or rather I shall have to keep the pictures with me longer. That is, if they are subjects that are connected and complement each other. And also because there will be some pictures which I certainly do not want to send you till they are bone dry.

In this last category there is a square size 30 canvas, a corner of a garden with a weeping tree, grass, round clipped cedar shrubs and an oleander bush. The same corner of the garden, that is, which you have already had a study of in the last parcel. But this one is bigger, there is a citron sky over everything, and also the colours have the richness and intensity of autumn. And besides it is in even heavier paint than the other one, plain and thick. That is picture number one this week.

The second represents the outside of a café, with the terrace lit up by a big gas lamp in the blue night, and a corner of a starry blue sky.

The third picture this week is a portrait of myself, *almost colourless*, in ashen tones against a background of pale veronese green.

I purposely bought a mirror good enough to enable me to work from my image in default of a model, because if I can manage to paint the colouring of my own head, which is not to be done without some difficulty, I shall likewise be able to paint the heads of other good souls, men and women.

The problem of painting night scenes and effects on the spot and actually by night interests me enormously. This week I have done absolutely nothing but paint and sleep and have my meals. That means sittings of twelve hours at a stretch.

I read in the literary supplement of Saturday's Figaro (15 September) the description of an impressionist house. This house was built with bricks - as it were like the bottoms of bottles - of convex glass, violet glass. With the sunshine reflected in it, and the yellow refractions, the effect was incredible. To support these walls of glass bricks, shaped like violet-coloured eggs, they had invented a support of black and gilt iron representing the weird branches of Virginia creeper and other climbing plants. This violet house was right in the middle of a garden where all the paths were of bright yellow sand. The ornamental flower borders were of course most unusual in colouring. The house is, if I remember correctly, in Auteuil.

Without changing anything in this house either now or afterward, I want all the same to make it an artist's house through the decorations. That will come. A good handshake. I went for a splendid walk by myself today among the vineyards.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 17 September 1888

I am inclined to think that the letter Gauguin wrote you throws a clear light on the question.

But I should not like to rely on the word of an artist of his merit when he says: You will have to pay my travelling expenses and my debts if you want me to come, for I myself have not got any money. But on the other hand, if this is the case, he ought to be very generous with his pictures. So that's that; however, in any case there would have to be money - but then I don't see much harm in the business. But those pictures, which will be sold one day, may freeze the interest on the purchase money invested for years to come. As a matter of fact, a picture for which you pay 400 francs today, and which you sell for 1000 francs after ten years, will still be sold at the current price, as all that time nothing could be done with the money. Well, you know this better than I.

I should not be surprised if little by little you regained your love for business, or at least if you got reconciled to your present situation, as soon as you feel that the inventors of new things in commerce do not know how to produce a great revolution in it. You are good to the artists, you are in the very center of the trade, you do what you can, you are damned right. Only take care of your health if you can, and don't get into a stew over nothing. Now, if it must come, it will come of its own accord.

I only want to stress the point that it appears to me that if Gauguin deposited his pictures exclusively with you and calmly awaited his hour, working with me here, and if he paid us for our out-of-pocket expenses with his work, he would be pursuing a policy that I would respect more than any other he might adopt.

With regard to Bernard - if Bernard should want to come here, it would not be on the same terms as Gauguin, at least so it seems to me.

If living together should be to his advantage, nothing would prevent your agreeing to buy something from him from time to time, if it is possible. But no arrangement of any sort with him, for he is too fickle.

If Gauguin should not come, he will succeed all the same, but then he will not succeed by means of his combining, but through the intrinsic merits of his canvases, if only he goes on having the time, the money and the liberty necessary to paint them - that's all. I assure you that under the present circumstances I should not be a better businessman than you are, so much is certain, and so much you know too, only I should like to send you better pictures. This I endeavour to do, and this I shall go on endeavouring to do. Very soon the hour will come for me to resume my painting in the garden. It is a tremendous advantage for me not to be short of canvases and paints, and so it is my bounden duty to work on indefatigably. If Gauguin should come, I think we might try to make our colours at home; I dare not do it alone, for I am afraid of getting discouraged if I do not succeed at once. I am very curious to know what price Tanguy will ask for his tubes. Did you read in the number of the Courrier Français you sent me an article entitled “La trace bleue”? Very good, it just makes one think of Segatori. No doubt you will read this article with pleasure.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 17 September 1888

My dear Theo,

I wrote to you already, early this morning, then I went away to go on with a picture of a garden in the sunshine. Then I brought it back and went out again with a blank canvas, and that also is finished. And now I want to write you again.

Because I have never had such a chance, nature here being so extraordinarily beautiful. Everywhere and all over the vault of heaven is a marvellous blue, and the sun sheds a radiance of pale sulphur, and it is soft and as lovely as the combination of heavenly blues and yellows in a Van der Meer of Delft. I cannot paint it as beautifully as that, but it absorbs me so much that I let myself go, never thinking of a single rule.

That makes three pictures of the gardens opposite the house. Then the two cafés, and then the sunflowers. Then the portrait of Bock and of myself. Then the red sun over the factory[Painting lost], and the men unloading sand, and the old mill. Not to mention the other studies, you see that I have got some work behind me. But my paints, my canvas and my purse are all completely exhausted today. The last picture [i.e. F 471], done with the last tubes of paint on the last canvas, of a garden, green of course, is painted without green, nothing but Prussian blue and chrome yellow.

I am beginning to feel that I am quite a different creature from what I was when I came here. I have no doubts, no hesitation in attacking things, and this may increase. But what a country! I am in a public garden, quite close to the street of the kind girls, and Mourier for instance hardly ever went there, although we took a walk in the gardens, practically every day - but on the other side (there are 3). But you realize, it is just this that gives a touch of Boccaccio to the place.

But this side of the garden is also, for the same reason of chastity or morality, destitute of any flowering bushes such as the oleanders. There are ordinary plane trees, pines in stiff clumps, a weeping tree, and the green grass. But it is all so intimate. Manet has gardens like this.

As long as you can manage to bear the burden of all this paint and canvas and all the money that I spend, keep on sending it. Because the stuff I am getting ready will be better than the last batch, and I think we shall make something on it instead of losing. If only I can manage to do a coherent whole. That is what I am trying to do.

But is it quite out of the question that Thomas would lend me 200 or 300 francs on my studies? That would let me make a profit of a thousand on it, for I cannot tell you often enough, I am ravished, ravished with what I see.

Today while I was working I thought a lot about Bernard. His letter is steeped in admiration for Gauguin's talent. He says that he thinks him so great an artist that he is almost afraid, and that he finds everything that he does himself poor in comparison with Gauguin. And you know that last winter Bernard was always picking quarrels with Gauguin. However this may be, and whatever happens, it is very comforting that these artists are our friends, and I dare say they will remain so, however the business turns out.

I am so happy in the house and in my work that I even dare to think that this happiness will not always be limited to one, but that you will have a share in it and good luck to go with it.

Some time ago I read an article on Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Giotto and Botticelli. Good Lord! it did make an impression on me reading the letters of those men.

And Petrarch lived quite near here in Avignon, and I am seeing the same cypresses and oleanders.

I have tried to put something of that into one of the pictures painted in a very thick impasto, citron yellow and lime green. Giotto moved me most - *always in pain*, and always full of kindness and enthusiasm, as though he were already living in a different world from ours.

And besides, Giotto is extraordinary. I understand him better than the poets Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.

I always think that poetry is more *terrible* than painting, though painting is a dirtier and a much more worrying job. And then the painter never says anything, he holds his tongue, and I like that too.

My dear Theo, when you have seen the cypresses and the oleanders here, and the sun - and the day will come, you may be sure - then you will think even more often of the beautiful “Doux pays” by Puvis de Chavannes, and many other pictures of his.

There is still a great deal of Greece all through the Tartarin and Daumier part of this queer country, where the good folk have the accent you know; there is a Venus of Arles just as there is a Venus of Lesbos, and one still feels the youth of it in spite of all.

I haven't the slightest doubt that someday you too will know the South.

Perhaps you will go to see Claude Monet when he is at Antibes, or anyway you will find some opportunity.

When we have mistral down here, however, it is the exact opposite of a sweet country, for the mistral sets one on edge. But what compensations, what compensations when there is a day without wind - what intensity of colour, what pure air, what vibrant serenity.

Tomorrow I am going to draw, until the paints come. But I have deliberately arrived at the point where I will not draw a picture with charcoal. That's no use, you must attack drawing with the colour itself in order to draw well.

Oh - the exhibition at the Revue Indépendante - good, but once and for all, we are too good smokers to put the wrong end of the cigar into our mouths. We shall be forced to try to sell in order to do the things we sell over again, and better. That's because we are in a bad trade, but let's try something different from the fun of the fair that's the pest of the house.

This afternoon I had a select public - four or five hooligans and a dozen street arabs, who were especially interested in seeing the paint come out of the tubes. Well, that same public - it meant fame, or rather I mean to laugh at ambition and fame, as I do at those street arabs, and at the loafers on the banks of the Rhône and in the Rue du Pont d'Arles.

Yesterday I was at Milliet's; he is coming tomorrow, having stayed on for four days.

I wish Bernard would go and do his military service in Africa, because he would do some fine things there, and I do not know what to say to him yet. He said he would exchange his portrait for one of my studies.

But he says he *dare not* do Gauguin as I asked him, because he feels afraid in front of Gauguin. Basically Bernard has so much temperament! He is sometimes foolish and vicious, but I certainly have no right to reproach him with that, because I myself know the same disorder of the nerves only too well, and I know that he will not reproach me either. If he went to Africa to join Milliet, Milliet would certainly receive him kindly, because Milliet is a very faithful friend, and makes love so easily that he comes near to despising love itself.

What is Seurat doing? I should not dare to show him the studies already sent, but the ones of the sunflowers, and the cabarets, and the gardens, I would like him to see those. I often think of his method, though I do not follow it at all; but he is an original colourist, and Signac too, though to a different degree, their stippling is a new discovery, and at all events I like them very much. But I myself - I tell you frankly - am returning more to what I was looking for before I came to Paris. I do not know if anyone before me has talked about suggestive colour, but Delacroix and Monticelli, without talking about it, did it.

But I have got back to where I was in Nuenen, when I made a vain attempt to learn music, so much did I already feel the relation between our colour and

Wagner's music.

It is true that in impressionism I see the resurrection of Eugène Delacroix, but the interpretations of it are so divergent and in a way so irreconcilable that it will not be impressionism which will give us the final doctrine.

That is why I myself remain among the impressionists, because it professes nothing, and binds you to nothing, and as one of the comrades I need not declare my formula.

Good Lord, how you have to mess about in life. I only ask for time to study, and do you yourself really ask for anything but that? But I think that you also, like me, must long to have the quiet necessary to study without prejudice.

And I am so afraid of taking it away from you by my demands for money.

However, I make such careful calculations, and again today I found that for the ten meters of canvas I had calculated all the colours except one, the fundamental yellow. If all my colours are used up at the same time, doesn't it prove that I know the relative proportions in my sleep? It is the same with drawing, I hardly measure at all, and in that I am definitely opposed to Cormon, who says that if he did not measure, he would draw like a pig.

All the same I think you did well to buy so many stretchers, because we must have a certain number to be able to dry the canvases, it preserves them, and I myself have a batch of them here as well. But don't let them get in your way by leaving them on the stretchers, you mustn't let the lot take up too much room.

Here I pay 4.50 francs for size 30, 25 and 20 stretchers, and 1 franc for size15, 12 and 10 if I get them made by the carpenter.

Carpentering is very expensive here. Tanguy should be able to make and deliver them at that price.

I am trying to get a frame for the square size 30 canvas in light walnut at 5 francs, and I think I shall get it. The heavy oak frame for the portrait, size 10 canvas, is costing me 5 francs also.

I have again had to order five size 30 stretchers for the new canvas; they have already been made, and I must go and get them. This will show you that I cannot get on without some money at this stage of the work. It is a comfort that all the time we are dealing in the raw material, and not speculating, but only trying to produce. So that we cannot go wrong.

I hope that this will always be so, and if there is the fatal necessity of using up my paint and my canvas and my cash, all the same be very sure it isn't that which will ruin us.

Even if you on your part use up your purse and whatever is inside it, it's not so good, but just tell me quietly, “There's nothing left”; for there will be some more because of what I've done with it. And supposing you say, very rightly - “And meanwhile?” - Meanwhile I shall go on drawing, because doing nothing but drawing is easier than painting.

With a good handshake. What days these are, not for what happens in them, but I feel so strongly that both you and I are neither in our decadence nor done for yet, nor shall we ever be.

But you know, I do not contradict the critics who will say that my pictures are not - *finished*. With a handshake, and good-by for the present.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 17 September 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and the 50-franc note which it contained.

I also received Maurin's drawing, which is magnificent. That man is a great artist. Last night I slept in the house, and though there are some things still to be done, I feel very happy in it. Besides, I feel that I can make something lasting out of it, from which others can profit as well. Now money spent will not be money lost, and I think that you will soon see the difference. At present it reminds me of Bosboom's interiors, with the red tiles, the white walls, the furniture of white deal and walnut and the glimpses of an intense blue sky and greenery through the windows. Its surroundings, the public garden, the night cafés and the grocer's, are not Millet, but instead they are Daumier, absolute Zola.

And that is quite enough to supply one with ideas, isn't it?

Yesterday I had already written to you, saying that if I figure the two beds at 300 francs, the price will not allow of any further reduction. If I have already bought more than that anyway, it is because I put half of last week's money into it. Yesterday again I had to pay 10 francs to the innkeeper and 30 francs for a mattress.

At the moment I have 5 francs left, so I must beg you to send me what you can, or else - but do let it be by return mail - a louis to last me the week, or indeed 50 francs if it's possible.

In one way or another I'd like to be able to count on getting this month, meaning the whole month, another 100 instead of the 50, as I asked you in yesterday's letter.

If I myself save 50 francs during the month, and add the other 50 to that, I should have spent altogether 400 francs on furniture. My dear Theo, here we are on the right road at last. Certainly it does not matter being without hearth or home and living in cafés like a traveler so long as one is young, but it was becoming unbearable to me, and more than that, it did not fit in with thoughtful work. So my plan is all complete, I will try to paint up to the value of what you send me every month, and after that I want to paint to pay for the house. What I paint for the house will be to repay you for previous expenditure.

I am still a bit commercial, in the sense that I long to prove that I pay my debts, and that I know how much I want for the goods which this blasted poor painter's profession keeps me working at.

Altogether I think I can be almost sure of bringing off a set of decorations which will be worth 10.000 francs in time.

Listen to me. If we set up a studio and refuge here for some comrade who is hard up, no one will ever be able to reproach either you or me with living and spending for ourselves alone. Now to establish such a studio requires a floating capital, and I have eaten that up during my unproductive years, but now that I am beginning to produce something, I shall pay it back.

I assure you that I think it is essential for you as well as me, and no more than our right, too, to always have a louis or two in our pockets, and some stock of goods to do business with. But my idea is that in the end we shall have founded and left to posterity a studio where one's successor could live. I do not know if I explain myself clearly enough, but in other words we are working for an art and for a business method that will not only last our lifetime, but can still be carried on by others after us.

For your part you do this in your business, and it is certain that you will make good in the end, even though you have plenty to harry you at the moment. But for my part I foresee that other artists will want to see colour under a stronger sun, and in a more Japanese clarity of light.

Now if I set up a studio and refuge right at the gates of the South, it's not such a crazy scheme. And it means that we can work on serenely. And if other people say that it is too far from Paris, etc., let them, so much the worse for them. Why did the greatest colourist of all, Eugene Delacroix, think it essential to go south and right to Africa? Obviously, because not only in Africa but from Arles onward you are bound to find beautiful contrasts of red and green, of blue and orange, of sulphur and lilac.

And all true colourists must come to this, must admit that there is another kind of colour than that of the North. I am sure if Gauguin came, he would love this country; if he doesn't it's because he has already experienced more brightly coloured countries and he will always be a friend, and one with us in principle.

And someone else will come in his place.

If what one is doing looks out upon the infinite, and if one sees that one's work has its raison d'être and continuance in the future, then one works with more serenity.

Now you have a double right to that.

You are kind to painters, and I tell you, the more I think it over, the more I feel that there is nothing more truly artistic than to love people. You will say that then it would be a good thing to do without art and artists. That is true in the first instance, but then the Greeks and the French and the old Dutchmen accepted art, and we see how art always comes to life again after inevitable periods of decadence, and I do not think that anyone is the better for abhorring artists and their art. At present I do not think my pictures worthy of the advantages I have received from you. But once they are worthy, I swear that you will have created them as much as I, and that we are making them together.

But I will not say more about that, because it will be as clear as daylight to you when I begin to do things more seriously. At the moment I am working on another square size 30 canvas, another garden or rather a walk under plane trees, with the green turf, and black clumps of pines.

You did well to order the paints and the canvas, because the weather is magnificent. We still have the mistral, but there are calm intervals and then it is wonderful.

If there were less mistral, this place would really be as lovely as Japan, and would lend itself as well to art.

As I was writing, a very kind letter arrived from Bernard; he is thinking of coming to Arles this winter, just a whim, but it is possible that Gauguin is sending him as a substitute, and would rather stay in the North himself. We shall soon know, because I am convinced that he will write you one way or the other.

In his letter Bernard speaks of Gauguin with great respect and sympathy, and I am sure that they understand one another.

And I really think that Gauguin has done Bernard good.

Whether Gauguin comes or not, he will remain friends with us, and if he does not come now, he will come another time.

I feel instinctively that Gauguin is a schemer who, seeing himself at the bottom of the social ladder, wants to regain a position by means which will certainly be honest, but at the same time, very politic.

Gauguin little knows that I am able to take all this into account. And perhaps he does not know that it is absolutely necessary for him to gain time, and that with us he will gain that, if he gains nothing else.

If someday he decamps from Pont-Aven with Laval or Maurin without paying his debts, I think in his case he would still be justified, exactly like any other creature at bay. I do not think it would be wise to offer Bernard straight off 150 francs for a picture every month, as you did Gauguin. And Bernard, who has evidently been over and over the whole business with Gauguin - isn't he rather counting on taking Gauguin's place?

I think it will be necessary to be very firm and very explicit about the whole thing.

And without giving any reasons, to speak very plainly.

I cannot blame Gauguin - speculator though he may be as soon as he wants to risk something in business, only I will have nothing to do with it. I would a thousand times rather go on with you, whether you are with the Goupils or not.

And in my opinion, you know, the new dealers are exactly and in every way the same as the old.

In principle, and in theory, I am for an association of artists who guarantee each other's work and living, but in principle and in theory I am equally against attempts to destroy old, established businesses. Let them rot in peace, and die a natural death. It is pure presumption to hope to regenerate trade. Have nothing to do with it; let's guarantee a living among ourselves, live like a family, like brothers and friends, and this even if it should not succeed - I would like to be in this, but I will never have anything to do with an attack on other dealers.

With a handshake, and I hope that what I have been obliged to ask you will not be too terribly inconvenient. But I did not want to postpone sleeping at home. And in case you are short yourself, 20 francs more will get me through the week, but it is urgent.

Ever yours, Vincent

I am keeping all Bernard's letters, they are sometimes really interesting. You shall read them someday, there is quite a bundle already.

When I said that we must be firm with Gauguin, it is only because you had already given your opinion when he told you his plan of action in Paris. You made him a good answer then without committing yourself, but also without wounding his self-respect.

And the same thing may become necessary again.

I think I shall see Milliet today. Thank you in advance for the Japanese things.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 18 September 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

Thanks for your letter, but I am somewhat surprised to hear you say, “Oh, impossible to do Gauguin's portrait!” Why impossible? What nonsense is this! I won't insist, and we won't say another word about this exchange once and for all. So, on his part too Gauguin hasn't even thought of doing yours. And such fellows call themselves portraitists; living so long together and not making up their minds to pose for each other, and they will separate without having painted each other's portrait! All right, I won't insist. And I repeat, there is no longer any question of an exchange.

Well then, I hope someday to paint your portrait and Gauguin's myself, as soon as we get together, which is bound to happen.

In short, I think that I am going to do the portrait of the second lieutenant of the Zouaves whom I told you about, and who is on the point of leaving for Africa.

Why haven't you replied with a single word to my question about your intentions with regard to your military service?

Now let's speak for a moment about your saying that you are thinking of coming here and spending the winter in Arles. I have expressly installed myself in such a way that I can put somebody up if necessary. But what if Gauguin comes? He has not definitely declined the offer yet; but even if I could take you in, I don't see how you could feed yourself well at less than 3 francs a day, and I should prefer to say 4 francs.

Of course, if we were hard up, we could have a lot of cheap meals in the studio; one can certainly always economize in this way. But I tell you, life here is a little more expensive than at Pont-Aven. I think you are only paying 2.50 francs a day - aren't you? - board, lodging and everything included. And if - what would tempt you the most - you were going to paint in the brothels - which is most certainly excellent - it can't be done free for nothing here!

So let it go until you have your uniform; in this respect soldiers - here and elsewhere - can get a lot of things free for nothing.

Take my own case, it is true that I have just done that study of the “Night Café,” but nevertheless, though it is a free-love hotel, where from time to time you may see a whore sitting at a table with her fellow, I myself have not been able to do a brothel in the exact sense of the word, just because if I were to do it a little satisfactorily and seriously, it would cost me more money than I can possibly afford. So I refrain from starting that picture until I feel strong enough financially to bring it off. Now listen, I don't want to say that we shan't go and have a glass of beer there; we shall make acquaintances there, we shall work partly from imagination, partly from the model. And if we should want to, I don't say it would be impossible to do it, but at present I for one am in no hurry at all. Plans so often fall through, however well the calculations are made, whereas by relying on chance and working from day to day, without any fixed purpose, one does a lot of unexpected things.

So I cannot possibly recommend to you to come here for the express purpose - undoubtedly excellent in itself - of painting brothels. I repeat, once you are a soldier you will have a splendid opportunity for that, and it would probably be as well for your own sake to wait until you have your uniform. But, my dear comrade Bernard, the thing I want to say to you clearly and frankly is, Go spend your time in Africa. The South will charm you and make a great artist out of you. Gauguin himself owes his superiority to the South. I myself have now seen the stronger sunlight here for months, and the result is that, after this experience, those who maintain their position best from the point of view of colour are Delacroix and Monticelli; those painters of whom it is said erroneously nowadays that they are pure romantics, fellows with an exaggerated imagination. In short, you see, the South which is painted so dryly by Gérôme and Fromentin is from here [Arles] on already essentially a country whose intimate charm can be interpreted only by the colour of the colourist.

I hope you will write me again soon.

I wouldn't venture to take it upon myself to urge anyone to come here. If someone comes here of his own accord, well, that's his own business; but as for recommending it, I'll never do that. As for me, I'll stay here, and of course I should be pleased if you were to spend the winter here.

A handshake.

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 22 September 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and the 100-fr. note it contained. Milliet also came this morning, bringing me the package of Japanese stuff and other things. Among them I very much like the cabaret in two sheets, with the line of violet girl musicians against the yellow lighted wall - I did not know that print, and there are several others which were unknown to me; there is one, a woman's head, which must belong to a good school.

I have just bought a dressing table with everything necessary, and my own little room is complete. The other one, Gauguin's or another lodger's, still needs a dressing table and a chest of drawers, and downstairs I shall need a big frying pan and a cupboard.

There is no hurry for this, and already I can see myself earning enough to be safe for a long time to come.

You cannot think what peace of mind it gives me, I am so set on making an artist's home, but one for practical use, and not the ordinary studio full of knick-knacks.

I am also thinking of planting two oleanders in tubs in front of the door.

After all we shall probably spend several times fewer hundreds of francs than Russell, for example, will spend thousands. And truly, even if I could choose between the two, for my own part I should rather have the hundred-franc method, so long as every piece of furniture is solid and big.

But the room where I shall put up anybody who comes this way will be like a boudoir, and when it is finished, you will see that it will not be a haphazard production, but a deliberate creation.

The text of Bing's Japon is rather dry, and leaves something to be desired; he says there is a great individual art, but though he gives a few scraps of it, he gives you no real impression of the character of that art.

Have you read Madame Chrysanthème yet?

The sense of tranquillity that the house has bought me mainly amounts to this - that from now on I feel I am working to provide for the future, so that after me another painter will find a going concern. I shall need time, but I am obsessed with the idea of painting such decorations for the house as will be worth the money spent on me during the years in which I was unproductive.

Mother's photograph gave me very great pleasure, because you can see that she is well, and because she still has such a lively expression. But I do not care for it at all as a real likeness; I have just painted my own portrait, in the same ashen colouring, and unless we are painted in colour, the result is nowhere near a speaking likeness. Just because I had taken a terrific amount of trouble to get the combination of ashen and grey-pink tones, I could not like the portrait in black and white. Would Germinie Lacerteux really be Germinie Lacerteux without her colour? Obviously not. How I would like to have painted portraits of her own family.

For the second time I have scraped off a study of Christ with the angel in the Garden of Olives. You see, I can see real olives here, but I cannot or rather I will not paint any more without models; but I have the thing in my head with the colours, a starry night, the figure of Christ in blue, all the strongest blues, and the angel blended citron-yellow. And every shade of violet, from a blood-red purple to ashen, in the landscape.

I have been to get five size 30 stretchers, so I have even more ideas. I'm having the pictures that I'm keeping here framed in oak and walnut.

It will take time, but you'll see later on.

I hope that you will give me some details of your visit to Maurin. I like the drawing of the two women in the carriage tremendously.

Even if it is some time before anyone comes here to stay with me, it won't make me change my mind about this step being urgent and being useful in the long run. This art that we are working in, we feel it has a long future before it, and one must be quietly settled, like steady people, and not like decadents. Here my life will become more and more like a Japanese painter's, living close to nature like a petty tradesman. And that, you well know, is a less gloomy affair than the decadent's way. If I can live long enough, I shall be something like old Tanguy.

After all, we don't really know anything about our own personal future, but we nevertheless feel that impressionism will last. Good-by for the present and good luck, and many, many thanks for all your kindness. I think that I shall put the Japanese things downstairs in the studio. A handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Paul Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh

Brittany, 22 September 1888

c. 22 September 1888

My dear Vincent,

It has taken me a long time to answer you: What do you expect? My sickly state and sorrow often leave me in a state of prostration, when I lock myself up in inaction. If you knew my life, you'd understand that after having struggled so much (in every way), I am just now catching my breath, and at this moment I am dormant. Your exchange project to which I haven't yet answered smiles at me, and I will do the portrait you want, though not *yet*. I am not up to doing it, seeing as it is not a copy of a face that you want but a portrait, as I understand a portrait to be. I watch little Bernard, and I don't yet possess him. I will perhaps do it from memory; in any case, it will be an abstraction. Maybe tomorrow, I don't know, it will come to me all at once. Right now, we're having a spell of good weather which leads both of us to try many things. I just did a religious painting, very poorly done, but which was interesting to do and which pleases me. I wanted to give it to the church at Pont-Aven. Naturally, they don't want it.

Groups of Brittany women pray, very intense black costumes. Very bright yellow-white headdresses. The two headdresses on the right are like monstrous helmets. A dark purple apple tree crosses through the painting, with foliage drawn in masses like emerald green clouds with intervals of yellow-green sunlight. The (pure vermilion) land. At the church it slopes down and becomes red-brown.

The angel is dressed in violent ultramarine blue and Jacob bottle-green. The angel's wings of pure chromium yellow one. The angel's hair chromium two and orange flesh-coloured feet. I think I've succeeded in creating a great rustic and *superstitious* simplicity in the faces. The whole thing is very severe. The cow under the tree is very small compared to life and rears up. In this painting I find that the landscape and the fight exist only in the imagination of the people who pray after the sermon - that's why there is a contrast between the life-sized people and the unnatural and disproportionate fight in its landscape. In your letter you seem angry at our laziness in regard to the portrait, and that makes me sad; *friends* don't get mad (at a distance words cannot be interpreted in their true value).

Another thing. You twist the dagger in the wound when you insist upon proving to me that I've got to come south, knowing I suffer by not being there right now. When you invited me to come there with your scheme, I formally wrote you one last *affirmative* letter, happy with your brother's offer. There is no way I can form a studio in the north, since every day I hope to sell something which would allow me to get out of here. The people who feed me here, the doctor who cured me, did it on credit and would never take a painting or scrap of clothing from me and are splendid toward me. I cannot let them down without committing a *misdeed*, which would bother me very much. If they were either rich or thieves, it wouldn't matter to me. I will wait, then. For example, if that day came, and you were in a different frame of mind and had to tell me “Too late” … I'd prefer that you do it right away. I'm afraid that your brother, who loves my talent, will price it too high. If he finds a collector or a speculator who is tempted by *low prices*, let him do it. I am a man of sacrifices, and I would like him to understand that I approve of whatever he does.

Little Bernard will bring several of my paintings to Paris with him shortly.

Laval plans to meet me in the Midi sometime in February. He found someone who will pay him 150 francs per month for a year.

Now it seems to me, my dear Vincent, that you count badly. I know the prices in the south; besides the restaurant, I am responsible for a house of three people for 200 francs per month, including food. I've kept up my household and I know how to get along - even more so with four.

As for housing; besides yours, Laval and Bernard could have a small furnished bedroom nearby. I like the layout of your dream house and the idea of seeing it makes my mouth water.

Well! As much as possible, I do not want to think about the promised fruit. Let's wait for better days; unless I rid myself of this foul existence that weighs down upon me so horribly outside of work.

Yours sincerely,

Gauguin

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 24 September 1888

My dear Theo,
The fine weather of the last few days has gone, and instead we have mud and rain. But it's sure to come back again before winter. Only one must make the most of it, as the fine days are short.

Especially for painting. This winter I intend to do a lot of drawing. If only I could draw figures from memory, I should always have something to do. But if you take a figure by the most skilful of all the artists who sketch from life - Hokusai, or Daumier - in my opinion that figure will never compare to a figure painted from the model by those same masters or other master portrait painters.

Anyway - if we are so often fated to go short of models, and especially of intelligent models, we mustn't despair or tire of the struggle.

I have arranged all the Japanese prints in the studio, and the Daumiers, and the Delacroixs and the Géricaults. If you come across Delacroix's “Pieta” again, or the Géricault, I urge you to get as many of them as you can.

What I should really love to have in the studio as well is Millet's “Work in the Fields,” and Lerat's etching of his “Sower” which Durand-Ruel sells at 1.25 francs. And lastly the little etching by Jacquemart after Meissonier, the “Man Reading,” a Meissonier I've always admired. I cannot help liking Meissonier's things.

I am reading an article on Tolstoy in the Revue des Deux Mondes - it appears that Tolstoy is enormously interested in the religion of his people. Like George Eliot in England. I believe there is a book on religion by Tolstoy, I think it is called My Religion, it's sure to be very good. In it he goes in search, or so I gather from the article, of what all religions have in common. It seems that he admits neither the resurrection of the body, nor even that of the soul, but says, like the nihilists, that after death there is nothing else. Though man dies, and dies completely, living humanity endures forever.

Anyhow, not having read the book itself, I'm not able to say exactly what his conception is, but I don't imagine that his religion is a cruel one which increases our suffering, but must be, on the contrary, a very comforting one, inspiring one with peace of mind, and energy, and the courage to live, and many other things.

I think the drawing of the “Blade of Grass” and the carnations and the Hokusai in Bing's reproductions are *admirable*.

But whatever they say, the most ordinary Japanese prints, coloured in flat tones, seem admirable to me for the same reason as Rubens and Veronese. I know perfectly well that they are not primitive art. But just because the primitives are so admirable, there is absolutely no reason for me to say, as is becoming the custom, “When I go to the Louvre, I cannot get beyond the primitives.”

If I said to a *serious* collector of Japanese art - to Levy himself - “My dear sir, I cannot help admiring these Japanese prints at 5 sous apiece,” it is more than probable he would be a little shocked, and would pity my ignorance and bad taste. Just as at one time it was considered bad taste to admire Rubens, Jordaens, and Veronese.

I'm sure I shan't end up feeling lonely in the house, and that during bad winter days, and the long evenings, I shall find something absorbing to do.

A weaver or a basket maker often spends whole seasons alone, or almost alone, with his craft as his only distraction. And what makes these people stay in one place is precisely the feeling of being at home, *the reassuring and familiar look of things.* Of course I'd welcome company, but it won't make me unhappy if I don't have it, and anyway, the time will come when I will have someone, I have little doubt of that.

I'm sure that if you were willing to put people up in your house too, you would find plenty of artists for whom the question of lodgings is a very serious problem.

For my part I think that it is absolutely my duty to try to make money by my work, and so I see my work very clear before me.

Oh, if only every artist had something to live on, and to work on, but as that is not so, I want to produce, to produce a lot and with a consuming drive. And perhaps the time will come when we can extend our business and be more help to the others.

But that is a long way off and there is a lot of work to get through first.

If you lived in time of war, you might possibly have to fight; you would regret it, you would lament that you weren't living in times of peace, but after all the necessity would be there and you would fight.

And in the same way we certainly have the right to wish for a state of things in which money would not be necessary in order to live.

However, as everything is done by means of money now, one has got to think about making it so long as one spends it, but I have more chance of making it by painting than by drawing. On the whole there are a good many more people who can do clever sketches than there are who can paint readily and can get at nature through colour. That will always be rarer, and whether the pictures are a long time in being appreciated or not, they will find a collector some day.

As for the pictures done in fairly thick impasto, I think they need longer to dry out *here*. I've read that the works of Rubens in Spain have remained infinitely richer in colour than those in the North. Even the ruins here exposed to the open air remain white, whereas in the north they turn grey, dirty, black, *etc.* You may be sure that if the Monticellis had dried in Paris, they would be very much duller by now.

I am beginning to appreciate the beauty of the women here better, so my thoughts return to Monticelli over and over again. Colour plays a tremendous part in the beauty of these women - I'm not saying that their figures are not beautiful, but that is not the native charm. That is to be found in the grand lines of the colourful costume, worn just right, and in the tone of the flesh rather than the shape. It won't be easy doing them the way I'm beginning to feel about them. But what I am sure of is that by staying here I shall make some progress. And in order to do a picture which is really of the South, a little skill is not enough. It is observing things for a long time that gives you greater maturity and a deeper understanding.

I didn't think when I left Paris that I should ever find Monticelli and Delacroix so *true*. It is only now, after months and months, that I am beginning to realize that they didn't dream it all up. And next year I think you'll see the same subjects again, orchards, the harvest, but - with a different colouring, and above all, a change in treatment. And these changes and variations will go on.

My feeling is that I must work at a leisurely pace. Indeed, what about practicing the old saying, One should study for ten years or so, and then produce a few figures? That is what Monticelli did, after all. Hundreds of his pictures should be considered as nothing more than studies. But still, figures like the woman in yellow, or the woman with the parasol, the little one you have, or the lovers that Reid had, those are complete figures and one can only admire the way they were drawn. For in them Monticelli achieves drawing as rich and magnificent as that of Daumier and Delacroix. Certainly, at the price Monticellis are fetching, it would be an excellent speculation to buy some. The day will come when his beautiful *drawn* figures will be considered very great art.

As for the beauty of the women and their costume, I'm sure the town of Arles was infinitely more glorious in the past. Everything has a blighted, faded quality about it now. Still, if you look at it for a long time, the old charm re-emerges.

And that is why I can see that I will lose absolutely nothing by staying where I am and contenting myself with watching things go by, like a spider in its web waiting for flies.

I can't force things, and now that I'm settled in, I'll be able to profit from all the fine days and all the opportunities for catching a real picture now and then.

Milliet is lucky, he has as many Arlésiennes as he wants, but then, he can't paint them, and if he were a painter, he wouldn't have them. I shall just have to bide my time without rushing things.

I've read another article on Wagner - Love in Music - I think by the same author who wrote the book on Wagner. How we need the same thing in painting!

It seems that in the book, My Religion, Tolstoy implies that whatever happens in a violent revolution, there will also be an inner and hidden revolution in the people, out of which a new religion will be born, or rather, something completely new which will be nameless, but which will have the same effect of consoling, of making life possible, as the Christian religion used to.

The book must be a very interesting one, it seems to me. In the end, we shall have had enough of cynicism, scepticism and humbug, and will want to live - more musically. How will this come about, and what will we discover? It would be nice to be able to prophesy, but it is even better to be forewarned, instead of seeing absolutely nothing in the future other than the disasters that are bound to strike the modern world and civilization like so many thunderbolts, through revolution, or war, or the bankruptcy of worm-eaten states.

If we study Japanese art, we discover a man who is undeniably wise, philosophical and intelligent, who spends his time - doing what? Studying the distance from the earth and the moon? No! Studying the politics of Bismarck? No! He studies … a single blade of grass. But this blade of grass leads him to draw all the plants - then the seasons, the grand spectacle of landscapes, finally animals, then the human figure. That is how he spends his life, and life is too short to do everything.

So come, isn't what we are taught by these simple Japanese, who live in nature as if they themselves were flowers, almost a true religion?

And one cannot study Japanese art, it seems to me, without becoming merrier and happier, and we should turn back to nature in spite of our education and our work in a conventional world.

Isn't it sad that the Monticellis have never been reproduced in beautiful lithographs or vibrant etchings? I should love to see what artists would say if an engraver like the one who engraved Velásquez's work made a fine etching of them. Be that as it may, I think it rather more our duty to try to admire and know things for ourselves than to teach them to others. But the two can go hand in hand.

I envy the Japanese the extreme clarity of everything in their work. It is never dull and it never seems to be done in too much of a hurry. Their work is as simple as breathing, and they do a figure in a few sure strokes as if it were as easy as doing up your waistcoat.

Oh, I still have to learn to do a figure in a few strokes. That will keep me busy all winter. Once I can do that, I shall be able to do people walking the boulevards, in the streets, and masses of new subjects. While I've been writing this letter to you, I've already drawn a dozen. I'm on the right track, but it's very complicated, as what I am trying to do in a few strokes is to provide the figure of a man, a woman, a child, a horse or a dog, with a head, a body, legs and arms that all fit together.

For the moment, and with a hearty handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

One day Madame De Lareby Laroquette said to me, Monticelli, Monticelli, now he was a man who should have been at the head of a great studio in the South.

I wrote to our sister the other day, and to you, you remember, that sometimes I felt I was continuing Monticelli's work here. Well, now you can see we are setting up that studio in question.

What Gauguin will be doing, what I shall be doing as well, will be in keeping with Monticelli's fine work, and we shall try to prove to the good people that Monticelli did not die slumped across the café tables of the Cannebiére, but that the little fellow is still alive.

And the thing won't end with us, we shall merely start it off on a fairly solid basis.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 26 September 1888

Dear Theo,

I have to thank you most kindly for the consignment of canvas and colours from Tasset's, which arrived in good condition and this time by parcel post. In my last letter I already told you that autumn has manifested itself in rain and bad weather. This has hampered me a little, but all the same I have just finished a size 30 canvas representing a ploughed field, done in the sunny intervals.

[A sketch of “Ploughed Fields (The Furrows)” appeared here.]

A blue sky with white clouds. An immense expanse of ground of an ashy lilac. Innumerable furrows and clods. A horizon of blue hills and green bushes with - [illegible].

This is another one that will take a long time to dry; pictures that are thickly painted must be treated like the stronger types of wine; one must let them mature. I have ordered a white deal frame for this one.

As long s autumn lasts, I shall not have hands, canvas and colours enough to paint the beautiful things I see.

I am also working on a portrait of Milliet, but he poses badly, or I may be at fault myself, which, however, I do not believe, as I am sorely in want of some studies of him, for he is a good-looking boy, very unconcerned and easy-going in his behaviour, and he would suit me damned well for the picture of a lover.

I have already promised him a study for his trouble, but, you know, he cannot keep still.

Besides, he hardly has any time to spare, seeing that he must take a tender leave of all the grues et grenouilles de la grenouillère of Arles, now that he has to return to his f — garrison, as he says.

I do not object to it, but I regret that he has a nervous motion of the legs when posing.

He is a good fellow, but he is only twenty-five, God damn it, ten years younger than I am - and within ten years - according to Ziem - I am afraid that, if he goes on like this, and not being able to caper about any longer, he may join the ambitious.

I should not be surprised if in his heart he were annoyed at having to leave, and perhaps he is living beyond his means, which obliges him to go back to Africa. I only know one serious fault in his character, which is that he likes

L'abbé Constantin by Georges Ohnet, and I have told him that he had a thousand times better read Bel Ami by Guy de Maupassant.

What does Father Tanguy say of the gross-grained paints now? I think I must warn him at once that I still want 5 or even 10 meters of canvas. And that at the same time I shall also want:

3 large tubes as the silver white and the zinc white and the Prussian blue.
6 large tubes id. id. chrome I citron
6 “ “ id. id. chrome II
2 “ “ id. id. chrome III
6 “ “ id. id. malachite green
and 6 medium tubes geranium lake
12 zinc white, large tubes

12 silver white

This is approximately in proportion to the canvas.

As I have just received the consignment of canvas and colours, you will understand that there is no hurry; however, it is the minimum that I shall need during autumn and the falling of the leaves, which will be marvellous and which lasts only one week.

I am sure that I shall be able to do a good job of work, and during that period I should not like to run short of yellow and blue. In case you should be a bit hard up, I could manage perfectly without the expensive blues and the carmine. One tube of Prussian blue yields as much as six of ultramarine or cobalt and costs *three times less*.

Now it fades a little, but when I use zinc white in its crude state, I shall be able to do without the rest if necessary.

Delacroix swore by that vulgar blue and used it often.

So I warn you of the state of affairs in advance, though the famous falling of the leaves is still a considerable distance off.

I must work like a team of mules as long as autumn lasts if I want to recover what our furniture has cost.

I wanted to do some sunflowers again but they were already finished. Yes, during autumn I would like to be able to make a dozen 30 square canvases and I can very well accomplish it as far as I can see. I have a terrifying lucidity at times when nature is so beautiful these days, and then I am not conscious of myself any more, and the painting comes to me as in a dream. I am rather afraid that it will have a reaction of depression when we have rotten weather but then I will seek for a distraction in the study of these questions of drawing figures from memory.

I am always frustrated in my best powers by the lack of models, but I don't let it worry me - I do a landscape and colour without worrying about where it will take me. I know this, that if I were to beg the models “Now pose for me I beg you,” I would be behaving like Zola's good painter in his book. And certainly Manet, for example, didn't behave like that. And in his book Zola doesn't say how those that didn't see anything supernatural in painting acted.

But don't criticise Zola's book. I will send five of Bernard's drawings in the style of the others.

I wrote to him that since Gauguin had not definitely stated if he would come or would not come I could not offer Bernard the free hospitality, or even paid in pictures or drawings. That here just his food alone would cost him in any case a bit more that food and lodging up where he currently is. A bit less perhaps if we ate in the studio, with or without Gauguin, we could make some savings.

But that in any case I didn't urge him to come. That as I counted on wintering here, certainly his company would be very welcome, but that above all he must do his calculations well.

If one of these days Gauguin writes to you definitely, either to you or to me, we will be able to see again about Bernard. I think myself that Bernard would certainly find his business here but his father should be a little bit more magnanimous in his regard. Because Bernard is painstaking. - I don't like these drawings, however, as much that the previous ones.

At the beginning of next month there will again be a heap of things that will fall on my back at the same time. In the frames and stretchers that I am having made here for the decoration of the house at the same time as the month's rent and the cleaning woman.

But I can delay taking the frames and the stretchers, and therefore I hope I will get by in any case.

The only hope that I have that is that by working very hard, at the end of one year I will have enough paintings to be able to exhibit - if I want or if you want to - at the time of the exhibition. I am not set on it, but what I am certainly set on is showing something not at all bad.

I would *not* exhibit, but we would have in my house work of mine that would prove that I am not slothful, nor an idler. I would be at peace, but the main thing seems to me to be that I must not give myself less trouble that the painters who work expressly for it.

Whether one exhibits or one doesn't exhibit it is necessary to be productive, and from then on one has the right to smoke his pipe in peace.

But this year we will be productive and I'm endeavouring to make this new series better than the first two consignments.

And among the studies there will be some, I hope, that are paintings, so to speak, there.

As for the starry sky, I keep hoping very much to paint it, and perhaps I will one of these days, in the same ploughed field if the sky is glittering properly.

Tolstoy's book My Religion has already been published in French in 1885 but I have never seen it in any catalogue.

He does not appear to believe much in a resurrection of the body or the soul. Above all he barely appears to believe in heaven - he argues these things like a nihilist - but - in opposition to most of these people - he attaches great importance of doing the things that one does well, since that is probably all one has.

And if he doesn't believe in resurrection, he appears to believe in the equivalent - the continuance of life - the march of humanity, of man and his work continued almost infallibly by the humanity of the generation to come. After all, they must not be empty consolations that he gives. Himself a nobleman, he made himself a worker, he knows how to make boots, knows how to repair stoves, knows how to guide a plough and to dig the earth.

I know nothing at all of all that, but I respect an energetic human soul, noted for his reforms too. My god, all the same we don't have to pity ourselves for living at a time where there are nothing but loafers, when we are contemporaries of similar specimens of poor mortals who don't even believe very strongly in heaven. He believes - maybe I already wrote of it to you, in a non-violent revolution caused by the need for love and religion that, as a reaction to the scepticism and desperate and discouraging suffering, must appear in people.

Goodbye. Your last letter came on Friday; if I got the next letter on Friday too it would be awfully good.

But it is not pressing, it will be alright whatever happens. A handshake

Ever yours,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 27 September 1888

My dear Theo,

I know quite well that I already wrote you yesterday, but it has been such a lovely day again today. My great regret is that you cannot see what I am seeing here.

Since seven o'clock this morning I have been sitting in front of something which after all is no great matter, a ball-shaped bush of cedar or cypress, planted in the grass. You already know this ball-shaped bush, since you already have a study of the garden. Enclosed also a sketch of my canvas, again a square size 30. [Painting lost]

The bush is green, a little bronze and various other tints.

The grass is very, very green, lemon-tinted emerald green.

The sky is very, very blue.

The row of bushes in the background are all oleanders, raving mad; the blasted plants flowering so riotously they could certainly catch locomotor ataxia. They are loaded with fresh flowers, and heaps of faded flowers as well, their greenery is likewise renewing itself in vigorous new shoots, apparently inexhaustibly.

A funereal cypress, all black, is standing over them, and some colourful little figures walking on a pink path.

This makes a pendant to another size 30 canvas of the same place, only from quite another point of view, where the whole garden is coloured in very different green, under a pale lemon-yellow sky.

But isn't it true that this garden has a strange character which makes one easily imagine the poets of the Renaissance, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, strolling among these bushes and over the flowering grass? Now it is true that I have left out some trees, but those I kept in the composition are really there just as you see it.

Only it has been overcrowded by some bushes which are not in character.

And this should find that truer and more fundamental character. This is the third time that I've painted the same place.

It just happens to be the garden right in front of my house.

But this corner of garden is a good example of what I was telling you, that to get at the real character of things here, it is necessary to study them and paint them for a very long time.

Perhaps you will see nothing in the sketch except that the lines are now very simple. This picture is again painted very thickly, like its pendant with the yellow sky.

I hope to work again with Milliet tomorrow.

Today again from seven o'clock in the morning till six in the evening I worked without budging except to grab a bite just two steps away. That is why the work is going so quickly.

But what will you say of it, and what shall I think of it myself, a little while from now?

I have a lover's lucidity or blindness for work just now.

Because the setting of colours all about me are new to me, and it gives me an extraordinary exaltation.

I have no thought of fatigue, I could even do another painting this evening, and I would bring it off.

If I tell you that it is very urgent for me to have:

6 large tubes of chrome yellow, 1 lemon yellow

6 “ “ veronese green

3 “ “ Prussian blue

10 “ “ zinc white

Big tubes like the zinc and silver white

Then this can be deducted from yesterday's order

At the same time 5 meters of canvas

I can't help it, I feel so lucid, and I want as far as possible to make sure I have enough pictures to hold my own when the others are making a great effort for the year '89. Seurat with 2 or 3 of his enormous canvases has enough to hold an exhibition of his own, Signac is a good worker and has enough as well. Gauguin and Guillaumin too. So for the time being, whether we exhibit or not, I want to have the series of studies:

Decoration

In this way we shall be absolutely original, for the others will not be able to think us pretentious when we have only that.

But you may be quite sure that I shall try to put *style* into them. Today Milliet was pleased with what I had done - the ploughed field - generally he does not like what I do, but because the clods of earth are as soft in colour as a pair of sabots, it did not offend him, with the forget-me-not blue sky flecked with white clouds. It would give me great pleasure if he posed better, and he would have a more elegant portrait than I can manage now, though the subject is beautiful with his pale and matte tinted face, the kepi red against a viridian background.

Ah, how I wish you could see all that I am seeing these days. In front of so many lovely things I can only let myself go. Especially since I think that the work is getting somewhat better than the last batch. Only it was the studies in the last batch that prepared me to be able to work with so much assurance, these days that are free of wind.

Why doesn't our good father Thomas want to lend me anything on my studies? He is making a mistake if he doesn't, and I hope he will. I am afraid of overburdening you, and yet I would like to order some 200 franc's worth of paints, and canvas, and brushes. It is not for anything else, it is for that.

Perhaps the entire autumn will be fine, and if I knock off a size 30 canvas every two or three days, I shall make several thousand franc notes.

I still have a kind of concentrated power, more than I need to spend just on the work. But I am bound to begin by using up a heap of paint, and that is why I need Thomas.

If I continue to work like this, I shall have my studio full of very sound studies the way Guillaumin's is. Guillaumin is sure to have some beautiful new things I don't doubt, and I would love to see them.

The present studies are really done with one coat of impasto.

The touch is not much divided and the tones are often blended, and altogether I can't help laying it on thick à la Monticelli. Sometimes I think I really am continuing that man's work, only I have not yet done the figure of a lover as he did.

And probably I shall not do it either before doing some serious studies from life. But there is no rush, and now I am quite set in my mind to work hard until I have surmounted that.

If I want to get this letter off, I must hurry.

Have you news of Gauguin? At any moment I am expecting Bernard's letter which will probably follow the sketches.

Gauguin must certainly have another combination in mind, I have felt that for weeks and weeks.

He has a perfect right to, of course.

For the moment the solitude doesn't bother me, and later we will find someone for company, and perhaps in the end more than we want.

I believe it is not necessary to say anything unpleasant to Gauguin if he does change his mind, and take it absolutely in good part.

If he has joined forces with Laval, it is only natural, since Laval is his pupil, and they have already lived together.

As a matter of fact, if they might really both come here, we could find some way of putting them up.

As for the furnishings, if I knew beforehand that Gauguin was not coming, I still would like to have two beds in case I had to put someone up. So of course he is quite free. There will always be someone with the desire to see the Midi. What has Vignon done?? After all, if everything takes a turn for the better, everyone will be sure to make great progress, and the same for me too. If you can't always see these lovely days here, you will see some of it in the paintings. And I am trying to get more into them than in the others.

A handshake and
Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 September 1888

My dear Theo, thank you very much of your letter and the 50 francs note that it contained. It is not good that the pains in the leg have come back - my god - it would be good it if it was possible if you could live in the Midi too, because I always think that we need each other, and the sun and good weather and the blue air are the strongest remedy. The weather here remains beautiful, and if it is always like this then it would be better than the paradise of those painters who are in Japan itself. I think about you and Gauguin and about Bernard all the time and everywhere. It is so beautiful and I would so like to see everybody here.

Included a small sketch of a 30 square canvas - in short the starry sky painted by night, actually under a gas jet. The sky is aquamarine, the water is royal blue, the ground is mauve. The town is blue and purple. The gas is yellow and the reflections are russet gold descending down to green-bronze. On the aquamarine field of the sky the Great Bear is a sparkling green and pink, whose discreet paleness contrasts with the brutal gold of the gas. Two colourful figurines of lovers in the foreground.

Also a sketch of a 30 square canvas representing the house and its setting under a sulphur sun under a pure cobalt sky. The theme is a hard one! But that is exactly why I want to conquer it. Because it is fantastic, these yellow houses in the sun and also the incomparable freshness of the blue. All the ground is yellow too. I will soon send you a better drawing of it than this sketch out of my head.

The house on the left is pink with green shutters. It's the one that is shaded by a tree. This is the restaurant where I go to dine every day. My friend the factor is at the end of the street on the left, between the two bridges of the railroad. The night café that I painted is not in the picture, it is on the left of the restaurant.

Milliet finds this horrible, but I don't need to tell you that when he says he doesn't understand that one can have fun doing a common grocer's shop and the stiff and proper houses without any grace, but I remember that Zola did a certain boulevard in the beginning of L'assommoir, and Flaubert a corner of the embankment of the Villette in the dog days in the beginning of Bouvard and Pécuchet which are not to be sneezed at.

It does me good to do difficult things. It does not prevent me from having a terrible need of, shall I say the word - of religion - then I go outside in the night to paint the stars and I dream ever of a picture like this with a group of lively figures of our pals.

Now I have had a letter from Gauguin who seems very sad, and says that certainly if he made a sale he will come, but he doesn't say clearly that if he would simply have his journey paid he would agree to come down here.

He says that the people where he lodges are, and have been, great to him, and that to leave them like that would be a bad thing to do. But that I turn a dagger in his heart if I would believe that he would not immediately come if he was able to. That besides, if you could sell his canvases at a low price he would be happy. I will send you his letter with the replies.

Certainly his arrival would be an increase of 100 percent in the importance of this enterprise of doing painting in the Midi. And once here, I don't see him leaving again because I believe that he would take root here. And I always tell myself that what you are doing in private would in the end, with his collaboration, be a more serious thing than just my work, without an increase in the expenses and you would have more satisfaction. Later on, if maybe one day you are on your own with the impressionist paintings you will only have to continue and to enlarge on those which actually exists. Finally Gauguin says that Laval found someone who will give him 150 francs per month for at least one year, and that Laval also would maybe come in February. And I have written to Bernard that I think that in the Midi he could not live for less than 3.50 or 4 francs per day just for lodging & food. He says that he believes that for 200 francs per month he would have food and lodging for all 3 which is not impossible, if we live & eat in the studio.

The Benedictine father must have been very interesting. What would, according to him, be the future religion? Probably he would always say the same as the past.

Victor Hugo says God is an eclipsing lighthouse, and certainly now we are passing through that eclipse.

I only wish that someone could prove to us something calming which comforted us, so that we stopped feeling guilty or unhappy and that we could go forward without losing ourselves in the solitude or nothingness, and without having to fear every step, or to nervously calculate the harm we may unintentionally be doing to others.

In odd Giotto's biography it said that he was always suffering and always full of ardour and ideas.

There, I would like to arrive at this assurance that makes one happy, cheerful and alive all the time. That would be easier to do in the country or a small town than in that Parisian furnace.

I would not be surprised if you will like the starry night and the ploughed fields - they are more tranquil than the other canvases. If the work always turned out like that I would have less concerns about money, because people would take to them more easily if the technique continued to be more harmonious. But this blasted mistral is very bothersome to do brushstrokes that hold and are well interwoven, with a feeling like music played with emotion.

With this calm weather I let myself go and I don't have to struggle against impossibilities

Tanguy's consignment arrived and I thank you very, very much for it because I also hope to be able to make something during autumn for the next exhibition. What is now the most pressing is 5 or even 10 meters of canvas. I write again that I will send Gauguin's letter with the reply.

Very interesting what you say of Maurin; at 40 francs his drawings are certainly not expensive. More and more I come to believe that the true and proper trade of painting is one has to let oneself go with one's taste, one's learning before the masters, in short one's faith. It is not any easier, I am convinced, to make a good painting that to find a diamond or a pearl; it requires pain and one must risk his life as a dealer or as an artist. But once one has some good stones then self doubt is not necessary, and one must boldly stick to a certain price. In the meantime… but while this idea encourages me to work, still naturally I suffer at having to spend money. But in the midst of my suffering this idea of the pearl came to me, and I would not be surprised if it didn't do you good too in times of discouragement. There are as few good paintings as there are diamonds.

And there is absolutely nothing dishonest about doing business with good stones. One can believe in oneself when one sees that the thing one is selling is good.Now, if people like paste, and it pleases them and since they ask for it, good, one can have it in the store, but it isn't enough to make one feel good about oneself with the good paintings, yet one can feel oneself and be firm, since it is a pure error that there is as much as one wants. Perhaps I am expressing myself badly, but I have thought about this a good deal these days, and calm has come to me about this Gauguin affair.

All these Gauguins are good stones, and so let us boldly be merchants of Gauguin.

Milliet says a good hello. I now have his portrait with a red kepi on emerald background, and in the background the arms of his regiment, the crescent and a 5-pointed star.

A good handshake and until next time and many thanks and I hope that the pains will not last long. Have you seen a doctor again[?] Look after yourself, because physical pain is so agonising.

Ever yours,
Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 28 September 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

Just a word to thank you for your drawings; I think they were done a little too hastily, and I like the drawings of the whores better; but for the rest there is an idea in all of them. I have been overwhelmed with work lately, for the weather is glorious, and I must make the most of the fine days, which are short.

I cannot withdraw what I said about the price: three francs, just for food, and then the extras! But I have no doubt that all that Gauguin told you about the prices here is correct. But all that I can see is that the moment of your departure to do your military service is drawing near, and I very much wish to induce your father to provide you with what's necessary to fortify yourself with good food, without your work suffering under it. Let him do the handsome thing and give you all that is reasonable in the interval between now and the time of your service.

I have written you insistently and repeatedly that, if you go to Africa, you will work there, and you will see the very scenery which you ought to see to develop your talent as a painter and a colourist to its full extent. But this can only be done at the expense of your poor carcass, unless before your African hardships your father enables you to avoid getting anemic or catching a debilitating dysentery as a result of a lack of strengthening food.

It is hardly possible to fortify one's body over there; far be it from me to say that when one is going into a hot climate one ought to fatten oneself up first, but what I do say is that one should attend to one's nourishment some time in advance; and I abide by this through thick and thin, as this regimen agrees with me so well here, because there is some difference between the heat of Africa and the heat of Arles.

You will either come out of this trial of your service much stronger, strong enough for a whole artistic career - or a broken man.

However that may be, I should be enormously delighted if you came here, and if Gauguin came too; and then the only thing to be regretted will be that it is winter and not the season of fine weather. I am coming to believe more and more that the cuisine has something to do with our ability to think and to make pictures; as for me, when my stomach bothers me it is not conducive to the success of my work.

In short, I think that, if your father made up his mind quietly to preserve your pictures and grant you a somewhat generous credit, he would lose less in the end than if he acted differently. In the South one's senses get keener, one's hand becomes more agile, one's eye more alert, one's brain clearer, however on condition: that all this is not spoiled by dysentery or something else of a debilitating nature. But apart from that I venture to believe most firmly that anyone who loves artistic work will find his productive faculties develop in the South; but take care of your blood and take care of everything else.

And now you will tell me perhaps that I am boring you with all this - that you want to go to the brothel without giving a damn about all the rest. Good heavens, it all depends, but I cannot speak differently than I do. Art is long and life is short, and we must be patient, while trying to sell our lives dearly. How I wish I were your age, and could go off, knowing what I know, to do my military service in Africa; but then I should get myself a better body than I have now, and no mistake!

If Gauguin and I are here together, which will probably happen, then we shall certainly do our utmost to save you expense; but then your father, on his part, ought to do his utmost too, and have confidence in us, and realize that we are not trying to do him out of more money than necessary. To do good work one must eat well, be well housed, have one's fling from time to time, smoke one's pipe and drink one's coffee in peace.

I do not say that all the other things are without value, I want to leave everybody free to do what he likes; but what I do say is that this system seems preferable to me to a good many others.

A hearty handshake,

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Eugne Boch

Arles, 2 October 1888

[Letter to his friend Eugène Boch]
My dear friend Bock,
Many thanks for your letter which pleased me very much. I congratulate you on not having hesitated this time and on having attacked the Borinage. There you have a field where you will be able to work all your life [*illegible*] - the extraordinary scenery [as well] as the figure.

The tip girls in their pit rags especially are superb. If you should ever go to Petit Wasmes, please inquire whether Jean Baptiste Denis, farmer, and Joseph Quinet, miner, are still living there, and tell them from me that I have never forgotten the Borinage and that I should still be delighted to see it again.

Now I must tell you a piece of news, namely that I have furnished the house at last and that I have immediately furnished a bedroom for Gauguin or for anyone else who should come.

The house is a lot brighter now that it is furnished. After that I have worked like blazes, for the fall is without wind and superb. I am also working on seven square size 30 canvases. In the first place the night café where I have stayed with lamp light effect, painted in the nighttime.

Three views of the public garden in front of the house.

[Here appears a sketch of a lost painting, Poet's Garden II.]

This is one of the views. A round clipped cypress or cedar shrub of a bottle green on a yellow-green lawn. In the background a row of oleanders and two figures. A sky of raw cobalt. You see, it is even a lot simpler than formerly. [Painting lost]

Then ploughed fields; a scenery with nothing but lumps of earth, the furrows the colour of an old wooden shoe under a forget-me-not blue sky with white cloud flocks.

Further a view of my house and its surroundings in a sulphur sun. The sky hard and bright cobalt. - A difficult job, I tell you!

Then a view of the café on Forum Square where we used to go, painted by night.

And lastly a study of the Rhône - of the town lighted with gas reflected in the blue river.

Over it the starry sky with the Great Bear - a sparkling of pink and green on the cobalt blue field of the night sky, whereas the lights of the town and its ruthless reflections are red gold and bronzed green.

The garden with the oleanders and the round clipped shrub has an impasto like painted porcelain.

Your portrait is in my bedroom along with that of Milliet, the Zouave, which I have just finished. I should like to ask you to exchange one of your studies of the coal-mines for something of mine, - but stop! - I myself am going to send you a study first, when I am sure it is one which will seem wholly unknown to you. For if you saw the night studies you might like them better than the sunlight studies. Well, leave it to me. For I hope that our intercourse once started will last forever.

Everything you'll do will interest me extraordinarily, because I love that dismal country of the Borinage, which will always remain unforgettable to me, so much.

I have nearly made up my mind, when I go to Paris next year, to push on as far as *Mons.* And perhaps even as far as my native country to do some spots that I know already. In the same way in the Borinage Marcusse, or from Antoine to Petit Wasmes. And further the Cour de l'Agrappe in Frameries where you are now. As a matter of fact it was in the Borinage that I first started to work from nature. But of course I destroyed it all a long time ago.

But it stirs my heart that these spots are going to be painted at last.

You will see how easily ideas will come to you.

I am writing you in a great hurry, but I wanted to answer your letter at once.

Enclosed a pretty bad sketch of the starry night. All these pictures are square size 30 canvases. If you had stayed here until now, you would have taken along other studies! For I tell you the scenery has been *extraordinarily* beautiful.

More than once I have done a size 30 canvas in one day, but then I did not stir from the spot from morning till sunset except to eat a morsel. My brother wrote me he saw you in passing. Well, I hope we'll meet again next year. Above all don't forget to let me have your address when you move, or to give me your exact permanent address in La Louvière, if my memory serves me well, for it will be excellent to work continuously in the mining district, and also to see something quite different come to the country of the oleanders and the sulphur sun.

Is your sister going to do the miners too? Surely there is work enough for two. I think it is a very pleasant thing for you to be both painting in the same house.

Well, I must go out to work in the vineyard near Mont Majour. It is all purple and yellow-green under a blue sky, a beautiful colour motif.

A hearty handshake and good courage and a lot of success with your work.

Sincerely, Vincent.

Excuse my great hurry; I haven't even time to read this letter over…

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Paul Gauguin

Arles, 3 October 1888

[In the Dutch edition this letter appears under number 553a]
Arles, 3 October 1888
[Sent by Gauguin to Schuffenecker on October 8, 1888, with the observation: “I am sending you a letter from Vincent to let you know how things stand between us and with all our present plans.”]
My dear Gauguin,

This morning I received your excellent letter, which I have again sent on to my brother. Your view of impressionism in general, of which your portrait is a symbol, is striking. No one could be more anxious than I am to see it - but I am sure even now that this work is too important for me to take in exchange. But if you would like to keep it for us, my brother will, if you agree, buy it at the first opportunity - and I immediately asked him to do so - so let's hope it happens soon.

For we are trying once more to make it as easy as possible for you to come here soon.

I must tell you that even while working I think continually about the plan of setting up a studio in which you and I will be permanent residents, but which both of us want to turn into a shelter and refuge for friends, against the times when they find that the struggle is getting too much for them.

When you left Paris, my brother and I stayed on together for a time, which will always remain an unforgettable memory for me. The discussions ranged further and wider - with Guillaumin, with the Pissarros, father and son, and with Seurat, whom I had not met before (I visited his studio only a few hours before my departure).

These discussions often dealt with something so near to my brother's heart and mine, namely what steps to take in order to safeguard the material existence of painters, to safeguard their means of production (paints, canvases) and to safeguard their true share in the price their pictures fetch these days - though not until long after they have left the artist's possession.

When you are here, we can mull over all these discussions.

Anyway, when I left Paris I was in a sorry state, quite ill and almost an alcoholic after driving myself on even while my strength was failing me - and then withdrawing into myself, still bereft of hope!

Now, hope is vaguely beckoning on the horizon again, that flickering hope which used sometimes to console my solitary life.

I should so much like to imbue you with a large share of my faith that we shall succeed in starting something that will endure.

When we have had a talk about those strange days spent in discussion in run-down studios and the cafés of the Petit Boulevard, you will understand the full scope of this idea of my brother's and mine - as yet unrealized when it comes to setting up a society.

Still, you will appreciate that in order to remedy the terrible situation of the last few years something is needed, either along the precise lines we proposed or else very much like them. That much we have taken for our unshakeable foundation, as you will gather when you have the full explanation. And you will agree that we have gone a good way beyond the plan we have already communicated to you. That we have gone beyond it is no more than our duty as picture dealers, for you probably know that I, too, spent several years in the trade and do not despise a profession in which I used to earn my living. Suffice it to say that I'm sure that, although you have apparently isolated yourself from Paris, you haven't stopped feeling a fairly close rapport with Paris.

I am having an extraordinary spell of feverish activity these days. Right now I am tackling a landscape with a blue sky above an immense green, purple and yellow vineyard, with black and orange vines. Little figures of ladies with red parasols and little figures of grape pickers with their small cart make it even gayer. Grey sand in the foreground. Another size 30 square canvas to decorate the house.

I've a portrait of myself, all ash grey. The ashen colour - which has been obtained by mixing malachite green with orange lead - on pale malachite background, all in harmony with the reddish-brown clothes. Not wishing to exaggerate my own personality, however, I aimed rather for the character of a bonze, a simple worshipper of the eternal Buddha. Though I have taken rather a lot of trouble with it, I shall have to go over it again if I want to express the idea properly, and I shall have to recover even further from the stultifying effect of our so-called state of civilization if I am to have a better model for a better picture.

One thing that gives me enormous pleasure is the letter I received yesterday from Boch (his sister is one of the Belgian Vingtistes), who writes that he has settled down in the Borinage to paint miners and coal mines there. He nevertheless intends to return to the south - to vary his impressions - and if he does he is certain to come to Arles.

I consider my views of art excessively ordinary compared with yours.

I have always had the coarse tastes of an animal.

I neglect everything for the external beauty of things, *which I cannot reproduce* because I render it so ugly and coarse in my pictures, albeit nature seems so perfect to me.

At present, however, my bony carcass is so full of energy that it makes straight for its objective. The result is a degree of sincerity, perhaps original at times, about what I feel, but only if the subject lends itself to my crude and clumsy touch.

I feel sure that if from now on you were to consider yourself head of this studio, which we shall try to ensure will become a refuge for many - little by little, as our unremitting labour provides us with the means of completing it - I'm sure that you would then feel more or less consoled for the present ordeals of penury and ill-health, seeing that we shall probably be devoting our lives to a generation of painters that will last a long while to come.

This part of the country has already seen the cult of Venus - in Greece, primarily artistic - followed by the poets and artists of the Renaissance. Where these things could flourish, impressionism can as well.

I have made a special decoration, the Poet's garden, for the room you will have (there is a first draft of it among the sketches in Bernard's possession - it was later simplified). The ordinary public garden contains plants and shrubs that conjure up landscapes in which one can readily imagine Botticelli, Giotto, Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio. I have tried to distil in the decoration the essence of what constitutes the immutable character of this country.

And I set out to paint that garden in such a way that one is put in mind of the old poet from these parts (or rather from Avignon), Petrarch, and of the new poet from these parts - Paul Gauguin - .

However clumsy this attempt may be, it may show you perhaps that I have been thinking of you with very great emotion as I prepared your studio.

Let's be of good heart about the success of our venture, and please keep thinking of this as your home, for I feel very sure that all this will last for a very long time.

A warm handshake, and believe me

Ever yours, Vincent

I am only afraid that you will think Brittany more beautiful, indeed, that you will find nothing more beautiful here than Daumier, the figures here are often pure Daumier. It shouldn't take you long to discover that antiquity and the renaissance lie dormant under all this modernity. Well, you are free to revive them.

Bernard tells me that he, Morel, Laval and somebody else will be making exchanges with me. In principle I am very much in favour of the system of exchanges between artists because I have seen the important part it played in the life of the Japanese painters. Accordingly, one of these days I shall be sending you what studies I have that are dry and that I can spare, so that you may have first pick. But I shall make no exchanges at all with you if it means that on your side it costs you something as important as your portrait, which is sure to be too beautiful. Truly, I wouldn't dare, because my brother would gladly buy it from you for a whole month's money.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 6 October 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

This time you deserve higher praise for the little sketch of the two Breton women in your letter than for the other six, because the little one has great style. I myself am behindhand with the sketches, for during the present superbly fine days I have been completely absorbed in square size 30 canvases which exhaust me considerably, and which I shall use to decorate the house. You will have received my letter in which I explained my serious reasons for advising you to try to persuade your father, if he pays your fare to Arles, to give you a little more latitude in the matter of finances.

I believe you will pay him back with your work, and in this way you would be in Gauguin's company longer; and then, when you leave to do your military service, you would set out on a fine artistic campaign. If your father had a son who sought and found unrefined gold in the pebbles and on the sidewalks, he would certainly not despise that talent. Now in my opinion your talent is absolutely equivalent to that.

Though your father might regret that it is not quite new and shining gold, coined into louis d'or, yet he would decide to make a collection of these finds, and would not part with them except for a reasonable price.

He ought to do the same thing with your pictures and drawings, which are, commercially speaking, as rare and valuable as precious stones and rare metals. And that is absolutely true.

Painting a picture is as difficult as finding a large or a small diamond. Now, however, whereas everybody recognizes the value of a louis d'or or a pure pearl, those who cherish pictures and believe in them are unfortunately rare. But they exist nonetheless.

In any ease one cannot do better than wait without losing patience, even if one should have to wait a very long time.

As for you, just think over what I told you about the cost of living here, and whether you would really like to come to Arles to join Gauguin and me. Tell your father emphatically that with a little more money you would paint much better pictures.

The idea of turning the painters into a sort of freemasonry does not please me enormously. I profoundly despise regulations, institutions, etc.; in short, what I am looking for is different from dogmas, which, far from settling things, only give rise to endless disputes. It is all a sign of decadence. Since a union of painters does not exist yet - except as a vague but very comprehensive design - well let's wait quietly and see what will happen that must happen.

It will be a finer thing if all this crystallizes naturally; the more one talks about it the less it will happen. If you want to help it onward, you will only have to go on working with Gauguin and me. This is in progress, so don't let's talk about it. If it is to come about, it will happen without prolix discussions but as the result of calm, well-thought-out actions.

As for exchanges, it is just because I observe that in the [i.e. your and Gauguin's] letters such frequent mention is made of Laval, Moret and the other young man that I am anxious to make their acquaintance. But I don't have five dry studies; I shall have to add at least two attempts at pictures a little more serious: a self-portrait and a landscape during the fury of an evil-minded mistral.

Moreover I should have a study of a little garden with multicolored flowers, a study of grey and dusty thistles, and finally a still life of a peasant's old boots, last of all a little landscape of nothing at all, in which there is only a little expanse. If these studies are not to their liking, if one or the other would rather not have them, then the only thing to do is to keep those for which they want to make an exchange, and to send back the others together with the exchanges. There is no hurry, and when making exchanges it is better for each to try to give something good.

If, when it is exposed tomorrow to the sun, it gets sufficiently dry to be rolled up, I shall add a landscape of “Men Unloading Sand,” also a project for and an attempt at a picture, in which there is a more mature purposefulness.

I cannot send a replica of the “Night Café” yet because it has not even been begun, but I shall be delighted to do one for you.

Once more, it is preferable for each of us to try to exchange good things, rather than do them in too great a hurry.

The artistic gentleman in the letter, who looks like me - is it me or somebody else? - as far as the face is concerned it would really seem to be me, but in the first place I am always smoking a pipe, and then I have always had an unutterable horror of sitting like that on precipitous cliffs verging on the sea, as I suffer from vertigo. So if that is meant to be my portrait, I protest against the aforementioned improbabilities.

1 am terribly absorbed in decorating my house; I dare believe it will be rather to your taste, although it is certainly very different from what you do. But at the

time, you spoke to me about pictures, one representing flowers, another trees, another fields. Well, I myself have the “Poet's Garden” (2 canvases; among the sketches you have there is the first conception of it, done after a smaller study that is already at my brother's). Then the “Starry Night,” further the “Vineyard,” then the “`Furrows,” then the view of the house, which might be called “The Street.” So that there is a certain unintentional consecutiveness.

Well, I am very curious to see the studies of Pont-Aven. But, as for you, please give me something a little elaborate. Anyhow, it is sure to be all right, because I like your talent so much that I greatly want to make a little collection of your works, bit by bit.

For a long time I have thought it touching that the Japanese artists used to exchange works among themselves very often. It certainly proves that they liked and upheld each other, and that there reigned a certain harmony among them; and that they were really living in some sort of fraternal community, quite naturally, and not in intrigues. The more we are like them in this respect, the better it will be for us. It also appears that the Japanese earned very little money, and lived like simple workmen. I have the reproduction (published by Bing), “A Single Blade of Grass.” What an example of conscientiousness! You will see it someday. A hearty handshake.

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, 7 October 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

The package you and Gauguin sent arrived almost simultaneously with the forwarding of my studies. I was very much amused; it warmed my heart greatly to see those two faces again. As for your portrait, you know, I like it very much. As a matter of fact I like everything you do very much, as you know, and possibly there has not been anybody before me who liked what you do as much as I.

I strongly urge you to study portrait painting, do as many portraits as you can and don't flag. We must win the public over later on by means of the portrait; in my opinion it is the thing of the future. But don't let's lose our way in hypotheses now.

And now that I have started thanking you, I thank you furthermore for the batch of sketches entitled “At the Brothel.” Bravo! It seems to me that the woman washing herself and the one saying, “There is none other like me when it comes to exhausting a man,” are the best; the others are grimacing too much, and above all they are done too vaguely, they are too little living flesh, not built up sufficiently. But no matter, these other ones too are something quite new and interesting. At the brothel! Yes, that's what one ought to do, and I assure you that I for one am almost jealous of the damned fine opportunity you will have of going there in your uniform, - which these good little women dote on.

The poem at the end is really beautiful; it stands more firmly on its own feet than certain figures. What you want to express and what you say you believe, you say well and sonorously.

Let me know when you will be in Paris. The fact is that I have already written you a thousand times that my night café isn't a brothel; it is a café where night prowlers cease to be night prowlers, because they flop down at a table and spend the whole night thus without prowling at all. It may happen that a whore brings her fellow along.

But going in one evening I came upon a little group, a pimp and his whore making up after a fight. The woman pretended to be indifferent and haughty, the man was wheedling. I got busy painting it for you from memory on a little canvas, size 4 or 6. So if you are leaving soon, I will send it to you in Paris; if you are staying on, let me know; it was not dry enough to be included in the package. I won't sign this study, for I never work from memory. There is some colour in it which will please you, but once again, I have painted a study for you which I should have preferred not to paint.

I have mercilessly destroyed one important canvas - a “Christ with the Angel in Gethsemane” - and another one representing the “Poet against a Starry Sky” - in spite of the fact that the colour was right - because the form had not been studied beforehand from the model, which is necessary in such cases. As for the study I am sending you in exchange, if you do not like it, you will only have to look at it a little longer.

I had a devil of a job doing it during a pestering mistral (just like the study in red and green). And look, although it is not painted as fluently as the “Old Mill,” it is more delicate and intimate. You will see that all this isn't in the least impressionistic; dear me, all the worse then. I am doing what I am doing, surrendering myself to nature, without thinking of this or that. Of course, if you should prefer another study in this batch to the “Men Unloading Sand,” you can take it and erase the dedication, if someone else will have it. But I think you will like this one, once you have looked at it a bit longer.

If Laval, Moret and the other one want to exchange with me, splendid! But for my part I should be particularly delighted if they would paint their portraits for me.

You know, Bernard, I feel sure that if I wanted to do studies of brothels, it would cost me more money than I have; I am no longer young and my body is not attractive enough to women to get them to pose for me free for nothing.

And I cannot work without a model. I won't say that I don't turn my back on nature ruthlessly in order to turn a study into a picture, arranging the colours, enlarging and simplifying; but in the matter of form I am too afraid of departing from the possible and the true.

I don't mean I won't do it after another ten years of painting studies, but, to tell the honest truth, my attention is so fixed on what is possible and really exists that I hardly have the desire or the courage to strive for the ideal as it might result from my abstract studies.

Others may have more lucidity than I do in the matter of abstract studies, and it is certainly possible that you are one of their number, Gauguin too ... and perhaps I myself when I am old.

But in the meantime I am getting well acquainted with nature. I exaggerate, sometimes I make changes in a motif; but for all that, I do not invent the whole picture; on the contrary, I find it all ready in nature, only it must be disentangled.

You will probably think these studies ugly. I don't know. In any case neither you, nor I, nor anybody else should make an exchange unwillingly. My brother writes me that Anquetin is back in Paris, I should like to know what he has done. When you see him, remember me most kindly to him.

My house will seem to me more lived-in now that I am going to see the portraits in it. How delighted I should be to see you yourself in it this winter! It is true that the journey is rather expensive. But all the same, can't one risk these expenses and recoup oneself by means of one's work? In winter, in the North, work is so difficult! Here too perhaps - I have hardly had any experience of it yet, and so I must wait and see; but it is a damned useful thing to see the South - where so much more of life is spent in the open air - in order to understand the Japanese better.

And then a certain quality of loftiness and nobility which can be found in some of the spots here will be very profitable to you.

The sun in the “Red Sunset” should be imagined higher up, outside the picture, let's say on a level with the frame. In this way, an hour or an hour and a half before sunset, the things on earth still keep their colour. Later on the blue and violet make them look blacker, as soon as the sun sends its rays more horizontally. Thanks again for your package, which has warmed my heart greatly, and a cordial handshake in thought. Write me the date of your departure, so that I shall know when you will be in Paris; your Paris address is still 5 Avenue Beaulieu, isn't it?

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 7 October 1888

My dear Theo,
Many thanks for your letter. How glad I am for Gauguin; I shall not try to find words to tell you - let's be of good heart.

I have just received the portrait of Gauguin by himself and the portrait of Bernard by Bernard and in the background of the portrait of Gauguin there is Bernard's on the wall, and vice versa.

The Gauguin is of course remarkable, but I very much like Bernard's picture. It is just the inner vision of a painter, a few abrupt tones, a few dark lines, but it has the distinction of a real, real Manet.

The Gauguin is more studied, carried further. That, along with what he says in his letter, gave me absolutely the impression of its representing a prisoner. Not a shadow of gaiety. Absolutely nothing of the flesh, but one can confidently put that down to his determination to make a melancholy effect, the flesh in the shadows has gone a dismal blue.

So now at last I have a chance to compare my painting with what the comrades are doing. My portrait, which I am sending to Gauguin in exchange, holds its own, I am sure of that. I have written to Gauguin in reply to his letter that if I might be allowed to stress my own personality in a portrait, I had done so in trying to convey in my portrait not only myself but an impressionist in general, had conceived it as the portrait of a bonze, a simple worshiper of the eternal Buddha.

And when I put Gauguin's conception and my own side by side, mine is as grave, but less despairing. What Gauguin's portrait says to me before all things is that he must not go on like this, he must become again the richer Gauguin of the “Negresses.”

I am very glad to have these two portraits, for they finally represent the comrades at this stage; they will not remain like that, they will come back to a more serene life.

And I see clearly that the duty laid upon me is to do everything I can to lessen our poverty.

No good comes the way in this painter's job. I feel that he is more Millet than I, but I am more Diaz then he, and like Diaz I am going to try to please the public, so that a few pennies may come into our community. I have spent more than they, but I do not care a bit now that I see their painting — they have worked in too much poverty to succeed.

Mind you, I have better and more saleable stuff than what I have sent you, and I feel that I can go on doing it. I have confidence in it at last. I know that it will do some people's hearts good to find poetic subjects again, “The Starry Sky,” “The Vines in Leaf,” “The Furrows,” the “Poet's Garden.”

So then I believe that it is your duty and mine to demand comparative wealth just because we have very great artists to keep alive. But at the moment you are as fortunate, or at least fortunate in the same way, as Sensier if you have Gauguin and I hope he will be with us heart and soul. There is no hurry, but in any case I think that he will like the house so much as a studio that he will agree to being its head. Give us half a year and see what that will mean.

Bernard has again sent me a collection of ten drawings with a daring poem - the whole is called At the Brothel.

You will soon see these things, but I shall send you the portraits when I have had them to look at for some time.

I hope you will write soon, I am very hard up because of the stretchers and frames that I ordered.

What you told me of Freret gave me pleasure, but I venture to think that I shall do things which will please him better, and you too.

Yesterday I painted a sunset.

Gauguin looks ill and tormented in his portrait!! You wait, that will not last, and it will be very interesting to compare this portrait with the one he will do of himself in six months' time.

Someday you will also see my self-portrait, which I am sending to Gauguin, because he will keep it, I hope.

It is all ashen gray against pale veronese (no yellow). The clothes are this brown coat with a blue border, but I have exaggerated the brown into purple, and the width of the blue borders.

The head is modeled in light colours painted in a thick impasto against the light background with hardly any shadows. Only I have made the eyes *slightly* slanting like the Japanese.

Write me soon and the best of luck. How happy old Gauguin will be.

A good handshake, and thank Freret for the pleasure he has given me. Good-by for now.

Ever yours, Vincent.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 8 October 1888

Arles
8 October 1888 (unfinished - not sent)
My dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, but I have had a very thin time of it these days, as my money ran out on Thursday, so it was a damnably long time till Monday noon. These four days I have lived mainly on 23 cups of coffee, with bread which I still have to pay for. It's not your fault, it's mine if it's anyone's. Because I was wild to see my pictures in frames, and I had ordered too many for my budget, seeing that the month's rent and the charwoman also had to be paid. And even today is going to drain me dry, because I must also buy some canvas and prepare it myself, as Tasset's has not yet come. Would you ask him as soon as possible if he has sent it off, 10 meters or at least 5 of ordinary canvas at 2.50 fr.

But I should not mind, my dear boy, if I did not feel that you yourself must suffer from the pressure that this work puts on us now. But I venture to think that if you saw the studies, you would say I was right to work at white heat as long as it was fine. It wasn't so the last few days, there is a merciless mistral furiously sweeping along the dead leaves. But between now and the winter there will be another spell of magnificent weather and magnificent effects, and then the thing will be to make another headlong spurt. I am so much taken up with the work that I cannot come to a dead stop. Don't worry, the bad weather will make me stop only too soon, like today, yesterday and the day before yesterday too.

Do your utmost to persuade Thomas. He is bound to do something. Do you know what I have left today for the week, and that after four days of strict fasting? Just 6 francs. It is Monday, the very day I received your letter. I ate something at noon, but already this evening I shall have to sup on a crust of bread. And the money is spent on nothing but the house, or else the pictures.

This is great news about Bague.

If these good gentlemen can make use of the Mauves as a set-off for Corot, it may come off and it may be a true and even a just thing. Because really, the Mauves, Mesdags or Marises have a heavy effect beside Corot. It is none the less true that they have bought a lot of it, even Mauve's last watercolours. It was they who took them to be framed at that place where we saw them, the man who made the frames for Reid's Monticellis. I am almost sure that Bague will like my big studies, the “Starry Sky,” “Furrows,” etc., he will like some in the last batch much less. So far Bague is in sympathy with me because he likes painting to be rich and in full impasto. I have heard him on it often enough in the past. I do not count at all on their buying, only it would do no harm to tell Bague that I have some big studies here - new ones - of autumn effects. And keep him going with that. I should say you might show him and Thomas the white orchard, “The Harvest” (size 30 canvas), but not much else. We must not push the studies, which are more trouble to do but are less pleasing to the eye than the pictures, which are the result and fruit of them, and which one paints as in a dream, without so much agony.

I have had walnut frames made for the two pictures of “The Poet's Garden,” and they have a very good effect. And now I am looking for a frame in yellowish chestnut. It is as stiff and plain as the rim of a slate, but the tone of the wood does well. Pine also goes well with the “Furrows” and the “Vineyard.”

If you were very kind and would send me a louis by return mail, I could get through the week and be spared the “pinching” which accompanied the beginning of this month. Without it I should get too run down, and I should not have all my strength for the fine days which I hope we shall have at the end of the week after the mistral.

Herewith another letter that I wrote about Gauguin's portrait during the last few days. I am sending it to you because I have no time to copy it out, but the chief thing is that I underline this, That I do not like these atrocious hardships of “the craft,” except in so far as they show us the way. Our way is neither to endure them ourselves nor to make others endure them, but the opposite.

I do not think I exaggerate about Gauguin's portrait, nor about Gauguin himself.

He must eat and go for walks with me in lovely surroundings, pick up a nice girl now and then, see the house as it is and as we shall make it, and altogether enjoy himself.

He has lived cheaply, yes, but he has got so ill by doing it that he can see no difference between a gay colour and a dismal one.

Well, that gets one nowhere.

It is high time that he came, no fear that he will recover very soon. Meantime forgive me too if I exceed my allowance; I shall work all the more. I promise you. But I have an absolute horror of this melancholy à la Méryon.

You will see the two portraits of Gauguin and Bernard someday, and compare them with the “Negresses.” And you will see that he absolutely must cheer up.

Or else . . .

But none of that “or else,” we'll take it for granted that he is going to cheer up.

But it is indeed high time.

I write in haste, I am working on a portrait.

That is to say, I am doing a portrait of Mother for myself. I cannot stand the colourless photograph, and I am trying to do one in a harmony of colour, as I see her in my memory.

A good handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Do not delay, if it does not leave you too short, do not delay sending me the *louis* and the canvas.

I have been so hard up since *Thursday* that from Thursday to *Monday* I only had two meals; apart from those I had only bread and coffee and even that I had to drink on credit, and had to pay for today. So if you can, do not delay a minute.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 8 October 1888

Arles, 8 October 1888 (includes last part of 546)
My dear Theo,

My whole mind, like yours, is set on Gauguin now. And like you, I hope that he will come right away.

This is great about Bague!

Not that it amazes me, but I am pleased for Bague, for I always thought him the *penitent* thief.

So if you happen to see him - and if you don't, then go on purpose - let him know that I have a “Starry Night,” the “Furrows,” the “Poet's Garden,” the “Vineyard.”

In short, romantic landscapes.

Do not say too much about the studies, which certainly are more trouble to do, but are less saleable. If you had sent me 200 fr. I should have done the same thing with the sea at Stes-Maries.

We are now in the midst of a merciless mistral, it is very bad for the work. But later, before the real winter, we shall have more fine weather, and in any case I hope to add other things to the series I am working on.

Do you know what I have left today out of the money you sent this very day? Well, I have 6 francs.

I asked you to send it to me on Friday, and I only received your letter *four* days later, on Monday noon.

It is mostly the fault of the frames, which I have already ordered, and which I need very badly. I can only finish in a frame. And besides, we may make use of them in Marseilles.

I have three kinds of wood, walnut, chestnut and pine, for the frames.

And if you see him, do give Bague my kind regards, and tell him that I recommend him my “Vineyard” and my “Starry Night.” And the same to Tripp. Didn't they buy a lot from Mauve, didn't they even buy Mauve's last big water colours at a good price? I do not know, it is so long since I saw anything of them. But in the past I never quarreled with either Tripp or Bague.

Only, while not saying too much about the first two batches, tell Bague that I am very pleased he has bought that study, and that I shall be doing studies as long as the autumn is propitious, and that I want him to come and see them when we send them with some Gauguins.

As for Thomas, I think it would be the right thing to go and see him.

I have just written that, all told, I have 6 francs left.

Is that enough for a week? No.

So I really beg you to send me a louis, and that by return mail, please. That will give me 16 francs for the week, and then I shall manage to get through. *But do not delay*. Besides, I must be ready to work as soon as the fine weather appears. We have an absolutely merciless mistral, but I must hold myself in readiness, the work is done in short intervals. So that everything must be prepared and ready for the attack.

Tasset has not sent any canvas. It is very, very urgent, do please order 10 or at any rate 5 meters from him at once.

It is very urgent, because already I have bought some canvas here so as to be ready for tomorrow or the day after, according to what the weather will be. The thing is that you must take advantage of the intervals in the mistral and be ready beforehand.

My dear Theo, a thousand thanks for the paints and your letter of today.

The work holds me in its grip, and I am sure I shall not lose by it if I can go on like this, the big canvases are all good.

But they are exhausting too.

Herewith yesterday's letter which I am sending you, such as it is. From it you will see what I think of Gauguin's portrait. Too dark, too sad.

I do not say that I do not like it as it is, but he will change, and he must come. Yes, indeed, they spend less than I, yes - but - if I was with two others as he is - if he spent a little more it would be better. Once more, one must not do flesh with Prussian blue. Because then it ceases to be flesh; it becomes wood. And there is nothing so urgent for Gauguin, nothing better for him to do, than to join me. However, I venture to think that with regard to colouring, the other Breton pictures will be better than the portrait he has sent me, done, after all, in haste. And I am far from judging studies such as that. However, you will see for yourself.

Say, if you can, don't let me be so hard up all the week. If you can, send me another louis. I don't quite know how to manage without it.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 9 October 1888

My dear Theo,

Yesterday I sent you a wire asking you for another 20 francs, I shall have nothing but that for my food all the week, but I have my frames at last and some stretchers.

Only don't let the next letter come later than Sunday, for it is a close, very close siege these days. But we will hold out, and I feel quite calm amid all the commotions we are passing through.

At the very moment I was writing these words, I received notice of the arrival of Tasset's canvas. Great!

The walnut frames go well with the studies. And I think that the next batch will be decisive, and that as for selling, we are getting very hot.

Let's be sensible, and not forget for a minute that not only for our own sake but also for the success of this studio, we must get back the money spent during the unproductive years. We shall if we keep calm; besides, it is our due and we have suffered enough for it.

But I beg you to try to make it up with the Bagues. What I mean is, we are getting too old to fight against the existing businesses, and the best policy will probably be to go on quietly accepting the realities of today. It costs a great deal to found another business, and to use the existing ones cost nothing at all. So then, if you see Bague, explain to him that coming to a country quite new to me, I began to do studies right and left, and sent you two batches of them, but that if there are any pictures among them, there are only two or three at the most, such as the “White Orchard” and the “Harvest” with a ruin in the background.

At the moment, however, I am able to concentrate. And as for the new things - ah, these are costing us dear, and we must not be too easy-going in selling them, they must bring what they are worth.

Let's hope that we shall not be too much on the rocks. With patience it won't be too difficult for us to do as Mauve and Mesdag did, who were able to wait and force the price up a little, and still got sold. We are sparing nothing to get a certain richness in colour. And I believe that the thought of gaining something as much for the comrades as for ourselves will give us confidence. And even if we have no fixed plan in business, everything we do will be based on our deep conviction of the injustice which the artists we know are now suffering under, and on the desire to change all this as much as we can. With that conviction we can work on calmly and with a will, and after all we have nothing to fear from anyone.

I am working on a portrait of Mother, because the black-and-white photograph annoys me so. Ah, what portraits could be made from nature with photography and painting! I always hope that we are still to have a great revolution in portraiture.

I am writing home for Father's portrait also. I do not want to have black photographs, but I do want to have a portrait. That of Mother, a size 8 canvas, will be ashen grey, against a green background, the dress *carmine*.

I do not know if it will be like her, but anyhow I want to give the impression of a blonde colouring. You will see it one day, and if you like, I will make one for you too. It will again be in very thick impasto.

Well, my dear Theo, about your next letter, let me have it on Sunday. It will be all right, I venture to think, for we are getting very near selling and the stuff I am getting ready now will put us in the way of making some show when the exhibition is on. It will be a year of hard work, but we shall have good times afterward, and even in the meantime I am doing a brothel study from memory for Bernard. Did you see that drawing of mine which I put in with Bernard's drawings, representing the house? You can get some idea of the colour. I have a size 30 canvas after that drawing.

With a handshake, and many thanks for the canvas; now for the attack, once again. *I stick to this*, that when these decorations that I am working on are finished, they ought to be worth ten thousand; whether it is easy for me to do or not, that is my fixed and steady aim; we have spent money and we must get it back.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 10 October 1888

My dear Theo,

Thinking and thinking these days how all these expenses of painting are weighing on you, you cannot imagine how disquieted I am. When things happen to us like what you told me in your last letter about Bague, we must be getting very near to selling.

Or rather we ought to be getting near to finding some assistance, either from Thomas or some other of the half dealer, half collector type. C. M., without helping us in any other way, could buy one study from us once again.

I do not know if you have ever read Les Frères Zemganno by the de Goncourt brothers, which perhaps roughly sketches their life story. If you know it, you will know that I am more afraid than I can say lest the effort to get money exhaust you too much.

If I were not so horribly and continually tormented by this uneasiness, I should say that we were getting on, because my work will get better, and my health is much better than in Paris.

I see more and more that my work goes infinitely better when I am properly fed, and the paints are there, and the studio and all that.

But have I set my heart on my work being a success? A thousand times *no*. I wish I could manage to make you really understand that when you give money to artists, you are yourself doing an artist's work, and that I only want my pictures to be of such a quality that you will not be too dissatisfied with *your* work. And that is not all, I should also like you to feel that you are making a profit on the money you invest, and that by doing so, we shall achieve a more complete independence than we should gain in the art trade itself.

And what will be done later to reform trade may be just this, that the dealer will join hands with the artist, the one for what one may call the housekeeping side, to provide the studio, food, paint, etc., the other to create. Alas! We have not got to that with the old trade, which will always follow the old routine, and is no good to anyone alive, nor any profit to the dead either.

But there, we need not stew about it, because it is not our duty to alter what exists, and to beat our heads against a stone wall.

Anyway, we must get our place in the sun without upsetting anyone. And I keep thinking that you haven't the place in the sun that you ought to have, because the Paris work at Goupil's is too exhausting. Then, when I think of that, I get into a mercenary frenzy. Then I want to earn money so that you will be freer to go where you like and do what you like. I feel that we are getting near to selling or finding help, so that we shall be given a chance to breathe.

There I go, perhaps, thinking that it is quite near, and it may still be far off, and then I feel this dread of spending too much coming over me. However, the pictures come off better if one looks after oneself and keeps one's health.

But as for you and your work, and in the rest of your life as well, you must not have too many anxieties. How are those sciatica pains, have they stopped? In any case, you will help me more by staying well and living well than by being too straitened on my account, even if the consignment of paints has to suffer.

I think the time will come when my work will be in demand, very good, but it still may be far off, and meanwhile do not pinch yourself. Because business, as well as painting, will come of itself and in a dream, as it were, quicker and better if you are taking care of yourself than if you are stinting. And at our age, surely, we ought to have a certain calm, a certain wisdom in managing our affairs. I am afraid now of poverty, bad health and all that, and hope that you share these feelings.

So I almost feel remorse at having bought that piece of furniture today, although it is good, because I have had to ask you to send me money sooner than I should have otherwise.

Get this quite clear, if you are ill or if you have too many difficulties or worries, nothing will go well. And if you are well, business will end by coming to you of itself, and ideas about your business will come to you infinitely more abundantly if you are eating well than if you are not eating enough.

So say stop if I am going too fast. If not, of course so much the better, because I also can certainly work much better when I am comfortable than when I am too hard up. But don't go and think that I care more for my work than for our well-being, or at least than for our peace of mind above all. Gauguin will feel the same thing someday and he will get all right again.

Perhaps the time will really come for him when he will want to be - and will be able to become again - what he really is - the father of a family.

I am very, very curious to know what he has done in Brittany. Bernard wrote praising it greatly. But it is so difficult to paint richly in cold and poverty, and perhaps his real home will prove to be the warmer, happier South after all.

If you saw the vines! There are bunches that actually weigh a *kilogram*. The grapes are magnificent this year because of the fine autumn days that came at the end of a summer that had left a lot to be desired.

I am sorry I spent money on that chest of drawers, but perhaps it will save us buying a more expensive one; the cheapest would have been 35 francs. And when Gauguin comes, he must have something to put his linen in, and altogether his room will be more complete with it.

If ever for a moment we are rather flush, I shall take this one for myself, and get him the one for 35 Frs. You can *always* find a bargain at that price, but *not* always at the price I paid for this one.

I have been thinking that if you've got some studies of mine that are beginning to crowd your place a bit and get in your way, you could take them off the stretchers and send them down here where there's room enough to store them. I am thinking of some of last year's stuff, or for that matter anything that is inconveniencing you.

Paris will be very beautiful in autumn all the same. The town here is *nothing*, at night everything is *black*. I think that plenty of gas, which is after all yellow and orange, heightens the blue, because at night the sky here looks to me - and it's very odd - *blacker* than in Paris. And if I ever see Paris again, I shall try to paint some of the effects of gaslight on the boulevard.

Ah, but in Marseilles it will be the opposite, I imagine that it must be more beautiful than Paris, the Cannebière.

I so often think of Monticelli, and when my mind dwells on the stories going around about his death, it seems to me that not only must you exclude the idea of his dying a drunkard in the sense of being besotted by drink, but you must also realise that here as a matter of course one spends one's life in the open air and in cafés far more than in the North. My friend the postman, for instance, lives a great deal in cafés, and is certainly more or less of a drinker, and has been so all his life. But he is so much the reverse of a sot, his exaltation is so natural, so intelligent, and he argues with such sweep, in the style of Garibaldi, that I gladly reduce the legend of Monticelli the drunkard on absinthe to exactly the same proportions as my postman's.

My paper is full, write me as soon as you can. With a handshake and good luck,

Ever yours, Vincent

Someday perhaps I shall know some details of those last days of Monticelli.

I notice that this chest has panels exactly like those on which Monticelli painted.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 10 October 1888

My dear Theo,

A letter from Gauguin, paying me heaps of undeserved compliments, and adding that he will not be coming till the end of the month.

And that he has been ill, and dreads the journey. What can I do about it…but after all, when you come to think of it, is it such a devastating journey when the worst lung cases undertake it?

When he comes, he will be welcome. If he does not come, well, it's his own lookout; but isn't it or oughtn't it to be clear that he is coming here for the very purpose of getting better?

And he asserts that he has to stay where he is to recover! The absurdity of it, really.

Thanks for your postal order for 20 francs. I put 35 francs for the dressing table and chest of drawers on my list of necessary purchases. Well now, I have just bought one at 14 francs, and paid for it, of course.

Send me an order for those 14 francs, I beg you.

I felt less hesitant about getting this piece of furniture because I want to be ready in case Gauguin should come sooner.

I enclose a copy of my answer to his rather too complimentary letter. Since he is not coming at once, *I want all the more to try to have everything in good order, and in readiness for him when he does come*. I have done a new size 30 canvas, and I expect to begin a new one this evening, *when the gas is lit*.

The one I have just done is another garden.

These days I always have the feeling that I am spending money, but every day too it astonishes me to find how I get it back from the house. Truly, it does you good to come home, and it gives you new ideas for work. Gauguin writes very nicely, but all the same he does not say why he is not coming at once. He says - “because he is ill,” but wasn't he coming here to recover? I thought that was precisely what we had in mind.

Anyway - *let them do just as they please*.

Ever yours, Vincent

[Reply to Gauguin's letter]

My dear Gauguin,

Thanks for your letter - far too flattering to me. So you are not coming till the end of the month.

Very good - since you really think that you will get better more quickly in Brittany than here.

I don't insist on it, only if your recovery is not very speedy in Brittany, remember that *we* claim to be able to cure you more quickly here than there. Come, everything is always for the best in this best of worlds, in which we have - according to good old Pangloss anyhow - the ineffable happiness of living. In this case I have no doubt at all that everything will be for the best. But is it absolutely true that the journey to Arles is as exhausting as you say? Nonsense, since the worst lung cases make it. You well know that the P. L. M. exists for that.

Or are you more seriously ill than you say? I am afraid so, and if you can, either reassure me on this point, or else write definitely that you are ill and in a bad way. But you write about business, and talk about lithographs. This is what I think:

For you, me, Bernard and Laval to make lithographs at night is *all right* - I am sure of that, but I am *not sure* about their periodical publication so long as I am not better off. I have more than enough worry with the painting. There is always something to spend money on in lithography *even if you do not buy* the stone. That would not cost so very much - I do not say that - but then for publishing, however modestly, the four of us would be in for at least 50 francs *each*. *And more besides*…

Contradict me if you like, I don't insist on it, but still I say what I say. I have already had some experience with one attempt, but the “besides” that I add means that it would not last, and above all would never interest the public. And it will go on costing us money.

Even if it did cost us money, I am actually all for *making* the lithographs in question. But as for *publication*, on the other hand, even *free of cost* - never.

If it is at our expense and for our own pleasure and use, then I tell you again, I am for it. If you are thinking of something else, I am not for it; do not tell me that one costs as little as the other if it's a question of publishing.

Yours sincerely, Vincent

And do come as soon as you possibly can!

P.S. to Gauguin. If you are not ill, do please come at once. If you are too ill, a wire and a letter, please.

P.S. to Theo. Perhaps you will think the P.S. to Gauguin too curt, but let him say whether or not he is ill, and anyhow he will recover better here. Have you received my canvases???

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 13 October 1888

My dear Theo,

I did not quite dare to hope for your new money order for 50 francs so soon, and I thank you very much for it.

I have a lot of expenses, and it worries me a good deal sometimes when I realize more and more that painting is a profession carried on most likely by exceedingly poor men, and it costs so much money.

But the autumn still continues to be so beautiful! It's a queer place, this native land of Tartarin's! Yes, I am content with my lot, it isn't a superb, sublime country, this; it is only a Daumier come to life.

Have you reread the Tartarins yet? Be sure not to forget. Do you remember that wonderful page in Tartarin, the complaint of the old Tarascon diligence? Well, I have just painted that red and green vehicle in the courtyard of the inn. You will see it.

[A sketch of the Tarascon Diligence appears here.]

This hasty sketch gives you the composition, a simple foreground of grey sand, background very simple too, pink and yellow walls, with windows with green shutters, and a corner of blue sky. The two carriages very colourful, green and red, the wheels yellow, black, blue and orange. Again a size 30 canvas. The carriages are painted like a Monticelli, thickly laid paint. You used to have a very fine Claude Monet showing four coloured boats on a beach. Well, here they are carriages, but the composition is in the same style.

[A sketch of “Poet's Garden III” appears here.]

Now imagine an immense greenish-blue pine, spreading its branches horizontally over a bright green lawn, and gravel splashed with light and shade. This very simple patch of garden is brightened by beds of geraniums, lead orange in the background under the black branches. Two figures of lovers in the shade of the great tree; size 30 canvas.

Then two other size 30 canvases, the Trinquetaille bridge and another bridge, along the road passing under the railway.

[Two sketches of “The Railway Bridge” and “The Trinquetaille Bridge” appear here.]

This canvas is a little like a Bosboom in colour.

The Trinquetaille bridge with all these steps is a canvas done on a grey morning, the stones, the asphalt, the pavements are grey; the sky, pale blue, the figures, coloured; and there is a sickly tree with yellow foliage. Two canvases in gray and blended tones, and two highly coloured ones.

Forgive these very bad sketches, I am half dead with painting that Tarascon diligence, and I see that I am not in the right mood for drawing.

I am just going to have dinner and I'll write you again this evening.

But these decorations are getting on a bit, and I think that they will broaden my way of seeing and doing things.

There will be a thousand things to criticize in it, but that's all right provided I can manage to get some verve into it.

But here's to the country of good old Tartarin, I am enjoying myself in it more and more, and it is going to be our second fatherland. Not that I forget Holland, the very contrasts make one think of it many a time. I will go on with this letter directly.

I am going on with it now. I so much wish I could show you the work that I am doing.

I am really so tired that I can see my writing isn't much.

I'll write better another time, because the idea of this decoration is beginning to take shape.

I wrote Gauguin again the day before yesterday to say once again that he would probably recover more quickly here.

And he will do such beautiful things here.

He will need time to recover, I tell you. I assure you, I believe that if ideas for my work come swarming over me now, and more clearly too, eating decent cooked food has a lot to do with it, and that is what everyone who paints ought to have.

What a lot of things there are that ought to be changed. Isn't it true that all painters ought to live like workmen? A carpenter or a blacksmith is accustomed to producing infinitely more than they do. And in painting too we should have large studios where each man would work with greater regularity.

I am really falling asleep and I can't see any more, my eyes are so tired.

Good-by for the present, because I still have a lot to say, and I must make you some better sketches. I shall probably make them tomorrow.

Thank you again very much for your money order. A good handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

That's 5 canvases I have in progress this week, that brings the number of these size 30 canvases for the decoration to 15, I think.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 14 October 1888

My dear Theo,

A letter from Gauguin telling me that he has sent you some pictures and studies. I'd be very glad if you could find time to write me some details of what they are. With his letter was one from Bernard, saying that they had received the canvases I sent, and that they are going to keep all seven. Bernard will send me another study in exchange, and the three others, Moret, Laval, and a young man will also send me portraits, I hope. Gauguin has my portrait and Bernard says he would like to have one like it, though he already has one of me, which I exchanged with him some time ago for the portrait of his grandmother.

And I am pleased to hear that they did not dislike what I have done in figure painting.

I have been and still am nearly half-dead from the past week's work. I cannot do any more yet, and besides, there is a very violent mistral that raises clouds of dust which whiten the trees on the plain from top to bottom. So I am forced to be quiet. I have just slept sixteen hours at a stretch, and it has restored me considerably.

And tomorrow I shall have recovered from this queer turn.

But I have done a good week's work, truly, with five canvases. If that somewhat takes it out of one, well, it's natural. If I had worked more quietly, you can easily see that the mistral would have caught me again. If it is fine here you must take advantage of it, otherwise you would never do anything.

Say, what is Seurat doing? If you see him, tell him from me that I am working on a scheme of decoration which has now got to 15 square size 30 canvases, and which will take at least 15 others to make a whole, and that in this work on a larger scale, it is often the memory of his personality and of the visit we made to his studio to see his beautiful great canvases that encourages me in this task.

I wish we had the self-portrait of Seurat. I told Gauguin that if I urged him to make an exchange of portraits it was because I thought that Bernard and he were sure to have made several studies of each other already. And since that was not so and he had done the portrait expressly for me, I did not want it as an exchange, as I thought it was too important for that. He wrote to say that he was determined I should have it in exchange, his letter is again very complimentary; as I don't deserve it, we will say no more.

I am sending you an article on Provence which seems well written to me. These Félibres are a literary and artistic society, Clovis Hugues, Mistral and others, who write fairly good, sometimes very good, sonnets in Provençal and sometimes in French.

If the Félibres stop being unaware of my existence someday, they will all come to the little house. I would rather this did not happen before I have finished my decorations. But since I love Provence as unreservedly as they do, I perhaps have a right to their attention. If I ever insist on that right, it will be so that my work may remain here or in Marseilles, where as you know I should so much like to work. Because I believe that the artists of Marseilles would do well to continue what Monticelli began.

If Gauguin and I were to write an article in one of the papers here, that would be enough to get in touch with them.

A handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 16 October 1888

Arles, 16 October 1888

My dear Theo,

At last I can send you a little sketch to give you at least an idea of the way the work is shaping up. For today I am all right again. My eyes are still tired but then I had a new idea in my head and here is the sketch of it. Another size 30 canvas. This time it's just simply my bedroom, only here colour is to do everything, and giving by its simplification a grander style to things, is to be suggestive here of *rest* or of sleep in general. In a word, looking at the picture ought to rest the brain, or rather the imagination.

The walls are pale violet. The floor is of red tiles.

The wood of the bed and chairs is the yellow of fresh butter, the sheets and pillows very light greenish-citron.

The coverlet scarlet. The window green.

The toilet table orange, the basin blue.

The doors lilac.

And that is all - there is nothing in this room with its closed shutters.

The squareness of the furniture again must express inviolable rest. Portraits on the walls, and a mirror and a towel and some clothes.

The frame - as there is no white in the picture - will be white.

This by way of revenge for the enforced rest I was obliged to take.

I shall work on it again all day, but you see how simple the conception is. The shadows and the cast shadows are suppressed; it is painted in free flat tints like the Japanese prints. It is going to be a contrast to, for instance, the Tarascon diligence and the night café.

I am not writing you a long letter, because tomorrow very early I am going to begin in the cool morning light, so as to finish my canvas.

How are the pains - don't forget to tell me about them.

I know that you will write one of these days.

I will make you sketches of the other rooms too someday.

With a good handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Paul Gauguin

Arles, 17 October 1888

[The following letter from Vincent van Gogh to Gauguin has a Bernard Number here because it appears in the edition of the letters to Bernard as number 22]

My dear Gauguin,

Thanks for your letter, and above all thanks for your promise to come here as early as the twentieth. Surely the reason you mention [not feeling well] will hardly contribute towards making your train journey a pleasure trip, and it is only right that you should put off your journey until you can manage it without trouble. But apart from that I almost envy you your journey, which is going to show you miles and miles of landscapes in the splendour of autumn.

There is still present to my mind the emotion by my own journey from Paris to Arles last winter. How I peered out to see whether it was like Japan yet! Childish, wasn't it?

Listen, the other day I wrote you that my eyesight was strangely tired. All right, I rested for two and a half days, and then set to work again, but without daring to go out into the open air yet. I have done, still for my decoration, a size 30 canvas of my bedroom with the white deal furniture that you know. Well, I enormously enjoyed doing this interior of nothing at all. Of a simplicity à la Seurat.

With flat tints, but brushed on roughly, with a thick impasto, the walls pale lilac, the ground a faded broken red, the chairs and the bed chrome yellow, the pillows and the sheet a very pale green-citron, the blanket blood red, the washstand orange, the washbasin blue, the window green. By means of all these very diverse tones I have wanted to express an *absolute restfulness*, you see, and there is no white in it at all except a little note produced by the mirror with its black frame (in order to get the fourth pair of complementaries into it).

Well, you will se it along with the other things, and we will talk about it, for I often don't know what I am doing when I am working almost like a sleepwalker.

It is beginning to turn cold, particularly on the days when the mistral blows.

I have had gas laid on in the studio, so that we shall have good light in winter.

Perhaps Arles will disappoint you, if you come here in mistral weather; but you wait … It is only in the long run that the poetry of this place penetrates.

You will not find the house as comfortable yet as we shall gradually try to make it. There are so many expenses! And it can't be done all at once. But I believe after all that once you are here you will be seized like me with a rage for painting the autumnal effects in the intervals between the spells of mistral, and that you will understand why I insisted on your coming here, now that we are having very fine weather.

Well, we'll se each other.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 17 October 1888

My dear Theo,

I am overjoyed to hear what you tell me of your two new friends. But all the same it amazes me that you tell me about them and their frame (at, if my memory serves me, 2000 fr.) and never a word of what was inside that frame, nor a single word of what they had done in the way of painting.

Perhaps it is because you think that I may have heard of them, but I declare it is the first time I have heard of this business, and even of the men themselves.

So being ignorant of things, I should like to ask, “Yes, yes, so much for the frame, but what was there inside it, and what are they actually doing?”

After that I shall certainly be better able to get some idea of what their conversations with you and Pissarro were, once I have some notion of what they themselves are doing.

In any case it proves one thing, that the Dutch artists have spoken of you as the dealer in impressionist pictures, and we must not lose sight of that.

Then what did they tell you of Dutch art, Breitner and Rappard and others, and lastly what do they say about Tersteeg?

Gauguin writes that he has already sent off his trunk and promises to come about the twentieth of this month, that is within a few days. I shall be very glad, because I do believe that it will do both of us good. So write me some details about the new friends' painting soon, and if they are really painters trying to make progress in virgin fields, boldly recommend the South to them. I believe that a new school of *colourists* will take root in the South, as I see more and more that those in the North rely on their ability with the brush, and the so-called “picturesque,” rather than on the desire to express something by colour itself. Your news gave me great pleasure, but it so astonishes me not to know what there was inside that frame.

Here, under a stronger sun, I have found what Pissarro said confirmed, and also what Gauguin wrote to me, the simplicity, the fading of the colours, the gravity of great sunlight effects.

You never come near to suspecting it in the North. And if these artists of the monstrous frame really wish to see something new, let them go to Bing, and then to the South. Myself, I already had palpitations over my order for pine wood frames at 5 francs.

It is just what I said to Russell about his house, that this one here would cost several times less in hundreds than his will cost in thousands, and that after all, even without Russell, we were working for Gauguin.

Have they seen anything of Seurat's, our gentlemen of the frame? I think that as a creation I should prefer Seurat's frame to theirs.

By the way, speaking of Seurat, have you seen him again?

As to selling, I say you are certainly right not to go out of your way looking for sales, I certainly should prefer never to sell, if it could be.

But all the same if we were forced to it, certainly after what has gone before we have no alternative, yet even though we might be obliged to do it someday, we could not do better than take our time about it.

A good handshake, and I hope that you will tell me what there really was inside the frame. And regards to the new friends, and my best wishes.

If they want to see something new, certainly they could go South, or to Africa or Sicily if it is winter. But if they have originality, it is only the real South that will show them anything different from Holland.

Good-by, I hope for only a little while, and that you will write again soon, a good handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Have you read Madame Chrysanthème yet?

I am adding a line to tell you that this afternoon I finished the canvas representing the bedroom.

In any case it pleased me mightily that you should have fallen in with these Dutchmen. It is really quite possible that I may have heard of this large picture, though not of the frame. Some time ago Rappard told me a story praising a picture and its painter, and I can easily tell if it's the same picture when you tell me what they are doing.

However that may be, my dear boy, look here - if you complain of having nothing in your noodle in the way of producing good stuff, just imagine *how very much more reason* I have for feeling the same depression. I could not even do a stroke of work without you, and we must not go and get excited over what the two of us manage to produce, but just smoke our pipes in peace and not torment ourselves into melancholia because we are not productive separately and with less pain.

Certainly I have my own moments when I should dearly like to change and be in business for a bit, and by so doing be able to earn some money myself.

But since for the moment we can do nothing to change it, let's accept this fate, that you on your part are condemned always to do business without rest or change, and that I on my part also have a job without rest, wearing enough and exhausting to the brain. I hope that within a year you will feel that between us we have produced a work of art.

This bedroom is something like the still life of the “Romans Parisiens” with the yellow, pink and green covers, you remember it. But I think the workmanship is more virile and simple. No stippling, no hatching, nothing, only flat colours in harmony.

I do not know what I shall undertake next, for my eyes are still tired even yet.

And in just such moments after hard work - and all the more the harder it is - I feel my own noodle empty too, you know.

And if I let myself go, nothing would be easier than to detest what I have just done, and kick my foot through it a few times, like old Cézanne. After all, why kick my foot through it - let's leave the studies in peace, even if one sees no good in them; and if we see something that may be called good, well, so much the better.

And after all, don't let's meditate on good and bad too deeply - they're always relative.

That is exactly the fault of the Dutch, to call one thing absolutely good and another absolutely bad. Nothing in the world is as hard and fast as that.

By the way, I have read Richepin's Césarine too; there are some very good things in it, that march on the retreating soldiers, how one feels their weariness, and without being soldiers, haven't we all marched like that sometime?

The quarrel of the father and son is just heartbreaking, but it is like La Glu, also by Richepin. I find that it leaves no hope, whereas Guy de Maupassant, who has written things certainly as sad, lets things end more humanely in the end. Look at Monsieur Parent, look at Pierre et Jean, it does not end in happiness, but in the end people are resigned and go on in spite of everything. It does not end in blood and horrors like the other things. Indeed, I much prefer Guy de Maupassant because he is more comforting. At the moment I have just finished Eugénie Grandet by Balzac, the story of a miserly peasant.

Good-by, I hope for only a little while.

Ever yours, Vincent

Come now, if we do not produce pictures with frames like these Dutchmen's, you and I are making pictures like Japanese prints, and let's be content with that.

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Arles, 19 October 1888
Paris, 19 October 1888
My dear Vincent,
It was really a rather serious omission on my part to have talked to you about De Haan and Isaäcson without mentioning what they have done up to now.
Above all I wanted to give you an idea of the kind of fellows they are. I have not seen the large picture; but, judging from a photograph taken of a preliminary sketch, I think it cannot be at all bad. The subject is Uriel Acoste before a Tribunal; it was a judicial crime in Jewish history. The composition is nothing like Rembrandt, as the light is not concentrated in one part of the picture, but for all that spread effectively all over it. Since the costumes belong to that epoch it has been said that it is a bad imitation of Rembrandt. It is certain that he was influenced by the latter, but notwithstanding this there is quite a personal quality in the work of his which I have seen to be found in the way he spreads his light all over his picture or drawing. The things I have seen were mainly charcoal drawings, their other work having been left behind in Holland. I am sending you two photographs of drawings, so that you will be able to judge for yourself; the photographs have turned out rather badly, for the drawings are a bit dim.

They look upon Breitner as one of the most vigorous of the modern Dutchmen; I don't think they place him above J. Maris, but they certainly do place him above Israëls. I believe that if you knew them, you would share my opinion that there is no reason to distrust them. I haven't seen anything of Isaäcson's yet except his sketches, which are very well done and highly original. He is waiting for drawings which are to be sent back from London. Seurat isn't back in town yet, and I don't know what he's doing. He is very vigorous, that fellow, and I quite agree with you that his frames calculated to suit the picture are worth more than all kinds of expensive frames.

A short while ago I read Tartarin of Tarascon, which I think fine, and his Nabob, which I like much less. I am also going to read the other Tartarin. They don't have Madame Chrysanthème in the library, but someone promised to let me have it, so that I may read it. I am quite eager to know it. It is very annoying that you have been having trouble with your eyes. What can be the cause of that?

So Gauguin is going to join you; it will mean a great change in your life. I hope that your project of turning the house into a refuge, where artists will feel at home, will be successful.

I'll stop now, for otherwise, the letter will not go off tonight.
Cordially yours, Theo

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 21 October 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the 50-franc note it contained. Thank you for writing more about the picture by these Dutch artists.

I have had gas put in the studio and in the kitchen, which has cost me 25 francs for the installation. If Gauguin and I worked every night for a fortnight, shouldn't we get it back? Only as G. may come any day now, I absolutely, absolutely need at least 50 francs.

I am not ill, but without the slightest doubt I'd get that way if I do not eat really well and if I don't stop painting for a few days. As a matter of fact, I am again pretty nearly reduced to the madness of Hugo van der Goes in Emil Wauter's painting.

And if it were not that I have almost a double nature,like that of a monk and that of a painter,I should have - and that long ago - been reduced completely and utterly to the aforesaid condition.

Yet even then I do not think that my madness would take the form of persecution mania, since when in a state of excitement my feelings lead me rather to the contemplation of eternity, and eternal life.

But all the same I must beware of my nerves, *etc.*

Only I tell you this because you are mistaken in thinking that I have any mistrust of these two Dutch painters in any way. But it was really only after your second letter that I could form any idea of what they are doing, and I am very curious to see the photographs of their drawings.

I should like to write you a letter expressly for them to read, to explain once again why I believe I am in the South both for the present and the future.

And to say at the same time how right I think it is to see a tendency toward great things in the impressionist movement, and not *only* a school which would confine itself to optical experiments. And as for those who are doing historical painting, or at least have done it in the past, if there are some really bad historical painters like Delaroche and Delort, aren't there also some good ones like Eug. Delacroix and Meissonier? Anyway, since I have the fixed intention not to paint for at least three days, perhaps I shall rest myself by writing to you and to them at the same time. For you know that the influence impressionism will have on the Dutch painters and on the Dutch collectors rather interests me.

[Here Vincent drew a sketch of The Poet's Garden IV.]

Here is a very vague sketch of my last canvas, a row of green cypresses against a pink sky with a pale lemon crescent. The foreground is vague land and sand and some thistles. Two lovers, the man in pale blue with a yellow hat, the woman with a pink bodice and a black skirt.. That makes the fourth canvas of “The Poet's Garden,” which is the decoration for Gauguin's bedroom.

I dread to have to ask you for money again, but I can't help it, and even so I am broke again. However, I think that someday the work I do by spending a little more will seem a better bargain to us than the earlier stuff.

Besides, I had already told you, if it had been possible to make a deal with Thomas, I should have dearly liked to be able to put even 200 francs more into the work before Gauguin's arrival.

As that could not be, I have nevertheless pushed what I was working on as far as I could in my great desire to be able to show him something new, and not to be subjected to his influence (for he will certainly influence me, I hope) before I can show him indubitably my own individuality. He will see that, however, in the decoration as it is now.

I beg you, if it is in any way possible, send me another fifty francs at once, I do not quite know how I shall be able to get through without it. I am very glad you have read Tartarin. I do hope that you will be able to write me no later than by return mail.

A good handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 22 October 1888

My dear Theo,

I have done another size 30 canvas, “An Autumn Garden,” with two cypresses, bottle green, shaped like bottles, and three little chestnut trees with tobacco and orange-coloured leaves. And a little yew tree with pale citron foliage and a violet trunk, and two little bushes, blood-red and scarlet purple leaves.

And some sand, some grass, and some blue sky.

And yet I had sworn to myself that I would not work. But it is like that every day, just accidentally I sometimes come upon things so lovely that I have to try to do them after all.

Well, the money which you are giving me, and which I keep on asking for more than ever, I will pay back to you in work, and not only for the present but for *the past as well*. But let me work as long as it is not absolutely impossible.

For it would be so much worse if I did not take advantage of the opportunities. Oh my dear boy, if only I could do something, or if Gauguin and I between us could do such things that Seurat would join hands with us. But in my opinion we must put his big pictures of the “Models” and the “Grande Jatte” down, well - let me see - say at 5000 apiece at the lowest.

Well, if we combined, Gauguin and I also ought to be good for a nominal capital of 10,000 each.

Once more that squares exactly with what I was telling you, that I was determined to do 10,000 francs' worth of paintings for the house. It is odd that though I do not calculate with figures but with what I feel, I so often come to the same results, after starting from absolutely divergent points of view. I do not dare to think, I do not dare to say anything more of this Seurat combination. First I must try to get to know Gauguin better. When we have him, we can't lose anyhow.

Listen to me again. As soon as you can, at once even if it's possible, I need 10 more meters of canvas at 2.50 fr.

Then big tubes like the flake white and the zinc white.

Zinc white 20 of the biggest tubes

Flake white 10 “ “

Chrome yellow 1. 10 “ “

“ “2. 5 “ “
Prussian blue 5 “ “
Geranium lake 10 medium tubes
Malachite green 10 of the biggest tubes

But I must say that I should be absolutely astonished if we could not first overcome the existing difficulties of production, *no matter what*.

If there's a hitch, we shall have to take counsel as soon as Gauguin comes, which I am hoping for from one day to the next.

I think that it may make a nice stir at the exhibition in '89. It might be more convenient if it didn't make a hit, but anyway we must really take things as they come. By the way, have you ever read Les Frères Zemganno, by the de Goncourt brothers? If not, read it. I might be more daring perhaps if I had not read it, and even after reading it my only fear is of asking you for too much money. If I come to grief myself in the attempt, it would do me no harm. In that case I have still some resource, for I should either go into business or I should write. But as long as I am painting, I see nothing for it but the association of several fellows and a life in common.

The leaves have begun to fall, you can see the trees turning yellow, and the yellow increasing every day. It is at least as beautiful as the orchards in bloom, and as for the work we are doing, I venture to think that far from losing on it, we shall make a profit. So much for that.

In any case please send by return mail, and certainly not later, some more money (50 if possible), or else less. And if you haven't time to write, please send it by money order, either more or less, depending on what you can spare.

A good handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Arles, 23 October 1888
Paris, 23 October 1888
My dear Vincent,
It is very distressing to me to learn that you are not feeling well. It is to be supposed that you have worked too hard, and consequently have forgotten to take proper care of your body. I am glad that your letter arrived today, for within a very short time I should have gone off to Brussels, in which case you would have had to wait at least two more days. What a financier you are! What causes me so much grief is that, notwithstanding all that, you are always so miserably hard up, because you cannot refrain from doing all kinds of things for others. I should greatly like to see you more egotistic, at least until your budget balances better.

You will understand that Father Thomas has given me the cold shoulder; you should have approached him yourself and all that. Now let's try to wriggle out of the difficulty; the others will come to us of their own accord. You will be pleased to learn that I sold the big picture of Gauguin's “Les Bretonnes,” which has been on exhibition at Diot's. I am sending him 500 francs, so for the moment he will be quite well off, but is he going to join you? De Haan is coming this week, and he will stay with me for some time, which is very pleasant for me, for he will probably become the central figure of a group of young people here after a while.

From your previous letter I get the impression that you believe that these fellows know all the answers to all the questions, in the manner of the Dutch, but if you have formed such an opinion it's my fault. When I told you that they known how to analyze a picture, taking as their starting point a feeling for the technique and so on, I did not mean to say that they separate the qualities; what I really meant to allude to was their singular clarity of mind, which prevents them from mixing things up. Isaäcson, particularly, gives me the impression of a true scholar. They have now received pictures and studies done in Holland - very good, only a bit dark. It is their intention to stay in Paris during the winter, and then to start for the country as soon as the weather permits them to travel out of town. I intend to return from Brussels on Friday or Saturday, and I hope to be able to write you a letter less hurriedly soon.

I hope your indisposition is not serious, and that you will not lose courage, even if Gauguin should not come.

Yours, Theo

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 24 October 1888

Arles, 24 October 1888

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the 50-fr. note. As you learned from my wire, Gauguin has arrived in good health. He gives me the impression he is even better than me.

Naturally he is very pleased with the sale you have effected, and I no less, since in this way certain expenses absolutely necessary for the installation need not wait, and will not weigh wholly on your shoulders. G. will certainly write you today. He is very, very interesting as a man, and I have every confidence that we shall do loads of things with him. He will probably produce a great deal here, and I hope perhaps I shall too.

And then I dare hope that the burden will be a *little* less heavy for you, and I even hope, *much* less heavy.

I myself realize the necessity to produce even to the extent of being morally crushed and physically drained by it, just because after all I have no other means of ever getting back what we have spent.

I cannot help it that my pictures do not sell.

The day will come when people will see that they are worth more than the price of the paint and my own living, very meager after all, that is put into them.

I have no other desire nor any other interest as to money or finance, than primarily to have no debts.

But my dear boy, my debt is so great that when I have paid it, when all the same I hope to succeed in doing, the pains of producing pictures will have taken my whole life from me, and it will seem to me then that I have not lived. The only thing is that perhaps the production of the pictures will become a little more difficult for me, and as to numbers, there will not always be so many.

It is agonizing to me that there is no demand for them now, because you suffer for it, but as far as I am concerned - if only you were not too worried by my bringing nothing in - it would pretty much be all the same to me.

But in money matters it is enough for me to realize this truth - that a man who lives for 50 years and spends 2000 a year has spent 100,000 francs, and must bring in 100,000 francs again. To do 1000 pictures at 100 francs during one's life as an artist comes very, very, very hard, but even when the picture is at 100 francs . . . once again . . . at times our task is very heavy. But there is no changing that.

We shall probably bypass Tasset altogether, because to a large extent we are going to use cheaper colours, Gauguin as well as I. And in the same way we are going to prepare the canvas ourselves. For a while I had a feeling that I was going to be ill, but Gauguin's arrival has so taken my mind off it that I'm sure it will pass. I must not neglect my food for a time, and that is all, absolutely all there is to it.

And after a time you will have some work again.

Gauguin brought a magnificent canvas, which he has exchanged with Bernard, Breton women in a green field, white, black, green, and a note of red, and the dull flesh tints. After all, we must all be of good cheer.

I believe that the time will come when I too shall sell, but I am so far behind with you, and while I go on spending, I bring nothing in. Sometimes the thought of it saddens me.

I am very glad of what you write, that one of the Dutchmen is coming to stay with you, so that you will not be alone any more, and it's all right, absolutely all right, especially since the winter will soon be here.

And now I am in a hurry and must go out and set to work again on another size 30 canvas.

Very soon, when Gauguin writes, I'll add another letter to his. Naturally, I don't know beforehand what Gauguin will say of this country, and of our life, but in any case he is very pleased with the good sale you have managed for him.

Goodbye for now, and a good handshake.

Ever yours,

Vincent

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Arles, 27 October 1888
Paris, 27 October 1888
My dear Vincent,
I was overjoyed to find your telegram and your letter in reply to my first one when I got back from Brussels. I am sending you a post office money order; for, although it is possible that Gauguin received the letter I addressed to him at Pont-Aven, thinking he was still there, there is also the possibility that you have not received it, and as you are two now it will be harder to have enough to live on than when you were alone. Why don't you try to get credit with some purveyor of food in case I am not there, as happened a short while ago, or if it is impossible for me to send the money at once? I am very happy that Gauguin is with you, for I was afraid that he had encountered some obstacle which prevented him from coming. Now I see from your letter that you are unwell, and that you are worrying a good deal. I want to tell you something once and for all. I look upon it all as though the question of money and the sale of pictures and the whole financial side did not exist, or rather existed as a disease.

As it is certain that money question will not disappear before a formidable revolution or probably a series of revolutions has come about, it is necessary to treat it like smallpox if one has caught it. That is to say, take the required precautions against accidents which may result, but don't bother your head about it. You have been thinking about it far too much lately, and although there may be no symptoms of an accident, you are suffering under it. By accidents I mean misery, and in order to avoid arriving at this pass, it is necessary to take things easy, and not to commit excesses, and to try to escape the other diseases as much as possible. You speak of money which you owe me, and which you want to give back to me. I won't hear of it. The condition I want you to arrive at is that you should never have any worries. I must work for the money. Seeing that we two together haven't got very much, we must see to it that we don't take too much on our shoulders, but apart from this consideration we shall be able to go on for some time to come, even without selling anything. If you very much feel the need of working *for yourself*, go ahead, say the word, and I think that notwithstanding this we shall be able to stick it out, but I don't understand the calculations of so many pictures at 100 francs apiece. If one wants them to be worth 100 francs, they are worth nothing at all, for the ignoble society we are living in is only on the side of those who do not stand in need of it. But knowing this, let's do as society does, and let's say, We don't stand in need of it; isn't it true that a warned man counts as two? You may do something for me if you like - that is, go on as in the past, and create an entourage of artists and friends for us, something which I am absolutely incapable of doing by my own self, and which *you* have been able to do, more or less, since you came to France. Isn't it true that, if the artists show the way, the others will follow suit, if the moment should come when we stand in need of it because of being unable to continue working as we are now? Personally I am firmly convinced of it. You don't know how much pain you give me when you say that you have worked so hard that you feel as though you had not lived.

In the first place I don't believe this is true, for in point of fact you are living *and* living like the great ones of the earth and the aristocrats. But I beseech you, warn me in time, in order that you may not feel that you have been living in misery, and that you have fallen ill because you lacked a piece of bread to keep alive. I hope Gauguin's company will be pleasant for you, and that you will recover within a very short time.

I have not received the canvases yet. Did he send them off, or shall I get them through the agency of somebody else? At Brussels I made the acquaintance of De Groux's son, who is also an artist. Unfortunately it was on the last night of my stay there, so that I could not take a look at what he does. The movement in art we are having here seems to be zealously discussed but also approved of over there, and it would be a good thing to organize a permanent exhibition at Brussels, too. De Haan is coming tomorrow to stay with me, which I am very glad of; I am very curious to know what he is going to do, for he is anxious to start working at once. Enclosed you will find a letter from our mother, which she requested me to forward to you. Tasset will send you the paints and the canvas shortly.

I hope to see you soon, and a cordial handshake to Gauguin.

Theo

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 October 1888

My dear Theo,

About falling ill, I have already told you that I did not think I should, but I'd have fallen ill if my expenditure had continued.

For I was terribly uneasy lest I should be forcing you to make an effort beyond your strength. On the one hand I thought that I could not do better than carry through the thing we had begun when persuading Gauguin to join us, and on the other, as you may know from experience, when one is furnishing or settling down, it is a lot more difficult than one thinks. Now I hope to breathe easily at last, since we have all had a tremendous stroke of luck in your being able to sell a picture for Gauguin. One way or another, all three of us, he and you and I, can pull ourselves together enough to realize what we have done.

Do not be afraid that I shall be worried about money. Now Gauguin has come, the object is *for the moment attained*. With the two of us sharing expenses, we shan't spend more for two than it has cost one to live alone.

He can even save money in proportion to his selling. It will help him, say in a year, to settle in Martinique, which he otherwise could not save enough money for.

You will have my work and also a picture from him every month. And I shall do just as much work without having so much trouble - so many expenses. Even a long time ago I thought that the combination we have just made would be good policy. The house is getting on very well indeed, and is becoming not only comfortable but an artist's house too.

So have no fear for me, nor for yourself either.

Indeed, I was horribly worried about you, for if Gauguin had not come to the same conclusion about it, I should have caused you pretty heavy expenses for nothing. But Gauguin is astonishing as a man, he does not let himself get out of hand, and he will wait here very quietly, working hard, for the right moment to take a great step forward. He needs rest as much as I do. With the money he has just earned, he certainly could have treated himself to a rest cure in Brittany just as well, *but as things are now, he is sure of being able to wait without getting fatally into debt once more*. *Together* we shall not spend more than 250 fr. a month. And we shall spend *much less* on paint, since we are going to make it ourselves. So on your part, don't be uneasy about us, and have a breathing spell too, you need it badly.

On my part I just want to tell you that I ask only to go on at an average rate of 150 a month (and the same for Gauguin). In any case that reduces my personal expenses. While his pictures are sure to go up.

After that, if you keep my pictures for yourself, either in Paris or here, I should so much rather be able to say bluntly that you prefer to keep my work for ourselves and not sell it than join in the scuffle for money just now. Honestly. Besides, if what I am doing should be good, then we shall lose nothing in the money line, for it will mature quietly, like wine in the cellar. In another way it is only right that I should take some trouble to make a painting such that *even* from the financial point of view it is better that it should be on my canvas than in the tubes.

Now, in conclusion, I venture to hope that in six months Gauguin and you and I will all see that we have founded a little studio which will last, and which will remain an outpost or a way station, necessary or at least useful to all who want to see the South.

I shake your hand firmly.

Ever yours, Vincent

I do not yet know what Gauguin thinks of my decorations in general, I only know that there are already some studies which he really likes, like the sower, the sunflowers, and the bedroom.

And as for the whole, I do not in the least know myself yet, because I need some more canvases of the other seasons. Gauguin has already very nearly found his Arlésienne, and I wish I had got that far, but for my part it is the landscape that comes to me, and I find it varied enough. So after all my modest work is going on as usual.

I venture to think that you will like the new “Sower.”

I am writing in haste; we have loads of work to do. He and I intend to make a tour of the brothels pretty often, so as to study them.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 October 1888

My dear Theo,

Thanks for the money order for 50 francs, which I received just now.

I knew well that Gauguin had made sea voyages, but I did not know that he was a regular mariner. He has passed through all the difficulties, and has been a real able seaman and a true sailor. This gives me an awful respect for him and a still more absolute confidence in his personality. He has, if one must compare him with anything, an affinity with that *Pêcheur d'Islande* [Icelandic Fisherman] by Loti. I think this will make the same impression on you as on me.

Now we have already worked of course. He is busy with a Negress and a large landscape of this region.

What he tells me about Brittany is very interesting, and Pont-Aven is a most marvellous country. Certainly everything there is better, larger, more beautiful than here. It has a more solemn character, and especially purer in its totality and more definite than the shrivelled, scorched, trivial scenery of Provence. Never mind, all the same he, as I myself, likes what he sees, and above all things he is intrigued by the Arlésiennes.

This week I made a new study of a sower, the landscape quite flat, the figure small and vague.

Further I have made another study of a ploughed field with the stump of an old yew tree. Like this.

And that's all. How are you, and have you done anything in Brussels?

My brain is still feeling tired and dried up, but this week I am feeling better than during the previous fortnight.

What Gauguin tells of the tropics seems marvellous to me. Surely the future of a great renaissance in painting lies there. Just ask your new Dutch friends whether they have ever thought how interesting it would be if some Dutch painters were to found a colourist school in Java. If they heard Gauguin describe the tropical countries, it would certainly make them desire to do it directly. Everybody is not free and [in] circumstances [that allow them] to emigrate. But what things could be done there!

I regret I am not ten or twenty years younger, then I would certainly go there.

Now it is most unlikely that I shall leave the shore and put to sea, and the little yellow house here in Arles will remain a way station between Africa, the Tropics, and the people of the North.

At present it is rather probable that Bernard will go to Africa, where he will meet Milliet, who gives you his regards and will leave on November 1.

I like the look of the studio, especially in the evening, with the gas burning.

If you should come across more Daumiers, don't forget to grab hold of them.

And I think that in the evening we will bring along neighbours and friends, and, while chatting away, we will work in the evening as in the daytime.

Portraits of people in the light of a gas lamp, it certainly seems to me it can be done.

I shake your hand well and write to us soon

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard

Arles, c. 2 November 1888

My dear comrade Bernard,

We have worked a lot these days, and in the meantime I read Le rêve by Zola, and because of this I had hardly any time to write. Gauguin interests me very much as a man - very much.

For a long time now it has seemed to me that in our nasty profession of painting we are most sorely in need of men with the hands and the stomachs of workmen. More natural tastes - more loving and more charitable temperaments - than the decadent dandies of the Parisian boulevards have.

Well, here we are without the slightest doubt in the presence of a virgin creature with savage instincts. With Gauguin blood and sex prevail over ambition.

But enough, you have seen him at close range for a longer time than I have; I only wanted to tell you in a few words what my first impressions are. Moreover, I do not think you will be greatly amazed if I tell you that our discussions tend to treat of the terrible subject of an association of certain painters. This association must or may have, yes or no, a commercial character. We haven't arrived at any conclusion yet, nor have we set foot on a new continent.

As for me, with my presentiment of a new world, I firmly believe in the possibility of an immense renaissance of art. Whoever believes in this new art will have the tropics for a home.

I have the impression that we ourselves serve as no more than intermediaries. And that only the next generation will succeed in living in peace. Apart from all this, our duties and the possibilities of action for us can become clearer to us only by experience and nothing else. I am a bit surprised at the fact that I have not yet received the studies you promised me in exchange for mine.

Now something that will interest you - we have made some excursions to the brothels, and it is probable that in the end we shall often go and work there.

At the moment Gauguin is working on a canvas of the same night cafe I painted too, but with figures seen in the brothels. It promises to turn out beautiful.

I myself have done two studies of the fall of leaves in an avenue of poplars, and a third study of this whole avenue, entirely yellow.

I must say I cannot understand why I don't do studies after the figure, seeing that it is often so difficult for me to imagine the painting of the future theoretically as otherwise than a new succession of powerful, simple portraitists, comprehensible to the general public. Well, perhaps I shall go do the brothels before long. I leave a page open for Gauguin, who will probably write to you too, and I heartily shake your hand in thought.

Sincerely yours, Vincent

Milliet, the 2nd lieutenant of the Zouaves, has gone to Africa; he would like you to write him a letter one of these days.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 6 November 1888

My dear Theo,

Gauguin and I thank you very much for the 100 Fr. you sent and also for your letter.

Gauguin is very pleased that you like what he sent from Brittany, and that other people who have seen them like them too.

Just now he has in hand some women in a vineyard, altogether from memory, but if he does not spoil it or leave it unfinished it will be very fine and very unusual. Also a picture of the same night cafe that I painted too.

I have done two canvases of falling leaves, which Gauguin liked, I think, and I'm working now on a vineyard all purple and yellow.

Then I have an Arlésienne at last, a figure (size 30 Canvas) slashed on in an hour, background pale lemon, the face grey, the clothes black, deep black, with unmixed Prussian blue. She is leaning on a green table and seated in an armchair of orange wood.

Gauguin has bought a chest of drawers for the house, and various household utensils, also 20 metres of very strong canvas, and a lot of things that we needed, and that at any rate it was more convenient to have.

Only we have kept an account of all he has paid out, which comes almost to 100 francs, so that either at the New Year or say in March we can pay him back, and then the chest of drawers *etc.* will naturally be ours.

I think this is right on the whole, since he intends to put money by when he sells, till the time (say in a year) when he has enough to risk a second voyage to Martinique.

We are working hard, and our life together goes very well. I am very glad to know that you are not alone in the flat. These drawings by de Haan are *very fine*. I like them very much. Yet to do that with colour, to manage so much expression without the help of chiaroscuro in black and white, damn it all, it is not easy.

And he will even arrive at a new *type of drawing* if he carries out his plan of passing through impressionism *at a school*, considering his new attempts in colour merely as studies. But in my opinion he is right over and over again to do all this.

Only there are several so-called impressionists who have not his knowledge of the figure, and it is just this knowledge of the figure which will later on come again to the surface, and which he will be all the better for. I am very anxious some day to get to know de Haan and Isaäcson. If they ever came here Gauguin would certainly say to them - go to Java for impressionist work. For Gauguin though he works hard here is still homesick for hot countries. And then it is unquestionable that if you went to Java, for instance, with the one idea of working on colour, you would see heaps of new things. Then in those brighter countries, with a stronger sun, direct shadow, as well as the cast shadow of objects and figures, becomes quite different, and is so full of colour that one is tempted simply to suppress it. That happens even here. Yet I will say no more on the importance of painting in the tropics, I am already sure de Haan and Isaäcson will feel the importance of it.

In any case, to come here some time or other would do them no harm, they would certainly find some interesting things.

Gauguin and I are going to have our dinner at home today, and we feel as sure and certain that it will turn out well as that it will seem to us better or cheaper.

So as not to delay this letter I will finish up for today. I hope to write again soon. Your arrangement about money is quite right.

I think you will like the fall of the leaves that I have done.

It is some poplar trunks in lilac cut by the frame where the leaves begin.

These tree-trunks are lined like pillars along an avenue where to right and left there are rows of old Roman tombs of a blue lilac. And then the soil is covered, as with a carpet, by a thick layer of yellow and orange fallen leaves. And they are still falling like flakes of snow. And in the avenue little black figures of lovers. The upper part of the picture is a bright green meadow, and no sky or almost none.

The second canvas is the same avenue but with an old fellow and a woman as fat and round as a ball.

But if only you had been with us on Sunday, when we saw a red vineyard, all red like red wine. In the distance it turned to yellow, and then a green sky with the sun, the earth after the rain violet, sparkling yellow here and there where it caught the reflection of the setting sun.

A handshake in thought from both of us, good bye for the present. I will write again as soon as I can, and to our Dutchmen too. [The two artists staying with Theo.]

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 12 November 1888

My dear Theo,

I have received a letter from M. C. Dujardin on the subject of the exhibition of my pictures in his black hole. I am go disgusted at the idea of handing over a canvas in payment for the proposed exhibition that really there is only one possible answer to the gentleman's letter. The one you will find enclosed. Only I am sending it to you and not to him so that you may know what I think, and that you may simply tell him that I have changed my mind, and at the moment have no desire to exhibit. Getting angry with the scoundrel doesn't do the slightest bit of good, it is better to be conventionally polite. So no exhibition at the Revue Indépendante; I boldly venture to think that Gauguin is also of this opinion. In any case he is making no attempt to persuade me to do it.

We have hardly exhibited, have we? There have been a few canvases, first at Tanguy's, afterward at Thomas's, and then at Martin's.

Now as for myself, I tell you flatly that I can see no use even in that, and it really seems to me much better if you simply keep the studies you like in your apartment, and send the others back here rolled up, since the apartment is small, and if you kept everything, they would crowd it up.

Then, without hurrying ourselves, I am going on down here, getting the staff ready for a more serious exhibition.

But as for the Revue Indépendante, please tell them curtly it's no go. It's too good an opportunity, and you will feel that they are greatly mistaken if they think I am going to pay for being put on view in such a dark, suspect little hole as that.

Now as to showing a few canvases at Tanguy's and Thomas's, it's a matter of such indifference to me that it isn't worth talking about, but above all remember that I simply don't care. I already know what I shall do the moment I have enough canvases. Right now I am only concerned with making them.

What will please you is that Gauguin has finished his canvas of the “Women Grape Gatherers.” It is as beautiful as the Negresses, and if you paid say the same price as for the Negresses (400, I think) it would be well worth it. But of course you have the lot to choose from, and I have not seen the Breton things. He has described several to me, and they must be fine.

I have done a rough sketch of the brothel, and I quite intend to do a brothel picture. Gauguin came here on October 20, so we must figure that he had 50 francs from you last month.

Yes, I think there must be a clear understanding about the exhibition of my work. You are with the Goupils, you have no right to do business outside the firm. I myself, being away, do *not* exhibit. I repeat, it is another matter at Tanguy's provided Tanguy fully understands that he has no right to my canvases *whatever*.

Then my position is at least clear, which is not altogether immaterial to me.

With a little more work behind me, I shall have enough not to have to exhibit at all, that is what I am aiming at.

I too have finished a canvas of a vineyard all purple and yellow, with small blue and violet figures and a yellow sun.

I think that you will be able to put this canvas besides some of Monticelli's landscapes.

I am going to set myself to work from memory often, and the canvases from memory are always less awkward, and have a more artistic look than studies from nature, especially when one works in mistral weather.

I think I haven't yet told you that Milliet has gone to Africa. He got a study of mine for troubling to take the canvases to Paris [Unknown painting], and Gauguin gave him a small drawing in exchange for an illustrated edition of Madame Chrysanthème. I have not yet received the exchanges from Pont-Aven, but Gauguin assures me that the canvases were finished.

We are having wind and rain here, and I am very glad not to be alone. I work from memory on bad days, and that would not do if I were alone.

Gauguin has also almost finished his night café. He is very interesting as a friend, I must tell you that he knows how to cook *perfectly*; I think I shall learn from him, it is very convenient. We find it very easy to make frames with plain strips of wood nailed on the stretcher and *painted*, and I have begun doing this.

Do you know that Gauguin is really partly the inventor of the white frame? But the frame of four strips nailed on the stretcher costs *5 sous*, and we are certainly going to perfect it. It does very well, because the frame has no projection, and is one with the picture.

Good-by for now, a handshake for you, and my compliments to the Dutchmen.

Ever yours, Vincent

Gauguin sends his greetings, and asks you to keep, out of the price of the first picture you sell, the amount necessary for the stretchers with screws that he wants, and also what Bernard will be asking you for a commission he gave him.

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Paul Gauguin

Arles, 13 November 1888
Arles, 13 November 1888
[Letterhead]
Goupil & Co.
Boussod Valadon & Cie.
Successeurs 19 Boulevard Montmartre Paris
Adr. télégr.: Boussoval Paris

13 November 1888

Dear Mr. Gauguin,

It will probably please you to learn that your pictures are having a great success. Even before I received my brother's letters I had them mounted on adjustable stretchers, and for showing the size 30 canvases I have taken a very fine white frame of unpainted wood, in which they show up very well. Degas is so enthusiastic about your works that he is speaking about them to a lot of people, and he is going to buy the canvas representing a spring landscape, with a meadow with two female figures in the foreground, the one sitting and the other standing.

Now there are two canvases definitely sold. One is in the uptight landscape with two dogs in a meadow, the other one a pool by the side of the road. As there is a combination of exchange, I am quoting that first one *net for you* at 375 francs, and the other one at 225 francs. I could also sell the ring of Breton girls, but there will have to be a small retouch. The hand of the little girl which almost touches the frame acquires an importance it doesn't seem to have when you look at the picture as a whole. The would-be buyer wants you to revise the shape of that hand a little, but without altering anything else whatever in the picture. It seems to me that this will not be difficult for you, and so I am sending you the canvas. He will give 500 francs for the picture all complete with a frame that will cost nearly 100 francs. Please consider whether you can comply with his wishes, and whether you want to close the bargain.

For the picture sold recently I have deducted 15 per cent, which is the minimum commission the firm takes. Many painters accord us 25 per cent. If we can manage to achieve somewhat regular sales, I must beg you to do the same, if you are willing. In that case it is easier to bring off exchanges or sales on credit.

Please let me know your opinion on the subject.

I was happy to hear that you are getting on well together, and that you have been able to start work immediately. I should like to be with you two. Is your health improving now?

A hearty handshake and cordially yours,

T. van Gogh

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, c. 16 November 1888

Arles, c. 16 November 1888

My dear sister,

It gave me much pleasure to receive a reply from Mrs. Mauve at last. As I want to write her a letter one of these days, kindly send me her present address at once and without fail. Her letter was dated from The Hague, but she does not say whether she is going to stay there; my impression was that she was going to stay at Laren. She told me that she had received a nice letter from you.

I received the letter dated from Middelharnis, and I thank you very much for it. It is a very good thing that you have at least started to read Au bonheur des dames, and so on. There are a lot of things in it - as in Guy de Maupassant too, for that matter.

I have already answered you that I don't like Mother's picture enormously.

I have just finished painting, to put in my bedroom, a memory of the garden at Etten; here is a sketch of it. It is a rather large canvas.

Here are the details of the colours. The younger of the two ladies who are out for a walk is wearing a Scottish shawl with green and orange checks, and a red parasol. The old lady has a violet shawl, nearly black. But a bunch of dahlias, some of them citron yellow, the others pink and white mixed, are like an explosion of colour on the somber figure. Behind them a few cedar shrubs and emerald-green cypresses. Behind the cypresses one sees a field of pale green and red cabbages, surrounded by a border of little white flowers. The sandy path is of a raw orange colour; the foliage of the two beds of scarlet geraniums is very green. Finally, the interjacent plane, there is a maid-servant, dressed in blue, who is arranging a profusion of plants with white, pink, yellow and vermilion-red flowers.

Here you are. I know this is hardly what one might call a likeness, but for me it renders the poetic character and the style of the garden as I feel it. All the same, let us suppose that the two ladies out for a walk are you and our mother; let us even suppose that there is not the least, absolutely not the least vulgar and fatuous resemblance - yet the deliberate choice of colour, the somber violet with the blotch of violent citron yellow of the dahlias, suggests Mother's personality to me.

The figure in the Scotch plaid with orange and green checks stands out against the somber green of the cypress, which contrast is further accentuated by the red parasol - this figure gives me an impression of you like those in Dickens's novels, a vaguely representative figure.

I don't know whether you can understand that one may make a poem only by arranging colours, in the same way that you can say comforting things in music.

In a similar manner the bizarre lines, purposely selected and multiplied, meandering all through the picture, may fail to give the garden a vulgar resemblance, but may present it to our minds as seen in a dream, depicting its character, and at the same time stranger than it is in reality.

I have also painted “Une Liseuse de Romans,” the luxuriant hair very black, a green bodice, the sleeves the colour of wine lees, the skirt black, the background all yellow, bookshelves with books. She is holding a yellow book in her hands.

So much for today. But remember I have not told you that my friend Paul Gauguin, an impressionist painter, is now living with me, and that we are very happy together. He strongly encourages me to work often from pure imagination.

Give my kindest regards to Mother, and do not fail to send me Mrs. Mauve's address by return mail.

I embrace you in thought, Mother and you.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 16 November 1888

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for the 100 francs you sent and for your letter. I know you will be pleased to hear that I have had a letter from Jet Mauve, thanking us for the picture. A very nice letter, in which she speaks of old times. I am going to answer it and I shall send some sketches in the letter besides.

You will also be pleased to hear that we have an addition to the collection of portraits of artists. The self-portrait by Laval, extremely good.

[Here was drawn a copy of the Laval self-portrait.]

Also a marine by Bernard in exchange for canvases of mine.

The portrait of Laval is very bold, very distinguished, and will be just one of the pictures you speak of, those one gets hold of before other people have recognized the talents.

I think it excellent that you are taking a Luce. Has he a self-portrait by any chance? Just in case there should be nothing extraordinarily interesting, portraits are always good.

Gauguin is working on a very original nude woman in the hay with some pigs. It promises to be very fine, and of great distinction. He has sent to Paris for the return of a magnificent jar with 2 rats' heads.

He is a very great artist and a very excellent friend.

If ever you could get a good Bernard, I very strongly advise you to. Gauguin has a superb one.

I have been working on two canvases.

A memory of our garden at Etten, with cabbages, cypresses, dahlias, and figures, then a Woman reading a novel in a library like the Lecture Française, a woman all in green. Gauguin gives me the courage to work from my imagination, and certainly things from the imagination take on a more mysterious character.

Tasset's package arrived the day before yesterday, and we were very pleased with it. Could Tasset send besides - but it is urgent - one very big tube of vermilion (same size as the big flake white) and 3 tubes of Prussian blue of the same size? We should be tremendously obliged.

I am glad Jet Mauve has written, and I venture to think that little by little they will come round to the impressionists after all. A handshake in thought for you,

and my compliments to Haan and Isaäcson.
Ever Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 23 November 1888

My dear Theo,

Gauguin's canvas, “Breton Children,” has arrived and he has altered it very well.

But though I quite like this canvas, it is all to the good that it is sold, and the two he is about to send you from here are thirty times better. I am speaking of the “Women Gathering Grapes” and the “Woman with the Pigs.” The reason for this is that Gauguin is beginning to get over that disorder of the liver or the stomach which has been tormenting him lately.

But I am now writing to reply to what you said about having a little canvas of mine of a pink peach tree framed, I imagine to send to *ces messieurs*. I don't want to leave any doubt as to what I think of that.

First, if it is your wish to let them have something of mine, good or bad, upon my honour if it can in any way give you any pleasure now or later, you have absolute carte blanche.

But if it is either to please me, *or for my own advantage*, then on the contrary I'm of the opinion that it is absolutely unnecessary.

If you had asked me what would please me, it's just this one thing: that you keep in the apartment for yourself whatever you like out of my work, and sell none of it now.

As for the rest, send whatever is in your way back to me here, for the good reason that all the things I have done from nature are chestnuts pulled out of the fire.

Gauguin, in spite of himself and in spite of me, has more or less proved to me that it is time I was varying my work a little. I am beginning to compose from memory, and all my studies will still be useful for that sort of work, recalling to me things I have seen. What then does selling matter, unless we are absolutely pressed for money?

And besides, I am convinced beforehand that you will end up seeing it the way I do.

You are with the Goupils, but I most certainly am not; after having worked with them for six *years*, both sides were utterly dissatisfied, they with me, I with them. It's an old story, but all the same, that's how things were.

So go your own way, but as a matter of business I think it is incompatible with my previous conduct to come back to them with a canvas as innocent as this little peach tree or something similar.

No. If in a year or two I have enough for an exhibition of my own, say thirty size 30 canvases or so, and if I said to them, “Will you do it for me?” Boussod would certainly send me about my business. I know them, alas, rather too well, and I think I shall not apply to them. Not that I should ever try to do them any harm whatever - on the contrary, you will have to admit that I urge all the others to go there, with great zeal.

But as far as I'm concerned, I still carry that old grudge.

Understand quite clearly that I consider you a dealer in impressionist pictures, completely independent of the Goupils, so that it will always be a pleasure to me to push artists in that direction.

But I do not want Boussod to ever have a chance to say, “That little canvas isn't too bad for a young beginner.” On the contrary, I will not go back to them, I would rather never sell anything than go to them otherwise than as a purely business matter. Now they are not the people to behave fairly, so it's no good beginning again.

Understand that the more clear-cut we are about this, the sooner they will come to you to see them. You yourself do not sell my work, so you are not doing business outside the firm of Boussod V. & Co. by showing it. So you will be acting quite correctly, which is always decent.

However, should someone or other want to buy, very good, then they have only to apply directly to me. But be sure of this, if we can stand the siege, my time will come. I cannot do anything but work just now, nor should I.

A handshake - we need some more paints.

I must also tell you that this month with the two of us together is going better on 150 francs than on 250 for myself alone. At the end of a year you will see how things have developed.

I cannot say any more.

I am rather sorry to have my room full of canvases, and to have nothing to send when Gauguin sends his.

It is because Gauguin has told me how to get rid of the grease in the things painted in impasto by washing from time to time.

And then when that is done, I must go over them to retouch them.

If I sent them to you now, the colours would be duller than they will be later.

They all think what I have sent too hastily done. I do not contradict it, and I will make some alterations.

It does me a tremendous amount of good to have such intelligent company as Gauguin's, and to see him work.

You will see that some people will soon be reproaching Gauguin with no longer being an impressionist.

His last two canvases, which you will soon be seeing, are very firm in the impasto, there is even some work with the palette knife. And they will throw his Breton canvases a little in the shade - not all, but some.

I have hardly any time to write. But for that, I should already have written to these Dutchmen. I have had another letter from Bock, you know, the Belgian who has a sister among the "Vingtistes"; he is enjoying his work up there.

I hope we shall always remain friends with Gauguin and doing business with him, and if he could succeed in founding a studio in the tropics, it would be magnificent. However, it requires more money according to my calculations than it does according to his.

Guillaumin has written to Gauguin. He seems to be very hard up, but he must have done some fine things. He has a child now but he was *terrified* by the confinement, and he says that he has the red vision of it always before his eyes. But to this Gauguin aptly replied that he himself has seen it six times.

Jet Mauve is much better as far as her health is concerned, and as you perhaps know, she has been staying in The Hague since last August, near the Jewish cemetery, and therefore almost in the country.

You will lose nothing by waiting a little for my work, and we will calmly leave our comrades to despise the present ones. Fortunately for me, I know well enough what I want, and am basically utterly indifferent to the criticism that I work too hurriedly. In answer to that, I have done some things *even more* hurriedly these last few days.

Gauguin was telling me the other day that he had seen a picture by Claude Monet of sunflowers in a large Japanese vase, very fine, but - he likes mine better. I don't agree - only don't think that I am weakening.

I regret - as always, how well you know - the scarcity of models and the thousand obstacles in overcoming that difficulty. If I were a different sort of man, and if I were better off, I could force the issue, but as it is I do not give in, but plod on quietly.

If, by the time I am forty, I have done a picture of figures like the flowers Gauguin was speaking of, I shall have a position in art equal to that of anyone, no matter who. So, perseverance.

Meanwhile I can at all events tell you that the last two studies are odd enough.

Size 30 canvases, a wooden rush-bottomed chair all yellow on red tiles against a wall (daytime).

Then Gauguin's armchair, red and green night effect, wall and floor red and green again, on the seat two novels and a candle, on thin canvas with a thick impasto.

What I say about sending back the studies is not in the least urgent, and I mean the bad ones, which will still be useful to me as documents, or the ones which are cluttering up your apartment.

And as for what I said in general about the studies, there is just one thing I am set on: let the position be quite clear, don't make any deal for me outside your own house. As far as I am concerned, I shall either never darken the Goupil's door again, which is probable, or else I shall go in boldly, which is hardly likely.

Good-by again, and thank you for all you do for me.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 25 November 1888

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your kind letter and the 100-fr. note enclosed.

I am very glad of Gauguin's success in the matter of the continuous sale. If he could have sold enough within a year from now to execute his plan to go to settle in Martinique, I should think his fortune would be made. Only, as I see it, he oughtn't to risk returning there before he has saved 5000 francs; according to him he will need 2000. But to my mind in that case he would not go away by himself but along with another man or with other men, and would found a studio there for good and all.

But oh well, till then a lot of water will flow under the bridge.

I am greatly interested in what you write about the Dutchmen. I hope to meet both of them personally someday. How old are they? I dare hope that ultimately they will find their coming to France was a good thing.

Their having trouble with their colour - damn it - does not surprise me; may De Haan never forsake the *serious* study of Rembrandt which the two drawings I am looking at now reflect!

Have they read Silvestre's book on Eug. Delacroix, and also the article on colour in the Grammaire des arts du dessin by Ch. Blanc? Ask them this for me, and if they have not read them, let them do so still. As for me, I am thinking more of Rembrandt than might appear from my studies.

[Vincent drew a sketch of The Sower here.]

This is a sketch of the latest canvas I am working on, another Sower. Immense citron-yellow disk for the sun. Sky green-yellow with pink clouds. The field violet, the sower and the tree Prussian blue. Size 30 canvas. Let's quietly postpone exhibiting until I have some thirty size 30 canvases. Then we are going to exhibit them only once in your apartment for our friends, and even then without exercising any pressure. And don't let's do anything else.

There are quite a few reasons not to make a stir at present. It won't be for long for that matter, I think that I shall be able to send it to you around the time of the exhibition or soon after. In the meantime it will dry thoroughly here, and then I shall be able to put a finishing touch to all the canvases, once they are thoroughly dry even in the thickly painted spots.

At the age of forty when I make a picture of figures or portraits in the way I feel it, I think this will be worth more than a more or less serious success at present.

Have you see the studies that Bernard brought back from Brittany? - Gauguin told me a lot about them. He himself has one that is simply masterly. I think that buying one from Bernard would mean doing him a service, and that he really deserves it.

Only you must not forget to return to Gauguin, either at the end of the year or in March, the money he may have spent, for instance, on sheets and other things that are to remain in the studio.

I think that on all counts it will be a good thing to alter nothing, absolutely nothing, in the financial arrangement as it is fixed. If after a year things are found to be going satisfactorily, then we shall see.

Gauguin is working on a very beautiful picture of women washing, and also on a large still life of an orange-coloured pumpkin and apples and white linen on a yellow background and foreground.[Painting lost]

Here the weather is cold, notwithstanding which one sees very fine things. For instance yesterday evening an extraordinarily beautiful sunset of a mysterious, sickly citron colour - Prussian blue cypresses against trees with dead leaves in all sorts of broken tones without any speckling with bright greens.

You cannot imagine how much it pleases me that you have painters staying with you, and that you are not living all alone in your apartment, just as it pleases me very much to have such good company as Gauguin's.

I shall write again soon, and once more thanks for your kind letter.

Ever yours, Vincent

What do De Haan and Isaäcson say about Monticelli? Have they seen other pictures of his than those in your house? You know that I myself still have the pretension to continue the job that Monticelli started here.

Letter from Albert Aurier to his Mother

Paris, 29 November 1888

[Extract from a letter from Albert Aurier to his mother dated 29 November 1888.]
…which I'm sure you will have heard some talk about. A few days before this I went to dine with Durez, who had just returned from a mission in England with which he had been entrusted by the government. The other day I was present at the performance of Rolande at the Théâtre Libre. I suppose you have read the criticisms. The personages are very prolific with expressions like “God damn it” and “Go to hell.” But notwithstanding this it is very good.

I can't remember when I last had tea with Van Gogh, an expert who owns a marvellous collection of pictures and prints - and was present at…

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 4 December 1888

My dear Theo,

It's rather more than time for me to write you a collected letter for once. First of all thank you for your kind letter, also for the 100-fr. note it contained. Our days pass in working, working all the time, in the evening we are dead beat and go off to the cafe, and after that, early to bed! Such is our life.

Of course it is winter here with us too, though it's still very fine from time to time. But I do not dislike trying to work from imagination, since that allows me to stay in. It does not worry me to work in the heat of a stove, but cold does not suit me, as you know. Only I have spoiled that thing that I did of the garden in Nuenen, and I think that you also need practice for work from the imagination.

But I have made portraits of *a whole family*, that of the postman whose head I had done previously - the man, his wife, the baby, the young boy, and the son of sixteen, all of them real characters and very French, though they look like Russians. Size 15 canvases. You know how I feel about this, how I feel in my element, and that it consoles me up to a certain point for not being a doctor. I hope to get on with this and to be able to get more careful posing, paid for by portraits. And if I manage to do *this whole family* better still, at least I shall have done something to my liking and something individual. Just now I am completely swamped with studies, studies, studies, and this will go on for quite a while - it makes such a mess that it breaks my heart, and yet it will provide me with some property when I'm forty.

From time to time there's a canvas which will make a picture, such as the “Sower” in question, which I myself think better than the first.

If we can stand the siege, victory will come to us one day, in spite of our not being among the people who are talked about. It is rather a case that makes you think of the proverb - joy in public, sorrow at home.

What can you expect? Supposing that the fight is still before us, we must just try to mature quietly.

You always told me to work more for quality than quantity.

Now nothing prevents us from having a good many studies labelled as such, and consequently a whole lot of things not for sale. And if we are *obliged* to sell sooner or later, then let's sell, at a somewhat higher price, things which can hold their own from the point of view of serious effort.

I think that, in spite of myself, I shall not be able to refrain from sending you some canvases soon, say *within a month*. I say in spite of myself, for I am convinced that canvases gain by drying thoroughly here in the South until the impasto is dry all the way through, and that takes a long time, say a year. It would certainly be better if I can refrain from sending them. For there is no need to show them at the moment, I know that well enough.

Gauguin works a lot. I very much like a still life, background and foreground yellow; he is working on a portrait of me which I do not count among his useless undertakings; just now he is doing some landscapes; and lastly, he has a good canvas of women washing, even very good I think.

You were to get two drawings from Gauguin in return for the 50 francs you sent him in Brittany. But Mother Bernard has simply appropriated them. Speaking of stories without a name, this really is one. I think that she will give them up in the end. Mind you, in my opinion, Bernard's things are very fine, and he will have deserved success in Paris.

Very interesting, your meeting Chatrian.

Is he fair or dark? I want to know that, since I know the two portraits.

Of their work, I like *Mme.* Thérèse and L'Ami Fritz especially. I think there is more to find fault with in the Histoire d'un sous-maître than I thought possible before.

I think that we shall end up spending our evenings drawing and writing, there is more work than we can manage.

You know that Gauguin is invited to exhibit at the “Vingtistes.” He is already imagining settling in Brussels, and that certainly would be a means towards his being able to see his Danish wife again.

Since in the meantime he is very successful with the Arlésiennes, I should not consider this entirely insignificant. He is married but he doesn't look it very much. In short, I fear that there is an absolute incompatibility of character between his wife and him, but he naturally cares more for his children, who are very pretty according to the portraits.

We aren't so gifted in that respect. Good-by for now. A handshake for you and the Dutchmen.

Vincent

Gauguin will write you tomorrow, he is waiting for a reply to his letter and sends you his good wishes.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 23 December 1888

My dear Theo,

Thank you very much for your letter, for the 100 Fr. note enclosed and also for the 50 Fr. money order.

I think myself that Gauguin was a little out of sorts with the good town of Arles, the little yellow house where we work, and especially with me. [Gauguin had written to Theo that Vincent and he could not go on living together “in consequence of incompatibility of temper.” The quarrel was made up, and Gauguin wrote another letter, speaking of the first as a bad dream.]

As a matter of fact there are bound to be for him as for me further grave difficulties to overcome here.

But these difficulties are rather within ourselves than outside.

Altogether I think that either he will definitely go, or else definitely stay.

Before doing anything I told him to think it over and reckon things up again.

Gauguin is very powerful, strongly creative, but just because of that he must have peace.

Will he find it anywhere if he does not find it here?

I am waiting for him to make a decision with absolute serenity.

A good handshake,

Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 2nd half December 1888

My dear Theo,
Gauguin and I went yesterday to Montpellier to see the museum there and especially the Brias room. [Alfred Bruyas (or Brias) had left his personal collection to the Museum.] There are a lot of portraits of Brias, by Delacroix, Ricard, Courbet, Cabanel, Couture, Verdier, Tassaert, and others. Then there are pictures by Delacroix, Courbet, Giotto, Paul Potter, Botticelli, Th. Rousseau, very fine. Brias was a benefactor of artists, I shall say no more to you than that. In the portrait by Delacroix he is a gentleman with red beard and hair, confoundedly like you or me, and made me think of that poem by de Musset - "*Partout ou j'ai touché la terre - un malheureux vétu de noir, auprès de nous venait s'asseoir, qui regardait comme un frère*." [Wherever I touched the earth, a wretch clad in black came and sat by us, looking at us like a brother.] It would have the same effect on you. I am sure. Please do go to that bookshop where they sell the lithographs by past and present artists, and see if you could get, not too dear, the lithograph after Delacroix's "Tasso in the Madhouse," since I think the figure there must have some affinity with this fine portrait of Brias.

They have got some more Delacroixs, the study of a "Mulatto Woman" (which Gauguin copied once), the "Odalisques," "Daniel in the Lions' Den"; and by Courbet: first, the "Village Girls," magnificent, a woman seen from behind, another lying on the ground in a landscape, second, the "Woman Spinning," superb, and a whole heap more of Courbet's. But after all, you must know this collection exists, or else know people who have seen it, and consequently be able to talk about it. So I shan't say more about the museum (except the Barye drawings and bronzes).

Gauguin and I talked a lot about Delacroix, Rembrandt, *etc.* Our arguments are *terribly electric*, we come out of them sometimes with our heads as exhausted as an electric battery after it has run down. We were in the midst of magic, for as Fromentin well says: Rembrandt is above all else a magician.

I tell you this in connection with our Dutch friends de Haan and Isaäcson, who have so sought after and loved Rembrandt so as to encourage you all to pursue your researches.

You must not be discouraged in them.

You know the strange and magnificent "Portrait of a Man," by Rembrandt, in the Lacaze Gallery. I said to Gauguin that I myself saw in it a certain likeness in family or in race to Delacroix or to Gauguin himself, I do not know why, but I always call this portrait “The Traveller,” or “The Man Come from Far.” It is a similar and parallel idea to the one I've already spoken to you about, that I always look on the portrait of old Six, the fine portrait of the “Man with a Glove,” as you in the future, and the etching by Rembrandt, “Six reading near a window in a shaft of sunlight,” as you in the past and present. This is how things stand. Gauguin was saying to me this morning when I asked him how he felt “that he felt his old self coming back,” which gave me enormous pleasure. When I came here myself last winter, tired out and almost stunned in mind, before ever being able to begin to recover I had a strain of inward suffering too.

I do wish that some day you could see this Montpellier Museum - there are some very fine things.

Say to Degas that Gauguin and I have been to see the portrait of Brias by Delacroix at Montpellier, for we must make bold to believe that *what it is*, and the portrait of Brias by Delacroix is as like you and me as a new brother.

As for founding a way of life for artists chumming it together, you see such queer things, and I will wind up with what you are always saying - time will show. You can say all that to our friends Isaäcson and de Haan, and even boldly read them this letter. I should have written to them already if I had felt the necessary electric force.

A good hearty handshake all round from Gauguin as from me.

Ever yours,

Vincent

If you should be thinking that Gauguin and I have facility in our work, I assure you that work does not always come easy, and that our Dutch friends may get no more discouraged than we do in their difficulties is my wish both for them and for you.

Letter from Joseph Roulin to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 26 December 1888

Arles, 26th December 1888
Monsieur Gogh,
I have been to see your brother Vincent. I promised to tell you what I thought of him. I am sorry to tell you that I think he is lost. Not only is his mind affected, but also he is very weak and despondent. He recognized me but did not show any pleasure at seeing me and didn't ask about any member of my family nor anyone else that he knows. When I left him I told him that I would come back to see him; he replied that we would meet again in heaven, and from his manner I understand that he was saying a prayer. From what the porter told me, I think that they are taking the necessary steps to have him placed in a mental hospital.

Please accept, Monsieur, the greetings of him who calls himself the friend of your beloved brother.

Roulin, Joseph.
Entrepeneur des Postes
Rue de la Montagne du Cordes, 10
Arles sur Rhone

My family sends their greetings to M. Paul Gauguin.

Letter from Joseph Roulin to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 December 1888

Monsieur Gogh,

I should have liked to have had the honour of announcing an improvement in your brother's health.

Unfortunately, I can't. Yesterday, Thursday, my wife went to see him, and he hid his face when he saw her coming. When she spoke to him, he replied well enough, and talked to her about our little girl, and asked if she was still as pretty as ever. Today, Friday, I went there but could not see him. The intern and the attendant told me that after my wife left, he had had a terrible attack; he had a very bad night, and they had to put him in an isolated room. Since he has been locked in this room, he has eaten no food and utterly refused to talk. That is the exact state of your brother at present.

The intern has told me that the doctor has for a few days postponed the decision to have him placed in a mental hospital in Aix.

Please, Monsieur, accept my sincere greetings.

Roulin, Joseph

Letter from Félix Rey to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 29 December 1888

Arles, 29 December 1888
Monsieur,

I hasten to respond to your letter and to give you the latest on the state of your brother.

I will first of all tell you that it is very difficult to definitively answer all the questions that you ask me. I will, however, give you my personal appreciation. The Protestant pastor M. Salles came to find me this evening, and we went to visit him. He was very calm and it appeared that all was well. When he saw me entering his room he told me that he wanted to have the least possible contact with me. Without a doubt he thought it was I who had locked him up. I have assured him that I am a friend to him and I want to see him well again very soon. I didn't hide the situation from him and explained to him why he was isolated in a room. I told him that his attacks didn't allow us to let him in the wards among our other patients. We talked a good while and we parted as good friends. He begged me to write to you and give you all the news; something he wouldnýt have done at the start of our interview. When I tried to talk to him about the motive that had driven him to cut his ear; he answered me that it was quite a personal business.

In summary, I find that his state is a bit better and I donýt think his life is in danger, at least for the moment. He is eating well enough and his physical strength allows him to weather his attacks. My appreciation is that he will be healed shortly, while retaining this great excitability that is the basis of his character. We will take care of him here for the moment, both for his ear and his not quite sound mental state. His injury is healing and it doesn't give us any concern.

A few days ago we wrote out a certificate of mental alienation. The mayor has signed a decree leaving him temporarily in the care of the hospital while waiting for his transfer to an asylum. During this time the police commissioner will make his inquest, then the prefect will issue the order to take him to Aix or to Marseille.

I was myself an intern in this latter city a few months ago, and I would be happy to recommend him to the colleague who replaced me, who is one of my good friends.

Nevertheless, I will take the liberty to ask you a question and give you some advice. Would you rather have your brother in an asylum close to Paris? Can you afford it? If yes; you should go and find one quickly: his state will certainly allow him to make the journey. This business has not gone so far that it cannot be stopped and for the commissioner to cancel his report. This is all the advice that I have to give you on your poor brother.

You ask me for my appreciation; I have given it to you for what it is worth.

Since I also have a brother I would be delighted to give you any news; also I have lived away from my family. In some months time I will be going to Paris for my doctorate thesis; I would be glad if someone looked out for me during my ordeal.

Please accept Monsieur, the assurance of my best regards.

Rey Félix.

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 31 December 1888

Salles 1 to Theo
Eglise Réformée d'Arles (Bouches-du-Rhône),
9, Rue de la Rotonde, Arles.

31 December 1888

Monsieur,

I am going to give you news of your brother. I have just seen him, and found him calm, in a state which does not show anything abnormal with him. Unfortunately, as a result of the insane act which required his admission to the hospital and the more than strange behaviour that he showed in that establishment, the doctors found it necessary to isolate him and place him in an isolated room which they can keep locked. It is their opinion that he must be transferred to a lunatic asylum and they have made a report to this effect to the Mayor. This report will cause an inquiry and the result will be sent to the Prefect, who will probably order your brother's transfer to Marseilles or Aix.

I wanted to warn you of what is going on with respect to your brother, something of which he himself seems to fully understand. I repeat, I found him talking calmly and not raving any more than anyone else. He is amazed, even indignant (which could be sufficient to start another attack) that they keep him shut up in this way, and that they completely deprive him of his liberty.He would like to leave the hospital and go back home. 'I think that I am quite capable of taking up my work again,' he told me. 'Why then are they keeping me here like a prisoner?'

He spoke to me of you and told me how much it astonished him that you had not written to him since you left. I promised him I would give you his news tonight. He would even have liked to send you a telegram to make you come here. I left him deeply saddened, and regretting that I was not able to bring any alleviation to his situation.

I am entirely at your service and pray you, Sir, to believe me, your very devoted in Christ. Salles.

Arles, 2nd January 1889

My Dear Theo,

So as to reassure you completely on my account, I write to you these few lines in the office of the intern, M. Rey, whom you have yourself met. I shall stay here at the hospital for a few more days, then I think I can count on quietly returning to the house.

Now I only beg of you one thing, not to worry, because that would cause me *too much* of a worry.

Now, let's talk about our friend Gauguin, have I terrified him? In short, why hasn't he given me any sign of life? He must have left with you. Besides, he had a need to return to Paris, and in Paris perhaps, he will feel more at home than here. Tell Gauguin to write to me, and that I think about him all the time.

A good handshake, I have read and re-read your letter about your meeting with the Bongers. It is perfect. As for me, I am content to stay just as I am.

Again a good handshake to you and Gauguin.

Vincent

Write to me still at the same address, Place Lamartine, 2.

[Added to this letter was a note from Dr. Rey]

I add a few words to your brother's letter to reassure you, in my turn, on his account.

I am happy to tell you that my predictions have been realized and that this over-excitement has only been temporary. I strongly feel that he will be himself in a few days. I have made a point of his writing to you himself, to tell you in his own words his condition. I made him come down to my office to talk for a bit. It will entertain me and it will do him good.

Please accept my kind regards, I am, yours very truly,

Rey

At this time, Vincent was 35 year old

Source:

Vincent van Gogh. Letter to Theo van Gogh. Written 2 January 1889 in Arles. Translated by Mrs. Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, edited by Robert Harrison, number 567.

URL: http://webexhibits.org/vangogh/letter/19/567.htm.

This letter may be freely used, in accordance with the terms of this site.

1889

Letter from Joseph Roulin to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 3 January 1889

Roulin 3 to Theo,

3 January 1889

Monsieur Gogh,
I am happy to confirm the telegram I sent you today, in which I told you that my friend Vincent has completely recovered; he will leave the hospital one of these days to return to his house. Do not worry, he is better than before that unfortunate accident happened to him. At present he can move freely about the hospital; we walked for over an hour in the courtyard; he is in a very healthy state of mind. I do not know how to explain the severe measures that were taken to keep him from seeing his best friends.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 4 January 1889

[Written in pencil]
My dear brother,
I hope that Gauguin will completely reassure you, and a bit about the painting business too.
I expect to begin work again soon.

The charwoman and my friend Roulin had taken care of the house, and have put everything in order.

When I come out I shall be able to take my little road here again, and soon the fine weather will be coming and I shall recommence on the orchards in bloom.

My dear brother, I am so terribly *distressed* at your journey. I should have wished you had been spared that, for after all no harm came to me, and there was no reason why you should put yourself to that trouble.

I cannot tell you how glad I am that you have made peace, and even more than that, with the Bongers.

Say that to André from me, and give him a very cordial handshake from me.

What would I not have given for you to have seen Arles when it was fine, as it is you have seen it in black [looking dismal].

However, keep good heart, address letters direct to me at Place Lamartine 2. I will send Gauguin's pictures that are still at the house as soon as he wishes. We owe him the money that he spent on the furniture.

A handshake, I must go back to hospital, but shall soon be out for good.

Yours,

Vincent

Write a line to Mother too for me, so that no-one will be worried.

Written on the back:

My dear friend Gauguin, I take the opportunity of my first outing from the hospital to write you a couple of words of my profound and sincere friendship.

I have often thought of you in the hospital and even in full fever and relative weakness.

Tell me - was my brother Theo's trip necessary - my friend?

Now, at least, completely reassure everyone, and I pray you yourself to have confidence that, all in all, nothing bad exists in this best of worlds where everything is always for the best.

Then, I would like you to give my kind regards to the good Schoeffenecker [Schuffenecker], that you refrain until more mature reflection on both our parts, from speaking ill of our poor little yellow house, that you give my respects to the painters that I saw in Paris.

I wish you prosperity in Paris, with a good handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Roulin has been truly good to me, it is he who had had the presence of mind to make me get out of there before the others were convinced.

Letter from Joseph Roulin to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 4 January 1889

Roulin 4 to Theo

4 January 1889

Monsieur Gogh,
I am truly happy today. I went to the hospital to get my friend Vincent and take him for a little fresh air. We went to the house, he was pleased to see his paintings again; we stayed four hours; he has completely recovered, it is really surprising. I am very sorry my first letters were so alarming, and beg your pardon for it. I am glad to say I have been mistaken in his lot. He only regrets all the trouble he has given you, and is sorry for the anxiety he has caused. Don't worry; I will do all I can to give him some distraction; one of these days he will leave the hospital and go back to his paintings. That is all he thinks of, he is a sweet as a lamb.

The intern was rather uneasy about letting him go, so I told him that I would take it upon myself to accompany him and bring him back to the hospital. By the time you receive my letter, I shall be with him again to spend some hours together. The intern and Vincent have agreed to meet me tomorrow at the Café Ginoux so that he can show his paintings.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to His Parents

Arles, 7 January 1889

Dear Mother and Sister,

For several weeks already I have firmly intended to write you a word or two to wish you a truly prosperous and Happy New Year. Well, I am pretty late in doing this.

I think you may feel inclined to excuse me if I tell you that in December I was indisposed.

But at the same time I can inform you that I have completely recovered, and am at work again, and everything is normal.

Although it is winter here too, and, what is worse, part of the country is flooded, at times we have a good deal milder weather than you do in Holland. Be so kind as to take good note of the fact that I am writing you these few words, in case Theo has told you about my having been indisposed for a while. However, I hope he understood of his own accord that it was not worth troubling to inform you of it.

But so that there may be no worrying on your part, nor even any question of it, I am writing you myself.

For this very reason I have postponed answering Jet Mauve's letter, which, however, I hope to do shortly; and at the same time I thank Wil kindly for her last letter.

My having been unwell has provided the opportunity for getting acquainted with quite a number of people, and I think it's probable that I shall have to do a number of portraits.

I so much hope everything is all right with you all, especially your health. As for myself, my having been indisposed for a few days has in fact refreshed me considerably, and I think there is a chance that there will be nothing the matter with me for a long time to come.

Meanwhile I shall be very pleased to get a letter from you one of these days. Although it is still rather a thing of the future, I suppose you are often thinking of Theo's intended visit to you. I should not be greatly surprised if he went a little earlier than usual this year, that is *before* the exhibition instead of after.

But all the same he will have to act according to circumstances.

I could not help thinking of you rather often these days, be assured of that, and believe me, Yours lovingly, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 7 January 1889

My dear Theo,

I hope it will not amaze you too much that though I wrote you a letter this morning, I add a few lines the same evening.

For there were several days when I could not write, but you see clearly that this is over now.

I have written a note to Mother and Wil and *addressed it to our sister*, with the sole intention of setting their minds at rest in case you have said anything about my having been ill.

Just tell them on your part that I have been a bit beat, the way I used to be in the past, when I had that venereal trouble in The Hague, and that I got myself looked after in the hospital. Only that it is not worth mentioning since I have completely recovered, and that I was only in the aforesaid hospital for a few days. In this way your information will square with the note which I have made them swallow at home in Holland. And by so doing, it will be very difficult for them to get into a stew about it. I hope you will think this stratagem innocent enough.

Also you will see by this that I have not yet forgotten how to jest once in a while.

I am going to set to work again tomorrow. I shall begin by doing one or two still lifes so as to get back into the habit of painting. Roulin has been splendid to me, and I dare say that the will remain a lasting friend. I shall have need enough of that still, for he knows the country well.

We had our dinner together today.

If ever you want to make the house surgeon Rey *very happy*, this is what would please him hugely. He has heard of a picture by Rembrandt, the “Anatomy Lesson.” I told him that we would get him the engraving after it for his study.

As soon as I feel somewhat up to it, I hope to do his portrait. Last Sunday I met another doctor, who knows his Delacroix and Puvis de Chavannes at least theoretically, and who is very curious about impressionism.

I think I can hope to become better acquainted with him.

I think that that engraving of the “Anatomy Lesson” is stocked by François Buffa & Sons, and that the net price should be from 12 to 15 francs. We had better have it framed here to save the cost of transportation.

I assure you that some days at the hospital were very interesting, and perhaps it is from the sick that one learns how to live.

I hope I have just had simply an artist's fit, and then a lot of fever after *very* considerable loss of blood, as an artery was severed; but my appetite came back at once, my digestion is all right and my blood recovers from day to day, and in the same way serenity returns to my brain day by day. So please quite deliberately forget your unhappy journey and my illness.

You see that I am doing what you asked, and writing you what I feel and think. On your part follow this meeting with the Bongers up quietly. I hope it will continue as a lasting friendship, and that perhaps it will be even more.

If I stay here, it is because for the moment I might not be able to transplant myself. After some time we can go over the pros and cons of the situation and figure things out again.

With a good handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 7 January 1889

My dear Theo,
Perhaps I shall not write you a very long letter today, but anyway a line to let you know that I got back home today. I do so regret that you had all that trouble for such a trifle. Forgive me, who am after all probably the primary cause of it all. I did not foresee that it would be important enough for you to be told of it. Enough… M. Rey came to see the paintings with two of his friends, doctors, and they were uncommonly quick at understanding at least what complementaries are. I now intend to do a portrait of M. Rey and possibly other portraits as soon as I am a little used to painting again.

Thanks for your last letter. Indeed, I always feel your presence, but do realise on your side too that I am working at the same thing as yourself.

How I wish you had seen the portrait of Brias by Delacroix and the whole Montpellier Musée where Gauguin took me. Since others before us have worked in the South, indeed it is rather difficult for me to believe that we are so far astray as all that. As for it's being a hot country, my word, I can't help thinking of a certain country Voltaire talks of, not to mention the simple "castles in the air." These are the thoughts which occur to me as I come back to my own home.

I am very anxious to know how the Bongers are and if the relations with them continue. I hope so.

If you agree - now that Gauguin has gone - we will put the money back again at 150 fr. I think that now I shall see calmer days here than in the past year.

What I greatly need for my better information are all the reproductions of Delacroix's pictures that are still available at that shop where they sell, I think at a franc apiece, lithographs after artists, ancient and modern, *etc.* I *most certainly* don't want the more expensive ones.

How are our Dutch friends De Haan and Isaäcson? Give them my very kind regards.

Only I think that we must still keep quiet with regard to my own painting. If you want any pictures, certainly I can send you some already, but when my peace of mind comes back to me, I hope to do different things. However, as to the Independents, do what seems best to you, and what the others do.

But you have no idea how much I regret that your journey to Holland has not yet come off.

After all, we cannot alter what has happened, but make up for it yourself by letter, or any way you can, as far as possible, and tell the Bongers how I regret having involuntarily caused this delay. I shall be writing Mother and Wil one of these days, and I must also write Jet Mauve.

Write me soon, and set your mind at rest about my health. It will completely cure me to know that things are going well with you. What is Gauguin doing? As his family are in the North, and he has been invited to exhibit in Belgium and now has some success in Paris, I like to think that he has landed on his feet. A good handshake. In spite of everything I am terribly happy that this is a thing of the *past*. Once more a good hearty handshake.

Ever Yours, Vincent

Letter from Joseph Roulin to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, 7 January 1889

Miss Van Gogh,
I acknowledge receipt of your kind letter, by which you do me too much honour, and I make haste to answer you that your amiable brother Vincent has quite recovered; he left the asylum today, the 7th inst. What caused my reply to be postponed for twenty-four hours is the fact that we kept each other company all day long, and I beg you to write him a letter. I have not let him read your letter, for he would be too chagrined to know that he has caused you so much grief. When you write him, please do not let him know that you are informed of the causes of his distemper, and tell him that you have learned through the mediation of your brother in Paris that he has been indisposed, and that you are very happy to hear that he has recovered.

We talked at great length about you as well as about your mother today.

Many thanks for the good wishes you expressed with regard to my wife and our little girl. Please set your mind quite at ease as to the health of my good friend Vincent; I go to see him as often as my work permits and if something should happen again, I should inform you as soon as possible.

I do not think I deserve all the words of gratitude which you address to me, but I shall always do my utmost to deserve the esteem of my friend Vincent as well as of those who are dear to him.

Please give my respectful regards, along with those of my family, to Madame your mother.

I beg you, Miss, to accept the sincere regards of the friend of your worthy brother Vincent.

Joseph Roulin
Post Office Agent

10 Rue de la Montagne des Cordes

Arles sur Rhône
Bouches du Rhône

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 9 January 1889

My dear Theo,
Even before receiving (this very moment) your kind letter, I had had a letter this morning from your fiancée announcing the engagement. So I have already sent her my sincere congratulations in reply, and herewith I repeat them to you.

My fear that my indisposition might prevent you from making that very necessary journey which I had so much and so long hoped for, now that this fear has disappeared, I feel myself quite normal again.

This morning I was again at the hospital to get another dressing, and I walked for an hour and a half with the house surgeon, and we talked a bit about everything, even about natural history.

What you tell me about Gauguin gives me tremendous pleasure, that is to say that he has not given up his project of returning to the tropics. That is the right road for him. I think I see light in his plan, and I approve of it heartily. Naturally I regret it, but you understand that provided all goes well with him, that is all I want.

If you can, get to talk a little to C. M. about the future of his business, and whethter his son will be able to keep it going as long as C. M. himself has; he should even make it his duty to listen to you. And C. M., together with his son, should try to keep the house founded by him going - didn't he introduce into Holland all the artists who were not with the Goupil's etc., etc?

Then Tersteeg must admit the impressionists, or at least believe in Eug. Delacroix, and then Tersteeg and you would give yourselves a very strong hand which Boussod would have to count on.

What is the `89 Exhibition going to be? Don't forget the “Anatomy Lesson” for M. Rey. He had already told me before this morning that he was fond of painting, though he knew nothing about it, and that he wished to learn. I told him he ought to turn *collector*, but that he should not try to paint himself. That means that perhaps we shall find two friends in the doctors here, Rey and the Paris doctor, of whom I have spoken before.

I told them that Brias of Montpellier had a certain family likeness to *us*, and that therefore we were only continuing in the South what Monticelli and Brias began.

I have had to pay quite a number of things on leaving the hospital, and though

I am in no sort of a hurry for several days, it would be nice if you could send me 50 francs or so within the next few days.

I think the mistake in old Gauguin's calculations was that he is rather too much in the habit of ignoring the inevitable expenses of house rent, charwoman, and a lot of worldly things of the kind. Now all those things are weighing more on *our* shoulders, but once we have accepted them, other artists could stay with me without having those expenses.

They have just told me that during my absence the owner of my house here made an arrangement with a fellow who has a tobacco shop to turn me out and give this tobacconist the house.

This has rather upset me, for I am not much disposed to have myself turned out of this house practically in disgrace when it was I who had it repainted inside and out, and had gas put in, *etc.* - in fact, who had made habitable a house which had been shut up and uninhabited for a considerable time, and which I took in a very poor condition. This is to warn you that perhaps at Easter, if the owner persists, I shall ask your advice about it, and that in all this I only consider myself a representative defending the interest of our artist friends. Besides, between now and then it is more than likely that a good deal of water will have gone under the bridge.

And the great thing is not to worry about it. Has Bernard given you back Silvestre's book? I shall need the exact title to make the doctors in question read the book.

Physically I am well, the wound is healing very well and the great loss of blood is being made up, because I eat and digest well. What is *to be feared* most is insomnia, and the doctor has not spoken about it to me, nor have I spoken of it to him either. But I am fighting it myself.

I fight this insomnia by a very, very strong dose of camphor in my pillow and mattress, and if ever you can't sleep, I recommend this to you. I was very much afraid of sleeping alone in the house, and I have been afraid I should not be able to sleep. But that is quite over and I dare to think that it will not reappear. My suffering from this in the hospital was frightful and yet through it all, even when I was so far gone that it was more than a swoon, I can tell you as a curiosity that I kept on thinking about Degas. Gauguin and I had been talking about Degas before, and I had pointed out to Gauguin that Degas had said …

“I am saving myself up for the Arlésiennes.”

Now you know how subtle Degas is, so when you get back to Paris, just tell Degas that I admit that up to the present I have been powerless to paint the women of Arles as anything but poisonous, and that he must not believe Gauguin if Gauguin speaks well of my work too early, for it has only been a sick man's so far.

Now if I recover, I must *begin again*, and I shall not again reach the heights to which sickness partially led me.

I should have liked very much to give another picture to Rivet, just because I quite agree with you that it would be well to put M. Rey in touch with Rivet.

But you could quite well tell Rivet that it would be a good thing to send M. Rey back here to the hospital with the doctor's degree he is trying to get.

He is very, very useful here and they will be desperately in need of a doctor here at Arles in the time to come, with cholera and the plague, etc., continuing so threatening in the region of Marseilles. Now Rey was born here, and would be no use in Paris or elsewhere, whereas once furnished with the full medical authority of Paris, he would do real miracles here in a time of calamity.

Certainly we have no right to meddle in medical affairs. Only Rivet himself will perhaps be of the same opinion, at any rate in so far as an Arlesien is not a Parisian and vice versa.

Did you stop at Breda? Naturally I am inclined to think so. Reassure mother especially with regard to me.

Have you seen the portrait of me which Gauguin has, and have you seen the portrait which Gauguin did of himself during those last few days?

If you compare the self-portrait Gauguin did then with the one that I still have of him, which he sent me from Brittany in exchange for mine, you will see that on the whole he himself got rested here.

What has become of Haan and Isaäcson? I did hope vaguely to see them here one day if Gauguin had stayed longer with me, and with this in mind I had even taken two little rooms which were going to be vacant in the house, which I am now occupying completely (the rent is 21.50 a month). I dare not urge this any more, seeing that Gauguin has gone, and especially considering that the journey South costs a good deal.

Give them my kind regards when you see them again. Roulin wants to be remembered to you. He was very pleased with what you said of him in your letter of today, but then he fully deserves it. With a handshake, and of course you know how I wish you happy days with your fiancée.

Ever Yours, Vincent

Regards to André Bonger if he is there too.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 17 January 1889

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your kind letter and also for the 50-franc note it contained. Even though you yourself might be able to answer all the questions at the moment, I do not feel capable of it. I want very much, after consideration, to find some solution, but I must read your letter again, *etc.*

But, before discussing what I might spend or not spend during a complete year, it might help us to go into the expenses of the current month alone.

It has been altogether lamentable in every way, and I should certainly count myself lucky, if at last you would give some serious attention to the way things are now and have been for a long time.

But what is to be done? It is unfortunately complicated by lots of things, my pictures are valueless, they cost me, it is true, an extraordinary amount, even in blood and brains at times perhaps. I won't harp on it, and what am I to say to you about it?

Meanwhile, let's get back to the present month and not talk of anything but money.

On December 23 I still had in hand one louis and 3 sous. The same day I received from you the 100-franc note.

These are the expenses:

Given to Roulin to pay the charwoman for the month of December 20 frs.

The same for the first fortnight in January 10 frs.

Paid to the hospital 21 frs.

Paid to the attendants who dressed the wound 10 frs.

On my return paid for a table, a gas heater, etc, which had been lent me and which I had taken on account 20 frs.

Paid for having all the bedding washed, the bloodstained linen, *etc.* 12.50 frs.

Various purchases like a dozen brushes, a hat, etc., etc., say 10 frs.

So on the day or the day after I came out of the hospital, we have already arrived at a forced expenditure on my part of 103.50 francs, to which must be added that on that first day I had a joyous dinner with Roulin at the restaurant, quite cheerful and with no dread of renewed suffering.

In short, the result of all this was that by the 8th I was broke. But a day or two later I borrowed 5 francs. That barely takes us to the 10th. I hoped for a letter from you about the 10th, but, this letter did not arrive till today, January 17th, the time between has been a most rigorous fast, the more painful because I cannot recover under such conditions.

I have nevertheless started work again, and I already have three studies in the studio, besides the portrait of Dr. Rey, which I gave him as a keepsake. So there is no worse harm done this time than a little more suffering and its attendant wretchedness. And I keep on hoping. But I feel weak and rather uneasy and frightened. That will pass, I hope, as I get back my strength.

Rey told me that being very impressionable was enough to account for the attack that I had, and that I was really only anaemic, but that I really must feed myself up. But I took the liberty of saying to M. Rey that if the first thing for me was to get back my strength, and if by pure chance or misunderstanding it had just happened that I had had to keep a strict fast for a week - whether he had seen many madman in similar circumstances fairly quiet and able to work; if not, would he then be good enough to remember occasionally that for the moment I am not yet mad.

Now considering that all the house was upset by this occurrence, and all the linen and my clothes soiled, is there anything improper or extravagant or exorbitant in these payments? If I paid what was *owing* to people almost as poor as myself as soon as I got back, did I do wrong, or could I have been more economical? Now today on the seventeenth I at last received 50 francs. Out of that I am paying first the five francs borrowed from the patron at the café and the ten meals taken on credit during the course of last week, which makes 7.50 francs.

I also have to pay for the linen brought back from the hospital and then for this last week, and for shoe repairs and a pair of trousers, certainly altogether something like 5 frs.

Wood and coal owing for December and to be bought again, not less than 4 frs.

Charwoman, 2nd fortnight in January 10 frs.

______

26.50 frs.

Net amount left me tomorrow morning after settling this bill 23.50 frs.

It is now the seventeenth, there are still thirteen days to go.

Ask yourself how much I can spend in a day? I have to add that you sent 30 francs to Roulin, out of which he paid the 21.50 rent for December.

There, my dear boy, are the accounts for this present month. It is not over.

Now we come to the expenses caused you by Gauguin's telegram, which I have already expressly reproached him for sending.

Are the expenses thus mistakenly incurred less than 200 francs? Does Gauguin himself claim that it was a brilliant step to take? Look here, I won't say more about the absurdity of this measure, suppose that I was as wild as anything, then why wasn't our illustrious partner more collected?

But I shan't press that point.

I cannot commend you enough for paying Gauguin in such a way that he can only congratulate himself on any dealings he has had with us. Unfortunately there again is another expenditure perhaps greater than it should have been, yet I catch a glimpse of hope in it. Must he not, or at least should he not, begin to see that we were not exploiting him, but on the contrary were anxious to secure him a living, the possibility of work and…and…of decency?

If that does not obtain the heights of the grandiose prospectuses for the association of artists which he proposed, and you know how he clings to it, if it does not attain the heights of his other castles in the air - then why not consider him as not responsible for the trouble and waste which his blindness may have caused both you and me?

If at present this theory seems too bold to you, I do not insist on it, but we shall see.

He has had experience in what he calls “banking in Paris” and thinks himself clever at it. Perhaps you and I are not curious at all in this respect.

In any case this is not altogether in contradiction with some passages in our previous correspondence.

If Gauguin stayed in Paris for a while to examine himself thoroughly, or have himself examined by a specialist, I don't honestly know what the result might be.

On various occasions I have seen him do things which you and I would not let ourselves do, because we have consciences that feel differently about things. I have heard one or two things said of him, but having seen him at very, very close quarters, I think that he is carried away by his imagination, perhaps by pride, but…practically irresponsible.

This conclusion does not imply that I advise you to pay very much attention to what he says on any occasion. But I see that you have acted with higher ideals in the matter of settling his bill, and so I think that we need not fear that he will involve us in the errors of the “Bank of Paris.”

But as for him…Lord, let him do anything he wants, let him have his independence?? (whatever he means by that) and his opinions, and let him go his own way as soon as he thinks he knows it better than we do.

I think it is rather strange that he claims a picture of sunflowers from me, offering me in exchange, I suppose, or as a gift, some studies he left here. I will send him back his studies which will probably be useful to him, which they certainly won't be to me.

But for the moment I am keeping my canvases here and I am definitely keeping my sunflowers in question.

He has two of them already, let that hold him.

And if he is not satisfied with the exchange he has made with me, he can take back his little Martinique canvas, and his self-portrait sent me from Brittany, at the same time giving me back both my portrait and the two sunflower canvases which he has taken to Paris. So if he ever broaches this subject again, I've told you just how matters stand.

How can Gauguin pretend that he was afraid of upsetting me by his presence, when he can hardly deny that he knew I kept asking for him continually, and that he was told over and over again that I insisted on seeing him at once.

Just to tell him that we should keep it between him and me, without upsetting you. He would not listen.

It worries me to go over all this and recapitulate such things over and over again.

In this letter I have tried to show you the difference between my net expenses, directly my own, and those for which I am less responsible.

I have been miserable because just at this moment you have had this expense, which did no one any good.

Whatever happens, I shall see my strength come back little by little if I can stick it out here. I do so dread a change or move just because of the fresh expense. I have been unable to get a breathing spell for a long time now. I am not giving up work, because there are moments when it is really getting on, and I believe that with patience the goal will at last be reached, that the pictures will pay back the money invested in making them.

Roulin is about to leave, as early as the 21st. He is to be employed in Marseilles. The increase in pay is microscopic, and he will be obliged to leave his wife and children for a time; they will not be able to follow him till much later, because the expenses of a whole family will be heavier in Marseilles.

It is a promotion for him, but it is a poor consolation that the Government gives such an employee after so many years work.

And in point of fact, I believe that both he and his wife are heart broken. Roulin has often kept me company during the last week. I quite agree with you that we mustn't meddle with medical questions, which do not at all concern us.

Just because you wrote a line to M. Rey saying that you would give him introductions in Paris, I understood you to mean Rivet. I did not think I was doing anything to compromise you by telling M. Rey that if he went to Paris, I'd be pleased if he took a picture to M. Rivet as a keepsake from me.

Of course I did not mention anything else, but what I did say was that I myself should always regret not being a doctor, and that those who think painting is beautiful would do well to see nothing in it but a study of nature.

It will always be a pity, in spite of everything, that Gauguin and I were perhaps too quick to give up the question of Rembrandt and light which we had broached. Are De Haan and Isaäcson still there? Don't let them get discouraged. After my illness my eyes have naturally been very sensitive. I have been looking at that “Croque-mort” [undertaker] of De Haans, which he was good enough to send me the photograph of. Well, it seems to me that there is a real touch of Rembrandt in that figure, which seems to be lit up by the reflection of a light coming from the open tomb in front of which the croque-mort is standing like a sleepwalker.

It is done with great subtlety. I myself do not try to get effects by means of charcoal, and De Haan has taken for his medium this very charcoal, again a colourless substance.

I should like De Haan to see a study of mine of a lighted candle and two novels (one yellow, the other pink) lying on an empty chair (really Gauguin's chair), a size 30 canvas, in red and green. I have just been working again today on its pendant, my own empty chair, a white deal chair with a pipe and a tobacco pouch. In these two studies, as in others, I have tried for an effect of light by means of clear colour, probably De Haan would understand exactly what I was trying to get if you read to him what I have written on the subject.

Although this letter is already very long, since I have tried to analyse the month's expenses and complained a bit of the queer phenomenon of Gauguin's behaviour in choosing not to speak to me again and clearing out, there are still some things that I must add in praise of him.

One good quality he has is the marvellous way he can apportion expenses from day to day.

While I am often absent-minded, preoccupied with aiming at *the goal*, he has far more money sense for each separate day than I have. But his weakness is that by a sudden freak or animal impulse he upsets everything he has arranged.

Now do you stay at your post once you have taken it, or do you desert it? I do not judge anyone in this, hoping not to be condemned myself in cases when my strength might fail me, but if Gauguin has so much real virtue, and such capacity for charity, how is he going to employ himself?

As for me, I have ceased to be able to follow his actions, and I give it up in silence, but with a questioning note all the same.

From time to time he and I have exchanged ideas about French art, and impressionism...

It seems to me impossible, or at least pretty improbable, that impressionism will organize and steady itself now.

Why shouldn't what happened in England at the time of the Pre-Raphaelites happen here?

The union broke up.

Perhaps I take all these things too much to heart and perhaps they sadden me too much. Has Gauguin ever read Tartarin in the Alps, and does he remember Tartarin's illustrious companion from Tarascon, who had such imagination that he imagined in a flash a complete imaginary Switzerland?

Does he remember the knot in a rope found high up in the Alps after the fall?

And you who want to know how things happened, have you read Tartarin all the way through?

That will teach you to know your Gauguin pretty well.

I am really serious in urging you to look at this passage in Daudet's book again.

At the time of your visit here, were you able to notice the study I painted of the Tarascon diligence, which as you know is mentioned in Tartarin the lion hunter?

And can you remember Bompard in Numa Roumestan and his happy imagination?

That is what it is, though in another way. Gauguin has a fine, free and absolutely complete imaginary conception of the South, and with that imagination he is going to work in the North! My word, we may see some queer results yet.

And now, dissecting the situation in all boldness, there is nothing to prevent our seeing him as the little Bonaparte tiger of impressionism as far as…I don't quite know how to say it, his vanishing, say, from Arles would be comparable or analogous to the return from Egypt of the aforesaid Little Corporal, who also presented himself in Paris afterward and who always left the armies in the lurch.

Fortunately Gauguin and I and other painters are not yet armed with machine guns and other very destructive implements of war. I for one am quite decided to go on being armed with nothing but my brush and my pen.

But with a good deal of clatter, Gauguin has nonetheless demanded in his last letter “his masks and fencing gloves” hidden in the little closet in my little yellow house.

I shall hasten to send him his toys by parcel post.

Hoping that he will never use more serious weapons.

He is physically stronger than we are, so his passions must be much stronger than ours. Then he is a father, he has a wife and children in Denmark, and at the same time he wants to go to the other end of the earth, to Martinique. It is frightful, all the welter of incompatible desires and needs which this must cause them. I took the liberty of assuring him that if he had kept quiet here with us, working here at Arles without wasting money, and earning, since you were looking after his pictures, his wife would certainly have written to him, and would have approved of his stability. There is more besides; he had been in pain and seriously ill, and the thing was to discover the disease and the remedy. Now here his pains had already ceased.

That's enough for today. If you have the address of Laval, Gauguin's friend, you can tell Laval that I am very much surprised that his friend Gauguin did not take a portrait of myself, which I had intended for him, away with him to be handed over. I have another new one for you too.

Thank you again for your letter, please do try to realise that it will be really impossible to live thirteen days on the 23.50 francs which I shall have left; if you could send 20 francs next week, I would try to manage.

With a handshake, I will read your letter again and will write you soon about the other things.

Yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 19 January 1889

My dear Theo,
I must write you a line again today. Yesterday they again presented the gas bill for 10 francs (or 9.90), which I also paid. That again increases the account which I made out for you in my last letter, and reduces what was left of the 50-franc note for my food to very little. If you could send me something more, I have explained it all clearly enough, I hope. I am still very weak, and I shall have difficulty in getting my strength back if the cold continues. Rey will give me quinine wine, which will have the right effect, I think.

I still have a lot to tell you in reply to your letter, but I have a picture on the easel and am in a hurry.

You didn't tell me that André B. had been married before. Jo sent me a note in reply to my congratulation, it is very kind of her.

It always seemed to me that you owed it to your social position and to the position you have in the family to get married, and besides, for a number of years it has been our mothers' wish too.

And by thus doing what you ought to do, you will perhaps have more peace, even amidst a thousand and one difficulties, than before.

All the same, life is not easy for me either.

What wouldn't I have given to be able to spend a day here with you and show you the work in progress, and the house, etc., *etc.*

Now I should have preferred your seeing nothing of what I have here to your having carried away an impression of it under such distressing conditions. That's that.

What is Guillaumin doing? You know he has a son now. Bernard is more and more bothered by his father. That house is becoming more and more of a hell. And the worst of it is there is not much one can do; if you put your head into it, you put it into a regular viper's nest. They, Gauguin and Bernard, are now going to try to get Bernard exempted from service on account of a narrowness of the chest. All right - but it would be a thousand times better for him to do his service decently in Algiers with Milliet.

Milliet will be starting to think me a fool, for he keeps on asking me for news of him.

Roulin is on the point of leaving. His pay here was 135 francs a month, to bring up three children on that and live on it, himself and his wife!

You can imagine what it has been. And that's not all, the increase is a remedy worse than the disease itself…What a Government…and what times we are living in! As for me, I have rarely seen a man of Roulin's temperament, there is something in him tremendously like Socrates, ugly as a satyr, as Michelet called him, “until on the last day a god appeared in him that illuminated the Parthenon.” If Chatrian, whom you met, had seen that man! Write me at once, please, for what you have sent was not really quite enough, as I have tried to explain to you with the utmost clearness.

Ever yours, Vincent

I forgot to mention that yesterday I had a letter from Gauguin again about the masks and fencing gloves, full of diverse and diversified projects, and he already sees the end of his journey on the horizon.

Naturally…

He is already afraid of not being able to go to Brussels for that reason. And after that, if he cannot even go to Brussels, how is he to go to Denmark and the tropics?

The best thing he could still do, and the very thing he will not do, would be quite simply to return here.

But we have not got to that yet, for he does not say that he sees bankruptcy on the horizon, though it is more than visible between the lines.

He is still temporarily at the Schuffeneckers', and is going to do the portraits of the whole family, so he still has time to think it over.

I have not answered him. Fortunately one thing is certain, I dare say that basically Gauguin and I are by nature fond enough of each other to be able to begin again together if necessary. I am very pleased that you have not forgotten the “Anatomy Lesson” for M. Rey. In the future I shall always need a doctor from time to time, and just because he knows me well now, it would be another reason for me to stay quietly here.

I will write to you again soon, but as for the month's money, draw your own conclusions, my net expenditure will not be more than any other month.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Paul Gauguin

Arles, 22 or 23 January 1889

My dear friend Gauguin,

Thank you for your letter. Left behind alone on board my little yellow house - as it was perhaps my duty anyway to be the last to leave - I am not a little put out at my friends' departure.

Roulin got his transfer to Marseilles and has just left. It has been touching to see him these last few days with little Marcelle, making her laugh and dandling her on his knee.

His transfer means his being separated from his family, and you will not be surprised that the man whom you and I one evening nicknamed “the passer-by,” was very heavy-hearted. And so was I, on witnessing that and other upsetting things.

When he sang to his child, his voice took on a strange timbre in which one could hear the voice of a woman rocking a cradle or of a sorrowing wet-nurse, and then another trumpet sound like a clarion call to France.

I reproach myself now that it was I - perhaps insisting too much that you stay on here to await events and giving you so many good reasons for doing so - I reproach myself now that perhaps it was I who was the cause of your departure - unless, of course, that departure was planned beforehand? And that it was therefore perhaps up to me to show I still had the right to be kept fully in the picture.

Be that as it may, I hope we still like each other enough to be able, if need be, to start afresh, assuming that the wolf at the door, alas ever-present for those of us artists without means, should necessitate such a measure.

You mention a canvas of mine in your letter - Sunflowers on a yellow background - and make it plain you'd rather like to have it. I don't think it's altogether a bad choice - for if Jeannin can claim the peony, and Quost the hollyhock, then surely I, above all others, can lay claim to the sunflower.

I think I'll begin by returning what is yours [Gauguin's fencing equipment], while observing that it is my intention, after what has happened, categorically to deny your right to the canvas in question. But since I commend your intelligence in choosing this canvas, I'll make the effort to paint two of them exactly alike. In which case it can all be done and settled amicably so that you can have your own in the end all the same.

I made a fresh start today on my canvas of *Mme.* Roulin, the one in which, due to my accident, the hands had been left unfinished. As an arrangement of colours, the reds moving through to pure orange, building up again in the flesh tones to the chromes, passing through the pinks and blending with the olive and malachite greens - as an impressionist arrangement of colours I have never devised anything better. And I'm sure that if one were to put this canvas just as it is in a fishing boat, even one from Iceland, there would be some among the fishermen who would feel they were there, inside the cradle.

Ah! My dear friend, to achieve in painting what the music of Berlioz and Wagner has already done … an art that offers consolation for the broken-hearted! There are still just a few who feel it as you and I do!!!

My brother understands you well and when he tells me that you are a poor sort of wretch like me, well, that just proves that he understands us.

I shall send you your things, but I still have bouts of weakness at times during which I'm in no position to even lift a finger to return your things to you. In a few days' time I'll pluck up the courage. And as for the `fencing masks and gloves' (make as little use as possible of less infantile engines of war), these terrible engines of war will just have to wait until then. I am writing to you very calmly, but packing up what's left is still beyond me.

In my mental or nervous fever, or madness - I am not too sure how to put it or what to call it - my thoughts sailed over many seas.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to A. H. Koning

Arles, 22 or 23 January 1889

My dear friend Koning,

Thanks for having wished me a happy New Year all the way from the North of our native country. I received your postcard in the hospital at Arles, where I had been quartered following an attack of something the matter with my brains, or otherwise fever, which had nearly passed off already.

And as for the causes and consequences of said illness, I think I shall be wise to leave the solving of these problems to the casual discussions of the Dutch catechists, that is to say whether I am mad or not, or whether I have been mad, and am still mad, in some imagination of a purely sculptural nature.

And if not, whether I was already mad before that time; or whether I am so at present, or shall be so in the hereafter.

After having thus given you ample information with regard to the state of my mind and body…I suppose you will think it less miraculous that I did not answer you earlier. Meanwhile we must not forget to stick to the point.

And starting from there I ask you what you are doing in the art of painting, and how you are working with the colours.

As far as I know, I have seen absolutely none of your studies which you sent to Theo, in spite of my urgent request to you for one of your works. Does the fault lie with Theo, who possibly has other things to think of, or with the not inconsiderable distance between us?

Did you know that Theo is engaged, and is going to marry an Amsterdam girl within a relatively short time?

After this question on your work, a few words about mine.

At present I have in mind, or rather on my easel, the portrait of a woman.

I call it “La Berceuse,” or as we say in Dutch (after Van Eeden, you know, who wrote that particular book I gave you to read), or in Van Eeden's Dutch, quite simply “our lullaby or the woman rocking the cradle.” It is a woman in a green dress (the bust olive green and grey skirt pale malachite green).

The hair is quite orange and in plaits. The complexion is chrome yellow, worked up with some naturally broken tones for the purpose of modelling.

The hands holding the rope of the cradle, the same.

At the bottom the background is vermilion (simply representing a tiled floor or else a stone floor). The wall is covered with wallpaper, which of course I have calculated in conformity with the rest of the colours. This wallpaper is bluish-green with pink dahlias and spotted with orange and ultramarine.

In this I think I have run pretty well parallel with Van Eeden and his style of writing, which consequently can be considered analogous to my style of painting in the matter of colours.

Whether I really sang a lullaby in colours is something I leave to the critics, particularly to the aforesaid ones.

But we talked all this over sufficiently at the time, didn't we? I mean the eternal problem of colours, which leads us on as far as our tranquillity of mind will allow.

At any rate, on leaving the hospital, I made a portrait of my own doctor. And I haven't wholly lost my equilibrium as a painter.

But of course, from that time onward I have painted quite a considerable number of studies or pictures. Among other things, last summer, two flower pieces with nothing but sunflowers in a yellow earthen pot. Painted with the three chrome yellows, yellow ocher and malachite green, and nothing else.

For the time being I am staying on in Arles, and keeping myself at your disposal in the matter of correspondence or painted studies. Not long ago Theo went to see Breitner, and discussing his work, he told me that after all he considered Breitner the best painter and thinker over there.

Good-by, amice, with a handshake in thought,

Your friend, Vincent

The address is still Place Lamartine 2, Arles.

Should you meet Breitner, you have my permission to let him read this letter or tell him of it. I mean as I write it, and without letting your powers of imagination run away with you too much.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 22 or 23 January 1889

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter and the 50 Fr. note it contained. Of course I am now safe until the arrival of your letter after the first. What happened about that money was entirely pure chance and misunderstanding, for which neither you nor I are responsible. By just the same mischance I could not telegraph as you said, because I did not know if you were still in Amsterdam or back in Paris. It is over now with the rest, and is one more proof of the proverb that misfortunes never come singly. Roulin left yesterday (of course my wire yesterday was sent off before the arrival of your letter of this morning). It was touching to see him with his children this last day, especially with the quite tiny one, when he made her laugh and jump on his knee, and sang for her.

His voice has a strangely pure and touching quality in which there was for my ear at once a sweet and mournful cradle-song, and a kind of far-away echo of the trumpet of revolutionary France. He was not sad, however. On the contrary, he had put on his brand new uniform, which he had received that very day, and everyone was making much of him.

I have just finished a new canvas which almost has what one might call a certain chic about it, a wicker basket with lemons and oranges, a cypress branch and a pair of blue gloves. You have already seen some of these baskets of fruit of mine.

Look here - you do know that what I am trying to do is to get back the money that my training as a painter has cost, neither more nor less.

I have a right to that, and to the earning of my daily bread.

I think it just that there should be that return, I don't say into your hands, since what we have done we have done together, and to talk of money distresses us so much.

But let it go to your wife's hands, who will join with us besides in working with the artists.

If I am not yet devoting much thought to direct sales, it is because my count of pictures is not yet complete, but it is getting on, and I have set to work again with a nerve like iron.

I have good and ill luck in my production, but not ill luck *only*. For instance, if our Monticelli bunch of flowers is worth 500 francs to a collector, and it is, then

I dare swear to you that my sunflowers are worth 500 francs too, to one of these Scots or Americans.

Now to get up heat enough to melt that gold, those flower-tones, it isn't any old person who can do it, it needs the force and concentration of a single individual whole and entire.

When I saw my canvases again after my illness the one that seemed the best to me was the “Bedroom.”

The amount we handle is a respectable enough sum, I admit, but much of it runs away, and what we'll have to watch above all is that from year's end to year's end it doesn't all slip through the net. That is why as the month goes on I keep more or less trying to balance the outlay with the output, at least in relative terms.

So many difficulties certainly do make me rather worried and timorous, but I haven't given up hope yet.

The trouble I foresee is that we shall have to be very prudent so as to prevent the expenses of a sale lowering the sale itself, when the time for it comes. How many times we have had occasion to see just that mischance in the lives of artists.

I have in hand the portrait of Roulin's wife, which I was working on before I was ill. In it I had ranged the reds from pink to an orange, which rises through the yellows to lemon, with light and sombre greens. If I could finish it, I should be very glad, but I am afraid she will no longer want to pose with her husband away.

You can see just what a disaster Gauguin's leaving is, because it has thrust us down again just when we had made a home and furnished it to take in our friends in bad times.

Only in spite of it we will keep the furniture, *etc.* And though everyone will now be afraid of me, in time that may disappear.

We are all mortal and subject to all the ailments there are, and if the latter aren't exactly of an agreeable kind, what can one do about it? The best thing is to try to get rid of them.

I feel remorse too when I think of the trouble that, however involuntarily, I on my side caused Gauguin.

But up to the last days I saw one thing only, that he was working with his mind divided between the desire to go to Paris to carry out his plans, and the life at Arles.

What will come of all this for him?

You will doubtless be feeling that though you have a good salary, nevertheless we lack capital, except in goods, and that in order really to alter the unhappy position of the artists that we know, we need to be in a stronger position. But then we often run up against sheer distrust on their part, and the things they are perpetually scheming among themselves, which always end in - a blank. I think that at Pont-Aven they had already formed a new group of 5 or 6, perhaps already broken up.

They are not dishonest, it is something without a name and one of their *enfant terrible* faults.

Meantime the great thing is that your marriage should not be delayed. By getting married you will set Mother's mind at rest and make her happy, and it is after all almost a necessity in view of your position in society and in commerce. Will it be appreciated by the society to which you belong, perhaps not, any more than the artists ever suspect that I have sometimes worked and suffered for the community…So from me, your brother, you will not want completely ordinary congratulations and assurances that you are about to be transported straight into paradise. And with your wife you will not be lonely any more; which I could wish for our sister as well.

That, after your own marriage, is what I should set my heart on more than anything.

When you are married, perhaps there will be other marriages in the family, and in any case you will see your way clear and the house will not be empty any more.

Whatever I think on other points, our father and mother were exemplary as married people.

And I shall never forget Mother at Father's death, when she only said one small word: it made me begin to love dear old Mother more than before. In fact as married people our parents were exemplary, like Roulin and his wife, to cite another instance.

Well, go straight ahead along that road. During my illness I saw again every room of the house at Zundert, every path, every plant in the garden, the views from the fields round about, the neighbors, the graveyard, the church, our kitchen garden behind-down to the magpie's nest in a tall acacia in the graveyard.

It's because I still have earlier recollections of those first days than any of the rest of you. There is no one left who remembers all this but Mother and me.

I say no more about it, since it is better that I should not try to recall all that passed through my head then.

Only please realize that I shall be very happy when your marriage has taken place. Look here now, if for your wife's sake it would perhaps be as well to have a picture of mine from time to time at Goupil's, then I will give up my grudge against them, in this way.

I said I did not want to go back to them with too naive a picture.

But if you like you can exhibit the two pictures of sunflowers.

Gauguin would be glad to have one, and I should very much like to give Gauguin a real pleasure. So if he wants one of the two canvases, all right, I will do one of them over again, whichever he likes.

You will see that these canvases will catch the eye. But I would advise you to keep them for yourself, just for your own private pleasure and that of your wife.

It is a kind of painting that rather changes in character, and takes on a richness the longer you look at it.

Besides, you know, Gauguin likes them extraordinarily. He said to me among other things - “That...it's...the flower.”

You know that the peony is Jeannin's, the hollyhock belongs to Quost, but the sunflower is somewhat my own.

And after all I should like to go on exchanging my things with Gauguin even if sometimes it would cost me also rather dear.

Did you during your hasty visit see the portrait of *Mme.* Ginoux in black and yellow? That portrait was painted in three-quarters of an hour. I must stop for the moment.

The delay of the money was pure chance, and neither you nor I could do anything about it. A handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 28 January 1889

My dear Theo,
Only a few words to tell you that my health and my work are not progressing so badly.

It astonishes me already when I compare my condition today with what it was a month ago. Before that I knew well enough that one could fracture one's legs and arms and recover afterward, but I did not know that you could fracture the brain in your head and recover from that too.

I still have a sort of “what is the good of getting better?” feeling about me, even in the astonishment aroused in me by my getting well, which I hadn't dared hope for.

During your visit I think you must have noticed the two size 30 canvases of sunflowers in Gauguin's room. I have just put the finishing touches to copies, absolutely identical replicas of them. I think I have already told you that besides these I have a canvas of “La Berceuse” the very one I was working on when my illness interrupted me. I now have two versions of this one too.

I have just said to Gauguin about this picture that when he and I were talking about the fishermen of Iceland and of their mournful isolation, exposed to all dangers, alone on the sad sea - I have just said to Gauguin that following those intimate talks of ours the idea came to me to paint a picture in such a way that sailors, who are at once children and martyrs, seeing it in the cabin of their Icelandic fishing boat, would feel the old sense of being rocked come over them and remember their own lullabies.

Now, it may be said that it is like a chromolithograph from a cheap shop. A woman in green with orange hair standing out against a background of green with pink flowers. Now these discordant sharps of crude pink, crude orange, and crude green are softened by flats of red and green.

I picture to myself these same canvases between those of the sunflowers, which would thus form torches or candelabra beside them, the same size, and so the whole would be composed of seven or nine canvases.

(I should like to make another duplicate for Holland if I could get hold of the model again.)

Since it is still winter, look here, let me go quietly on with my work; if it is that of a madman, well, so much the worse. I can't help it.

However, the unbearable hallucinations have ceased, and are now getting reduced to a simple nightmare, in consequence of my taking bromide of potassium, I think.

It is still beyond my powers to go into the details of this money question, and yet I want to do that very thing, and I am furiously at work from morning till night, to prove to you (unless my work is another hallucination), to prove to you that indeed and indeed we are following Monticelli's track, and what's more, that we have a light before our feet and a lamp upon our path in the powerful work of Brias of Montpellier, who did so much to create a school in the South.

Only don't be too amazed if during the next month I shall be obliged to ask you for the month's money in full and some extra money as well.

After all it is only right that during periods of productivity, on which I spend all my vital warmth, I should insist on what is necessary in order to take a few precautions.

Even in that case the difference in expenditure is certainly not excessive on my part.

And once again, either shut me up in a madhouse right away - I shan't oppose it, for I may be deceiving myself - or else let me work with all my strength, while taking the precautions I speak of. If I am not mad, the time will come when I shall send you what I have promised you from the beginning. Now perhaps the pictures are alas bound to be dispersed, but when you for one see the whole that is in my mind, I dare hope it will make a comforting impression on you.

You saw, as I did, part of the Faure collection being passed in review one by one in the little window of that picture framer's shop in the Rue Lafitte, didn't you? Like me, you saw that this slow succession of once despised canvases was strangely interesting.

Good. My great desire would be that sooner or later you should have a series of canvases of mine which might likewise march past in just that same window.

Now by continuing this furious work during next February and March, I shall hope to have finished the quietly composed repetitions of a number of studies I made last year. And these together with some canvases you have already had from me, such as the “Harvest” and the “White Orchard,” will form a tolerably firm foundation. By that same time, not later than March, that is, we can arrange what there is to arrange on the occasion of your marriage.

But during February and March, though working, I shall go on considering myself an invalid, and I tell you beforehand that for those two months I shall perhaps have to take 250 a month from the year's allowance.

You will perhaps understand that what would reassure me in some fashion as to my illness and the possibility of a relapse would be to see that Gauguin and I had not exhausted our brains for nothing, but that some good canvases have come out of it.

And I dare to hope that someday you will see that by keeping steady and straight in this money business, in the longer run it will prove to be impossible that you have acted against the interests of the Goupils.

But if I should have eaten their bread indirectly through you as an intermediary, in that case my integrity would be directly involved.

Then, however, far from going on feeling more or less embarrassed by each other because of it, we shall be able to feel even more like brothers after that has been arranged.

You will have gone on being poor all the time in order to support me, but I will give you back the money or give up the ghost. Meanwhile this tender-hearted wife of yours will have to come, and will make us old fellows almost young again.

But this I believe, that you and I will have successors in our business, and that just as when the family, financially speaking, abandoned us to our own resources, once again it will be we who never flinched.

And after that, the deluge… Am I wrong in this? Indeed, as long as this world lasts, so long will there be artists and picture dealers, especially those who, like you, are at the same time apostles.

What I am telling you is true. If it is not absolutely necessary to shut me up in a cell, then I am still good for paying, at least in goods, what I am considered to owe. In conclusion, I still have to tell you that the chief superintendent of police paid me a very friendly visit yesterday. He told me as he shook hands that if I ever needed him, I could consult him as *a friend*. I am far from refusing that, and I may soon be in just that position if they raise difficulties about the house.

I am waiting till the time comes for me to pay the month's rent to interview the agent or the proprietor face to face.

But if they try to kick me out, they will find themselves tripped up this time anyhow.

What would you? We have gone all out for the impressionists, and now as far as it's in my power I am trying to finish canvases which will undoubtedly secure me the little corner that I have claimed. Ah, the future of it all…but since old Pangloss assures us that everything is always for the best in the best of worlds - can we doubt it?

My letter has grown longer than I intended, but it doesn't matter. The main thing is that I am asking categorically for two month's work before making the arrangements which will have to be made at the time of your marriage.

After that, in the spring, you and your wife will found a commercial house for several generations. It will not be too easy. And that settled, I only ask the position of a painting employee, at least as long as there is enough to pay one.

The work distracts my mind. And I *must* have some distraction. Yesterday I went to the Folies Arlésiennes, the budding theatre here. It was the first time that I slept without a bad nightmare. They were giving (it was a Provençal literary society) what they called a *Noël* or *Pastorale*, reminiscent of the Middle Ages. It was a very carefully studied performance, and must have cost them a lot of money.

It represented, of course, the birth of Christ, mixed up with the burlesque of a family of gaping Provençal peasants.

But the amazing thing about it, like a Rembrandt etching, was the old peasant woman, just such another as *Mme.* Tanguy, with a head of silex or flint, dishonest, treacherous, silly, all this very evident from the preceding scenes.

Now in the play that woman, led before the mystic crib, began to sing in her quavering voice, and then the voice changed, changed from the voice of a witch to that of an angel, and from an angel's voice to a child's, and then the answer came in another voice, strong and warm and vibrant, the voice of a woman behind the scenes.

It was amazing. I can tell you these so-called “Félibres” had certainly put themselves to expense.

As for me, being in this little country of mine, I have no need at all to go to the tropics. I believe and I shall always believe in the art that is to be created in the tropics, and I think it will be marvellous, but personally I am too old and (especially if I have a papier mâché ear put on) too jerry-built to go there.

Will Gauguin do it? It is not essential. For if this ought to be done, it will happen of itself.

We are nothing but links in a chain.

Old Gauguin and I understand each other basically, and if we are a bit mad, what of it? Aren't we also thoroughly artists enough to contradict suspicions on that score by what we say with our brush?

Perhaps someday everyone will have neurosis, St. Vitus' dance, or something else.

But doesn't the antidote exist? In Delacroix, in Berlioz, and Wagner? And really, as for the artist's madness of all the rest of us, I do not say that I especially am not infected through and through, but I say and will maintain that our antidotes and consolations may, with a little good will, be considered ample compensation.

Ever yours, Vincent

See “Hope” by Puvis de Chavannes.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 30 January 1889

My dear Theo,
Though I have nothing very unusual to tell you, I wanted to let you know that I saw our friend Roulin again last Monday. There was enough reason for it too, as the whole of France was shaken. Certainly in *our* eyes the election and its results and its representatives are only symbols. But what it proves once more is that worldly ambition and fame pass away, but the human heart beats the same to this day, in as perfect sympathy with the past of our buried forefathers as with the generation to come.

I had a very friendly letter from Gauguin this morning, to which I replied without delay. When Roulin came I had just finished the duplicate of my sunflowers, and I showed him the two examples of “La Berceuse” between the four bunches of flowers. Roulin sends his kind regards.

He was present at the demonstration in Marseilles on Sunday at the time that the election result was telegraphed from Paris. Like Paris, the whole population of Marseilles was moved to the very depths of their soul.

Well, who is there now who will dare to order any gun at all to fire, machine gun or Lebel rifle, when so many hearts have already offered themselves to serve as cannon fodder? All the more because certainly the victorious politicians of this great day, Rochefort and Boulanger, are with one accord more ambitious for a graveyard than for any throne. Anyhow, that was our interpretation of what has happened, not just Roulin's and mine, but many others'. Nevertheless we were greatly moved. Roulin told me that he almost cried when he saw that silent crowd at Marseilles, and he only recovered himself when he turned and saw behind him some very, very old friends, who stopped and happened to recognize him. Then they had supper together till late into the night.

Although he was very tired, he could not resist the desire to come to Arles to see his family again, and he came to shake hands, almost dropping with sleep and very pale. I could just show him the two copies of the portrait of his wife, which pleased him very much.

From what I am told, I am very obviously looking better; inwardly my heart is rather too full of so many feelings and divergent hopes, for I am amazed to be getting better.

Everyone here is kind to me, the neighbours, etc., kind and attentive as if I were at home.

I know already that several people here would ask me for portraits if they dared. Roulin, quite a poor fellow and lowly employee though he is, is much respected, and it is known that I have done his whole family.

My dear brother, in the meantime we will certainly go on suffering, make mistakes, fall into misfortune, I can't deny it, but we will always have worked in this present '89 with the French who we admire so much, since on their part they have made us feel that this is our homeland too. Still, that's the way they are.

Don't speak to your fiancée about this business between us. Just let me go on working in the way I asked you until the end of March. And in this way I will have done some impressionist canvases, right?

Today I am working on a third “Berceuse.” I know very well that it is neither drawn nor painted as correctly as a Bouguereau and I rather regret this, because I have an earnest desire to be correct. But though it is doomed, alas, to be neither a Cabanel nor a Bouguereau, yet I hope that it will be French.

It has been a magnificent day with no wind, and I have such a longing to work that I am astonished, as I did not expect it any more.

I will finish this letter like Gauguin's, by telling you that there certainly are signs of previous overexcitement in my words, but that is not surprising, since everyone in this good Tarascon country is a trifle cracked.

With a good handshake, also for De Haan and Isaäcson. I shall expect your letter as soon as possible after February 1.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 3 February 1889

My dear Theo,

I should have preferred to reply at once to your kind letter containing the 100 francs, but since at that precise moment I was very tired and the doctor had given me strict instructions to go out for walks and make no mental exertion, I haven't written to you until today.

As far as work is concerned, this month hasn't been bad on the whole, and as the work takes my mind off things, or rather keeps me in order, I don't deprive myself of it.

I have done “La Berceuse” three times, and seeing that *Mme.* Roulin was the model and I only the painter, I let her choose between the three, her and her husband, on condition, however, that I could do a duplicate for myself of the one she chose, which I am working on at present.

You ask if I have read La Mireille by Mistral - I am like you, I can only read the extracts that have been translated. But what about you, have you heard it yet, for perhaps you know that Gounod has set it to music. At least I think so. I don't know the music, of course, and even if I did go to hear it, I should be watching the musicians rather than listening.

But I can tell you this, that the local dialect spoken here sounds so musical in the mouths of the Arlésiennes that I actually pick up snatches of it every now and then.

Perhaps there is an attempt at a medley of local colour in “La Berceuse.” It's badly painted, and in a sense cheap chromos are infinitely better done, but even so…

Here, the so-called worthy town of Arles is such a peculiar sort of place that it is with good reason our friend Gauguin calls it the filthiest spot in the South. Now, if Rivet saw the population, he'd certainly have some bad moments, and repeat over and over again, “You're in a sorry state, the lot of you,” just as he says of us. Still, once you've had the local disease, you'll never catch it again.

Which is just to let you know that as far as I am concerned, I have no illusions about myself. Things are going very, very well, and I'll do everything the doctor says, but…

When I came out of hospital with good old Roulin, I fancied there'd been nothing wrong with me, it was only *afterwards* I felt I'd been ill. Well, that's only to be expected, I have moments when I am twisted with enthusiasm or madness or prophecy, like a Greek oracle on his tripod. I display great presence of mind then in my words, and speak like the Arlésiennes, but in spite of all that, my spirits are very low. Especially when my physical strength returns. But I've already told Rey that at the first sign of a serious symptom I would come back and submit myself to the alienists in Aix, or to himself.

What else except pain and suffering can we expect if we are not well, you and I?

Our ambition has been dashed so low. So let us work very calmly, look after ourselves as best we can, and not exhaust ourselves in futile attempts at mutual generosity. You do your duty and I will do mine, and as far as that's concerned, we've both already paid for it - and not just in words - and at the end of the road we may quietly come together again. But when I am in a delirium and everything I love so much is in turmoil, then I don't mistake that for reality, and I don't play the false prophet.

Indeed, illness or death holds no terror for me, but happily for us, ambition is not compatible with the callings we follow. There are so many people in all classes of society, from the highest to the lowest, who believe that, anyway.

But why are you thinking about your marriage contract and the possibility of dying just now? Wouldn't it be better simply to run your woman through instead? After all, that's normal practice in the North, and it's not for me to say that practices in the North are no good.

It'll all come all right in the end, believe me.

But I, without a penny to my name, I still say that when it comes down to it, money is one kind of currency and painting is another. And I am even ready to send you a consignment along the lines mentioned in previous letters. And it will get better. If my strength returns.

So, if Gauguin, who is completely infatuated with my sunflowers, takes these two pictures, I should just like him to give your fiancée or you a couple of pictures of his, not second-rate ones but better than that. And should he take a copy of “La Berceuse,” then all the more reason for him to give a good one in return. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to complete the series I spoke to you about, which should be fit to go on show in that same little display window we have gazed at so often.

In this case, the value of the pictures does not come into it, and I don't claim to be an expert. It remains a fact, however, that I may be entitled to attach as much importance to my social position as you do to yours as a loyal employee. And let me just say this: I think as much of brotherly integrity when it comes to Boussod's money as you do. It has never played us false. And we have sweated far too much doing good work to get annoyed at being called thieves or incompetents.

Anyway, I won't keep on about it.

As for the Indépendants, it seems to me that six pictures are too many by half. To my mind, The “Harvest” and the “White Orchard” are enough, with the “Provençale Girl” or the “Sower” if you like. But I really don't care. The only thing I really want to do some day is to give you a more comforting impression of this painting business of ours with a collection of about 30 more serious studies. In any case that will prove to our real friends like Gauguin, Guillaumin, Bernard, etc., that we are producing something.

As for the little yellow house, when I paid my rent the landlord's agent was very kind and behaved like an Arlésien, treating me as an equal.

So I told him that I had no need of a lease, nor of a written assurance of preference, and that in the event of my being ill payment would only be made by friendly arrangement.

People here have their hearts in the right place and the spoken word is more binding than the written word. So I shall keep the house on for the time being, as I need to feel that this is my home if I am to regain my mental health.

Now about your moving from the Rue Lepic to the Rue Rodier, I can't offer any opinion, as I haven't seen it, but the main thing is that you too will be lunching at home with your wife. By staying in Montmartre you would all the sooner get decorated and be a Minister of Arts, but as you are not too keen on that, it is better to have the peace of one's own home, so I think you are quite right.

I am a little like that too. I always tell the people here who ask after my health that I shall begin by dying in their midst, and that then my malady will be dead.

This doesn't mean I shall not have long spells of respite, but once you are ill in earnest, you know quite well that you cannot contract the same illness twice, you are well or you are ill, just as you are young or old. Like you, I will do what the doctor tells me as much as I can, and I consider that as part of my work and the duty I have to fulfil.

I must tell you this, that the neighbours, etc., are particularly kind to me, as everyone here is suffering either from fever, or hallucinations, or madness, we understand each other like members of the same family. Yesterday I went to see the girl to whom I had gone when I was off my head. They told me that there's nothing surprising about things like that in this part of the world. She'd been upset and had fainted but had regained her composure. And indeed, they spoke well of her.

But it won't do for us to think that I am completely sane. The people from round here who are ill like me have told me there will always be times when you take leave of your senses.

So I don't ask you to tell people that there is nothing wrong with me, or that there never will be. It is just that the explanation of all this is probably not Ricord's but Raspail's. Though I have not yet had the fevers of the region, I might still catch them. But they already know a thing or two about all that here at the hospital, and as long as you have no false shame and say frankly how you feel, you cannot go wrong.

I am bringing this letter to a close for this evening with a good handshake in my thoughts,

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 7 February 1889

Dear Sir,
Your brother, whom we had believed more or less cured and who had taken up his usual work once more, has again lately shown signs of mental distress. For three days he has imagined that he is being poisoned and is seeing nothing but poisoners and poisoned people everywhere. The cleaning woman, who looks after him with a certain devotion, noticing his more than abnormal state, considered it her duty to report it - and the neighbors bought it to the attention of the central commissioner. This man put your brother under surveillance, and this afternoon had him driven to the hospital, where he has been placed in an isolation cell. I have just seen him and his state made a very painful impression on me. He has withdrawn into absolute muteness, hides himself under his bedcovers and sometimes cries without uttering a word. Today, according to the cleaning woman, he has refused all food; all day yesterday and this morning he has spoken little and at times his behaviour has frightened this poor woman, who told me that while he was in this state she could not continue to look after him.

What are we to do now? After I met with the bursar, the intern and doctor Deloy, it was decided that I would write to you to get your opinion. Obviously it is necessary that your brother is put under constant supervision and also receive the special care that can only be given to him in a nursing home or by the family. He cannot remain in the hospital; he would only be cared for poorly there, although they have agreed to keep him for several days more. Tell me if you want to have him close to you or at least in a home located in the neighbourhood of the capital. In this case, the cleaning woman could get a permit for Paris (her husband being an employee at the train station) and she would gladly accompany him. In any case it is necessary to make a quick decision, and we will only act after having received your answer.

I regret, Sir, having to give you such distressing news. Be assured that I will do everything in my power to ease your brother's situation the entire time that he is locked up in the hospital. Tonight I saw that a fire was lit in his cell, for it felt very cold to me, and that someone keeps it going all night. We will see tomorrow if we can install him in a better room.

My very cordial greetings, and believe me, your devoted in Christ, Salles.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 17 February 1889

My dear Theo,

I have been so completely out of sorts mentally that it would have been useless to try to write an answer to your kind letter. Today I have just come home provisionally, I hope for good. I feel quite normal so often, and really I should think that if what I am suffering from is only a disease particular to this place, I must wait here quietly till it is over, even if it returns (and let's say that it won't).

But this is what I told M. Rey once and for all. If sooner or later it is desirable that I go to Aix, as has already been suggested, I consent beforehand and I will submit to it.

But in my character as a painter and a workman it is not permissible for anyone, not even you or a doctor, to take such a step without warning me and consulting me about it, also because since up till now I have always kept a comparative presence of mind in my work, I should have the right to say (or at least to have an opinion on) whether it would be better to keep my studio here or to move to Aix altogether. This so as to avoid the expenses and loss of moving as much as possible and not to do it except in case of absolute necessity.

It seems that people here have some superstition that makes them afraid of painting, and that they have been talking about it in the town. Very good, I know it is the same thing in Arabia, but nevertheless we have loads of painters in Africa, haven't we?

Which shows that with a little firmness you can modify these prejudices, at least as far as painting in spite of it is concerned.

The unfortunate thing is that I am rather inclined to be affected by the beliefs of others, and to feel them myself, and I cannot always laugh at whatever foundation of truth there may be in the absurdity.

As I have already been staying here for more than a year, and have heard almost all the ill that could be spoken of myself, Gauguin and painting in general - why shouldn't I take things as they come and wait for the upshot here? To what place worse could I go than where I have twice been: in the madhouse?

The advantages I have here are what Rivet used to say, “They are a sickly lot, all of them,” so that at least I do not feel alone.

Then, as you well know, I am so fond of Arles, though Gauguin has uncommonly good reason to call it the dirtiest town in the whole South.

And I have already met with such friendliness from my neighbours, from M. Rey, and from everyone at the hospital besides, that really I would rather be always ill here than forget the kindness there is in the very people who have the most incredible prejudices against painters and painting, or at any rate have no clear, sane idea of it as we have.

Then they know me now at the hospital, and if it comes on again, nothing would be said, and they would know what to do at the hospital. I have no desire at all to be treated by other doctors, nor is there any necessity.

The only thing I should like to be able to do is go on earning with my hands what I spend. Koning wrote me a very nice letter saying that he and a friend would probably be coming South to me for a long time. It was in reply to a letter I wrote him some days ago. I do not dare persuade painters to come here after what has happened to me, they run the risk of losing their wits like me; the same applies to De Haan and Isaäcson. Let them go to Antibes, Nice, or Mentone, it is perhaps healthier.

Mother and our sister have also written, the latter was terribly distressed about the patient she was nursing. At home they are very, very glad about your marriage.

Now mind, you must not think too much about me, nor fret yourself. It will probably have to take its course, and we cannot change much in our fate by taking precautions.

Once more let us try to resign ourselves to our fate whatever it is. Our sister wrote that your fiancée had just been staying some time at home. That is good. Well, I send my love with all my heart, and don't let's lose courage.

Believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

Address next letter to Place Lamartine.

Kind regards to Gauguin. I hope he is going to write me. I shall write him too.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 22 February 1889

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your kind letter and for the 50-fr. note which it contained. Are you tolerably well, and is the weather in Paris bearable?

We have days of sun and wind here. I walk a lot to get fresh air. So far I am sleeping and eating at the hospital. Yesterday and today I began to work. When *Mme*. Roulin also left to go and live temporarily with her mother in the country, she took “La Berceuse” with her. I had the study of it and two repetitions. She had a good eye and took the best, only I am doing it again at the moment and I do not want it to be inferior.

In reply to Mourier's letter, which gave me pleasure, if Gauguin wants to make an exchange with you for a copy of “La Berceuse,” he can send it to his wife in Denmark, and I should willingly see a canvas of mine going there in this way. But as I have told you already, this canvas may be unintelligible.

I should have liked to send something to Holland, but I haven't enough confidence for that yet.

Can you see a blade of grass from your new apartment? I hope so.

As for Koning, really I daren't encourage him to come here too much, even with his inclination to go wild about the Midi, after the experience I have had of it now.

If he goes to Nice or Mentone, where it is perhaps healthier, he is sure to be taken by the gambling crowd because of his good nature, etc., for it is a real plague, that, even here already, and it warps the character.

But if one has *too* many troubles, what is one to do or say?

In short, you see that I do not yet quite know what to think.

Bernard also wrote to me. I have not yet been able to answer, for it is so hard to explain the character of the difficulties one may meet with here, and with our habits and ways of thinking in the North or in Paris, it is fatal to stay here long. In this part of the world you have to endure things that are no joke.

It must be admitted, however, that in every town there is a school of drawing and a set of collectors, but you realize that, directed as they are by some invalids and idiots of the Beaux-Arts, it is only make-believe and sham.

M. Salles handed the 50 francs over at once. I am very glad that Gauguin has finished some lithographs.

I agree with what you say, that if it takes a more serious turn someday, I must do what the doctors say and not oppose it. But that may be neither tomorrow nor the next day.

Now it is not uncommon, it seems, to see even a whole population in these parts seized with panic, as at Nice during the earthquake. Just now the whole town is uneasy, no one rightly knowing why, and I saw in the papers that actually there have again been slight earthquake shocks in places not far from here. The more reason then, I consider, why as far as I am concerned I should wait with as much patience as I can muster, hoping that things will clear up again. At another time, if I were less impressionable, I should probably poke a good deal of fun at what seems to me topsy-turvy and off-beat in the ways of this country. At present it doesn't make a particularly funny impression on me.

Well, well, after all there are so many painters who are cracked in one way or another that little by little I shall be reconciled to it.

I understand what Gauguin must suffer more than ever, for in the tropics he caught the very same thing, this excessive sensitivity. In the hospital I actually saw a mad Negress, who is staying there and working as a servant. Tell him that.

If you told Rivet that you are so uneasy about me, he would certainly reassure you by telling you that because there is so much sympathy and community of ideas between us, you feel rather the same way. Do not think too much about me, as if it were an obsession. Besides, I shall get along better if I know you have peace of mind.

A good handshake. You are very kind to say I could come to Paris, but I think the excitement of a big town would never do for me. Good-by for now.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 26 February 1889

Monsieur,

Your poor brother has been taken into the hospital again. As you will undoubtedly have heard from him, he had returned to his house a few days ago.

However, his behaviour, and the way he talked, made me fear that the improvement which had taken place was only apparent. This fear which we all had, proved only too well-founded. A petition signed by some 30 neighbours, informed M. the Mayor of the inconvenience caused by allowing this man his complete liberty and mentions facts to support this assertion. The superintendent of police, to whom the document was submitted, has immediately had your brother taken back to the hospital with the express order not to let him leave. He came to my house to inform me of the situation, and to ask me to write to you.

It is clear that a decision has to be made. Is it your intention to come and take your brother with you, or to put him yourself into an institution of your own choice? Or do you prefer to leave it in the hands of the police? On this point we should have a categorical reply.

Will you without hesitation make your intentions known, and adress them either to myself or to the Mayor or to the superintendent of police. We will only act after having received your reply and we will act according to your wishes.

I had rather hoped to have some better news, and that stopped me from writing to you sooner to acknowledge receipt of your letter and the 50 f. that it contained. This sum I have had taken to my home by the cleaning woman.

My deepest sympathies, and I assure you of my best wishes. Salles.

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 1 March 1889

Arles, 1st March 1889
Monsieur,

I have been to see your brother in hospital and found him tolerably well. Everybody, the intern, the bursar and the board of directors, are well disposed in his regard, and it has been decided that someone will accompany him tomorrow to his house to fetch his brushes and colours to give him something to do during his stay in hospital.

However, the question remains the same. The Central Commissioner, who has the petition I spoke to you about, and who conducted the inquest in the neighbourhood, remains convinced that he was right to take these measures.

Meanwhile it seems to me, and it is also the view of M. Rey, that it would be a kind of cruelty to lock up a man who has not done any harm to anyone and who can, with kindness and good will, return to his normal state. I repeat, he has on his side the best will of all those that attend him at the hospice, and everything is being done to make it possible to avoid his transfer to a mental asylum.

In any case, if they succeed in returning him to his normal state, it would be necessary that he gives up his current accommodation and move to another quarter of the city. This is the opinion of everybody.

I give you my best regards, Sir, and my best wishes. Salles.

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 02 March 1889

Monsieur,

I have just received your letter and felt I must add some further comments.

Your brother is interned in the hospital on the orders of the police and as a result of the petition signed by neighbors. This petition, which I have read, certifies that his appearances and his acts are those of a lunatic and that there is a real danger to leave him at liberty.

Since his admission to hospital the commissioner has made an inquiry of the signatories of the petition. You understand, it is all done discreetly and without noise: depositions have been collected in writing and filed. I have read some and my impression it is that they are exaggerated. Evidently to the point where the neighbours fear your brother and they have overexcited each other. The acts that they reproach your brother with (supposing that they are true) do not justify accusing a man of insanity and to request his imprisonment. They say that the children flock around him and run after him, that he, on his part, chases them, and he could hurt them; that he drinks in excess (the café owner, his neighbor, has told me exactly the opposite), and finally that women fear him “because he has seized some by the waist and has engaged in touching their persons.” This last expression appears several times in the depositions.

Unfortunately the act of madness that necessitated his first admission to the hospital has resulted in a most unfavorable interpretation of all the eccentric acts the poor young man has engaged in. In any other person they would perhaps not be noticed, but for him they immediately take on particular importance.

I hope, despite the conviction of the central commissioner and his resolution to incarcerate your brother, that we will succeed in keeping him here and that we will be able to avoid what you, with just reason, fear.

As I told you yesterday, everyone in the hospital is well disposed to him and, after all, it is the physicians and not the commissioner who must be judges in these cases.

Yours Faithfully, Salles.

P. S.: I fully take note of what you tell me in your letter and I will make my duty to do as you wish when I believe it necessary. For the moment your brother is well enough and can attend to his own business.

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Arles, 16 March 1889
Paris, 16 March 1889
My dear brother,
I hear that you are not better yet, which causes me a good deal of grief. I so wish you could tell me how you are feeling, for there is nothing more distressing than this uncertainty, and if you could tell me how things are with you, I might be able to do something sooner to give you solace. You have done so much for me that it is a great sorrow for me to know that, precisely at this time when in all probability I am going to have days of happiness with my dear Jo, you are passing through days of misery. She had the fond idea that, by reason of her wanting to live my life as much as possible, you might have been a brother to her, as you have always been to me. We hope from the bottom of our hearts that you will be able to recover your health completely, and that you will be able to resume your work within a short time.

While arranging my new apartment it is such a pleasure for me to look at your pictures. They make the rooms so gay, and there is such an intensity of truth, of the true countryside in them, in each one of them. It is really as you used to say now and then of certain pictures of other artists - that they give the impression of having been reaped directly from the fields.

If it were not so far away, I should certainly have come to see you, but I don't have the time for that, and I ask myself if my visit would be of any use to you.

Signac intends to go to the South within a short time. He will go see you. I am now having an exhibition of Claude Monet at the gallery; it is very successful. It will not be long before the public will be asking for pictures of the new school, for they certainly stir up the public mind. If you can, you would be most kind if you would give me, or let someone give me, news about you, for apart from the letters from Messrs. Rey and Salles, I know nothing about you.

I wish you better health, and remain your brother who loves you.

Theo

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 18 March 1889

Dear Sir,
You will doubtlessly have understood that my last letter had crossed itself with yours. I have here in my hand the one that you wrote on the 16th and, after having paid a visit to your brother, I will give you his news.

I will hasten to tell you that, to my great surprise, I found him reasoning perfectly and having full understanding of his condition. On entering the hospice the porter handed me a letter he had just received for him, and which I recognised as coming from you. He thought that your brother would not be in a state to understand it. But I had hardly entered his room when, noticing the considerable improvement in him, I did not hesitate to give it to him. He read it in my presence, and even communicated to me the last part of it, where you speak to him of a friend, a fellow painter, who wants to come to Arles.

Your brother has spoken to me with calm and perfect lucidity about his situation, and also of the petition signed by his neighbors, the existence of which which the commissioner cannot ignore. This piece distresses him a great deal. If the police, he said to me, protected my liberty by preventing the children and even the grown-ups from gathering around my domicile and climbing up the windows as they did (as if I was a curious beast), I would have remained calmer; in any case I haven't hurt anybody and I am not dangerous to anyone.

He understands, that goes without saying, that he has had a bout of insanity and this thought grieves and revolts him at the same time. I told him that, once he is completely recovered, he must agree that it would be in his best interest and in view of his peace of mind to move to another quarter. He appears to have accepted this idea, while calling my attention to the fact that perhaps it would be difficult to find an apartment elsewhere after what has happened.

In summary, I have found your brother transformed and, God willing, this improvement will be maintained.

There is something in his state which is indefinable, and it is impossible to account for the so abrupt and sudden changes that have happened to him. It is evident that while he remains in the situation where I have seen him, there is no question that he will remain confined; no one that I know has this sad courage.

He told me that he will hasten to write to you.

The best to you, and from the bottom of my heart.

Your very devoted, Salles.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 19 March 1889

Arles, 19 March 1889

My dear brother,

I seemed to see so much brotherly anxiety in your kind letter that I think it my duty to break my silence. I write to you in the full possession of my faculties and not as a madman, but as the brother you know. This is the truth. A certain number of people here (there were more than 80 signatures) addressed a petition to the Mayor (I think his name is M. Tardieu), describing me as a man not fit to be at liberty, or something like that.

The commissioner of police or the chief commissioner then gave the order to shut me up again.

Anyhow, here I am, shut up in a cell all the livelong day, under lock and key and with keepers, without my guilt being proved or even open to proof.

Needless to say, in the secret tribunal of my soul I have much to reply to all that. Needless to say, I cannot be angry, and it seems to me a case of qui s'excuse s'accuse.

Only to let you know that as for setting me free - mind, I do not ask it, being persuaded that the whole accusation will be reduced to nothing - but I do say that as for getting me freed, you would find it difficult. If I did not restrain my indignation, I should at once be thought a dangerous lunatic. Let us hope and have patience. Besides, strong emotion can only aggravate my case. That is why I beg you for the present to let things be without meddling.

Take it as a warning from me that it might only complicate and confuse things.

All the more because you will understand that, while I am absolutely calm at the present moment, I may easily relapse into a state of overexcitement on account of fresh mental emotion.

So you understand what a staggering blow between the eyes it was to find so many people here cowardly enough to join together against one man, and that man ill.

Very good - so much for your better guidance; as far as my mental state is concerned, I am greatly shaken, but I am recovering a sort of calm in spite of everything, so as not to get angry.

Besides, humility becomes me after the experience of the repeated attacks. So I am being patient.

The main thing, I cannot tell you this too often, is that you should keep calm too, and let nothing upset you in your business. After your marriage we can set ourselves to clearing all this up, and meanwhile I beg you to leave me quietly here. I am convinced that the Mayor as well as the commissioner is really rather friendly, and that they will do what they can to settle all this. Here, except for liberty and except for many things that I could wish otherwise, I am not too badly off.

Besides, I told them that we were in no position to bear the expense. I cannot move without expense, and here are three months that I haven't been working, and mind, I could have worked if they had not vexed and worried me.

How are our mother and sister?

As I have nothing else to distract me - they even forbid me to smoke - though the other patients are allowed to - I think about all the people I know all day and all night long.

It is a shame - and all, so to speak, for nothing.

I will not deny that I would rather have died than have caused and suffered such trouble.

Well, well, to suffer without complaining is the one lesson that has to be learned in this life.

Now with all this, if I am to take up my task of painting again, I naturally need my studio, and some furniture, and we certainly have nothing to replace them with in case of loss. You know my work would not permit being reduced to living in hotels again. I must have my own fixed niche.

If these fellows here protest against me, I protest against them, and all they have to do is to give me damages and interest by friendly arrangement, in short, only to pay me back what I have lost through their blunders and ignorance.

If - say - I should become definitely insane - I certainly don't say that this is impossible - in any case I must be treated differently, and given fresh air, and my work, *etc.*

Then - honestly - I will submit.

But we have not got to that, and if I had had peace I should have recovered long ago.

They pester me because of my smoking and eating, but what's the use? After all, with all their sobriety, they only cause me fresh misery. My dear boy, the best we can do perhaps is to make fun of our petty griefs and, in a way, of the great griefs of human life too. Take it like a man, go straight to your goal. In present-day society we artists are only the broken pitchers. I so wish I could send you my canvases, but all of them are under lock and key, guarded by the police and keepers. Don't try to release me, that will settle itself, but warn Signac not to meddle in it, for he would be putting his hand into a hornets' nest - not until I write again. I shake your hand in thought. Give my kind regards to your fiancée, and to our mother and sister.

Ever yours, Vincent

I will read this letter just as it stands to M. Rey, who is not responsible, as he was ill himself. Doubtless he will write to you himself as well. My house has been closed by the police.

If, however, you have not heard from me direct for a month from now, then take action, but as long as I go on writing you, wait.

I have a vague recollection of a registered letter from you which they made me sign for, but which I did not want to take because they made such a fuss about the signature, and I have heard nothing about it since.

Explain to Bernard that I have not been able to answer him. It's quite a production to write a letter, there are as many formalities necessary now as if one were in prison. Tell him to ask Gauguin's advice, but give him a handshake for me.

Once more kind regards to your fiancée and Bonger.

I would rather not have written to you yet for fear of dragging you into it and upsetting you in what is before you. Things will settle down, it is too idiotic to last.

I had hoped that M. Rey would have come to see me so that I could talk to him again before sending off this letter, but though I sent word that I am expecting him, no one has come. I beg you once more to be cautious. You know what it means to go to the civil authorities with a complaint. At least wait till after you've been to Holland.

I am myself rather afraid that, if I were at liberty outside, I should not always keep control of myself if I were provoked or insulted, and then they would be able to take advantage of that. The fact remains that a petition has been sent to the Mayor. I answered roundly that I was quite prepared, for instance, to chuck myself into the water if that would please these good folk once and for all, but that in any case if I had in fact inflicted a wound on myself, I had done nothing of the sort to them, *etc.*

So cheer up, though my heart fails me sometimes. For you to come just now, honestly, would precipitate everything. I shall move out, of course, as soon as I see how to manage it.

I hope this will reach you all right. Do not be afraid of anything, I am quite calm now. Let them alone. Perhaps it would be well if you wrote once more, but nothing else for the time being. If I have patience, it can only strengthen me so as to leave me in less danger of a relapse. Of course, since I really had done my best to be friendly with people, and had no suspicion of it, it was rather a bad blow.

Good-by, my dear boy, for a little while, I hope, and don't worry. Perhaps it is a sort of quarantine they are forcing on me, for all I know.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 22 March 1889

My dear Theo,

Thank you for your letter which I have just received. All the more because in this case I would rather be in the wrong than in the right, certainly we are absolutely and entirely in agreement as to the general argument of your letter. That's how the thing looks to me too.

The news is that I think M. Salles is busy finding me an apartment in another part of town. I approve of this, for in this way I should not be obliged to move immediately - I should keep some sort of niche - and then I could certainly go for a trip to Marseilles or farther on to find something better. M. Salles is very kind and very loyal, and a pleasant contrast to others here. So there it is. That is all the news for the moment. If you were to write, try all the same to get them to give me the right to go out into the town.

As far as I can judge, I am not properly speaking a madman. You will see that the canvases I have done in the intervals are steady and not inferior to the others. I *miss* the work more than it tires me.

Certainly I should be pleased to see Signac, if he has to pass through here after all. Then they must let me go out with him to show him my canvases.

Perhaps it would have been a good thing for me to accompany him where he was going, and if we had tried to find a new place together, but there, there isn't much likelihood of that now, so what's the use of his putting himself out on purpose to come and see me?

There is one very good thing in your letter, where you say that one must not let oneself have any illusions about life.

The thing is to put up with the real facts of your destiny, and then there you are. I am writing in haste to send off this letter, which will, however, perhaps only reach you on Sunday, when Signac will have already left. I can't help it. All I would ask is that people whom I do not even know by name (for they took good care to arrange that I should not know who sent the letter in question) do not meddle with me when I am busy painting, or eating, or sleeping, or taking a turn at the brothel, since I haven't a wife. Now they are meddling with everything. But in spite of everything, I wouldn't give a damn if it weren't for the grief that I am very unwillingly causing you, or rather that they are causing - and for the delay in my work.

If they should continue, these repeated and unexpected agitations may change a passing and momentary mental disturbance into a chronic disease.

Believe me, if nothing intervenes, I shall now be able to do the same and perhaps better work in the orchards than I did last year.

Now let us be as firm as possible and, in short, not let them tread too painfully on our toes. From the start I have been faced with very mischievous opposition here. All this stir will naturally be good for “impressionism,” but you and I as individuals will suffer because of a pack of skunks and cowards.

There is some reason for keeping your indignation to yourself, isn't there? I have already seen in a paper here a really good article on decadent or impressionist literature.

But what are these articles in papers, etc., to you or me? As my good friend Roulin says, “It is to act as a pedestal for others.” But at least you would like to know for whom or for what, wouldn't you, then you could have no objection. But to be on a pedestal for something you do not know, that is trying.

After all this for nothing, provided you go straight to your goal - a secure home for you is a great gain for me too - and that done, we can perhaps find another, more peaceful, way of settling things after your marriage. If sooner or later I should really go mad, I think I should not want to stay on here at the hospital, but just now I want to come and go freely.

The best thing for me would certainly be not to live alone, but I would rather live in a cell forever than sacrifice another life to mine. For this business of painting is a sorry poor job nowadays. If I were a Roman Catholic, I should have the resource of turning monk, but not being precisely that way, as you know, I haven't that resource. The management of the hospital is - how shall I say? - Jesuit, they are very, very able, very clever, very powerful, they are even impressionistic, they know how to make inquiries of an unheard of subtlety, but - but that amazes and confounds me - and yet…

In fact this is, in a way, the cause of my silence, so keep aloof from me in business, and meanwhile I am a man after all, so you know I will shift for myself in matters of conscience which concern myself alone.

I shake your hand in thought. Tell your fiancée and our mother and sister not to worry about me and to believe that I am on the high road to recovery.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 24 March 1889

My dear Theo,
I am writing to tell you that I have seen Signac, and it has done me quite a lot of good. He was so good and straightforward and simple when the difficulty of opening the door by force or not presented itself - the police had closed up the house and destroyed the lock. They began by refusing to let us do it, but all the same we finally got in. I gave him as a keepsake a still life which had annoyed the good gendarmes of the town of Aries, because it represented two bloaters, and as you know they, the gendarmes, are called that. You remember that I did this same still life two or three times in Paris, and exchanged it once for a carpet in the old days. That is enough to show you how meddlesome and what idiots these people are.

I found Signac very quiet, though he is said to be so violent; he gave me the impression of someone who has balance and poise, that is all. Rarely or never have I had a conversation with an impressionist so free from discords or conflict on both sides. For instance he has been to see Jules Dupré, and he admires him. Doubtless you had a hand in his coming to stiffen my morale a bit, and thank you for it.

I took advantage of my outing to buy a book, Ceux de la Glébe by Camille Lemonnier. I have devoured two chapters of it - it has such gravity, such depth! Wait till I send it to you. This is the first time in several months that I have had a book in my hands. That means a lot to me and does a good deal toward curing me.

Altogether there are several canvases to be sent to you, as Signac could see, he was not frightened by my painting as far as I saw. Signac thought, and it is perfectly true, that I looked healthy.

And with it I have the desire and the inclination for work. Still, of course, if I had to endure my work and my private life being interfered with every day by gendarmes and poisonous idlers of municipal electors petitioning the Mayor whom they have elected and who consequently depends on their votes, it would be no more than human of me to relapse all over again. I am inclined to think that Signac will tell you very much the same thing. In my opinion we must firmly oppose the loss of the furniture, *etc.* Then - my Lord - I must have liberty to carry on my handicraft.

M. Rey says that instead of eating enough and at regular times, I kept myself going on coffee and alcohol.

I admit all that, but all the same it is true that to attain the high yellow note that I attained last summer, I really had to be pretty well keyed up. And that after all, an artist is a man with his work to do, and it is not for the first idler who comes along to crush him for good.

Am I to suffer imprisonment or the madhouse? Why not? Didn't Rochefort and Hugo, Quinet and others give an eternal example by submitting to exile, and the first even to a convict prison? But all I want to say is that this is a thing above the mere question of illness and health.

Naturally one is beside oneself in parallel cases. I do not say equivalent, being in a very inferior and secondary place to theirs, but I do say parallel.

And that is what the first and last cause of my aberration was. Do you know those words of a Dutch poet's - “Ik ben aan d'aard gehecht met meer dan aardse banden”? [I am attached to the earth by more than earthly ties.]

That is what I have experienced in the midst of much suffering - above all - in my so-called mental illness.

Unfortunately I have a handicraft which I do not know well enough to express myself as I should like.

I pull myself up short for fear of a relapse, and I pass on to something else. Before you leave, could you send me

3 tubes zinc white

1 tube same size cobalt

1 “ “ ultramarine
4 “ “ malachite green
1 “ “ emerald green
1 “ “ orange lead

This in case - probable enough if I find a way of resuming my work again - I should set to work shortly on the orchards again. Oh, if only nothing had happened to mess up my life!

Let's think well before going to another place. You see that I have no better luck in the South than in the North. It's pretty much the same everywhere.

I am thinking of frankly accepting my role of madman, the way Degas acted the part of a notary. But there it is, I do not feel that altogether I have strength enough for such a part.

You talk to me of what you call “the real South.” The reason why I shall never go there is above. I rightly leave that to men who have a more well-balanced mind, more integrity than I. I am only good for something intermediate, and second-rate, and self-effaced.

However intense my feelings may be, or whatever power of expression I may acquire at an age when physical passions have lessened, I could never build an imposing structure on such a mouldy, shattered past.

So it is more or less all the same to me what happens to me - even my staying here - I think that in the end my fate will be evened up. So beware of sudden starts - since you are getting married and I am getting too old - that is the only policy to suit us.

Good-by for now, write me without much delay, and believe me, after asking you to give my kindest regards to Mother, our sister and your fiancée, your very affectionate brother,

Vincent

I will send the book by Camille Lemonnier pretty soon.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 26 March 1889

[Letter written by Signac to Theo]
Dear Mr. Van Gogh,

I found your brother in perfect health, physically and mentally. Yesterday afternoon and again this morning we went for a walk together. He took me along to see his pictures, many of which are very good, and all of which are very curious.

His courteous doctor, the house physician Rey, is of the opinion that, if he should lead a very methodical life, eating and drinking normally and at regular hours, there would be every chance that the terrible crises would not repeat themselves at all.

He is quite willing to keep him all the time that would be necessary. He thinks that all the expenses of his stay in the hospital will have to be defrayed by the municipality, because it was at the administration's demand that he was kept in the asylum.

At any rate, if he does not go back to Paris, which in Mr. Rey's opinion would be preferable, it would be necessary for him to move to another house, as his neighbours are hostile to him. This is also what your brother desires, for at the earliest possible date he wants to leave this asylum, where after all he must necessarily suffer under the continual surveillance, which often has to be of a petty nature.

Summarizing, I emphatically assure you that I found him in a condition of perfect health and sanity. There is only one thing he wishes - to be able to work in tranquillity. So do your best to grant him this happiness. How dismal the life he is living must be for him.

I shake your hand cordially, dear Mr. Van Gogh.

P. Signac

Letters to be called for at Cassis.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 29 March 1889

My dear Theo,

A few more lines before you leave; just now things are going well. The day before yesterday and yesterday I went out into the town to get things to work with. When I went home, I was able to ascertain that the real neighbours, those whom I knew, were not among the petitioners.

However it may be in other quarters, I saw that I still have friends among them.

In case of need M. Salles will undertake to find me within a few days an apartment in another part of town. I have sent for a few more books so as to have a few sound ideas in my head. I have reread Uncle Tom's Cabin, you know Beecher Stowe's book on slavery, Dickens's Christmas books and I have given Germinie Lacerteux to M. Salles.

And now I am returning to my portrait of “La Berceuse” for the fifth time. And when you see it, you will agree with me that it is nothing but a chromolithograph from the cheap shops, and again that it has not even the merit of being photographically correct in its proportions or in anything else.

But after all, I want to make an image such as a sailor at sea would dream of when he thinks of a woman ashore.

They are very attentive to me at the hospital these days, and this as well as many other things upsets me and makes me rather confused.

Meanwhile I imagine that you would rather get married without all the ceremony and congratulations of a wedding, and I'm quite sure in advance that you will avoid them as much as possible.

If you see Koning or others and especially the Mauve cousins and Lecomte, don't forget to give them my very best regards.

These last three months do seem so strange to me. Sometimes moods of indescribable mental anguish, sometimes moments when the veil of time and the fatality of circumstances seemed to be torn apart for an instant.

Certainly you are right after all, damn well right - even allowing for hope, the thing to do is to accept the probably disastrous reality. I am hoping once again to throw myself wholly into my work, in which I've fallen behind.

Oh, I must not forget to tell you a thing I have very often thought of. Quite accidentally I found in an article in an old newspaper some words written on an ancient tomb in the country between here and Carpentras.

Here is this very, very, very old epitaph, say dating from the time of Faubert's Salammbô.

“Thebe, daughter of Thelhui, priestess of Osiris, who never complained of anyone.”

If you see Gauguin, you should tell him that. And I thought of a faded woman, you have the study of her at home, the woman who had such strange eyes whom I also met accidentally.

What does it mean, this “she never complained of anyone”? Imagine a perfect eternity, why not, but don't let us forget that even in those old days reality had this - “and she never complained of anyone.”

Do you remember that one Sunday good old Thomas came to see us and said, “Ah but - are those the kind of women to make a man horny?”

It is not exactly a question of being horny, but from time to time in your life you feel thrilled through and through as if you were actually striking root in the soil.

Meanwhile you talk to me of “the real South,” and I have said that after all it seemed to me it was rather for men with a more well-balanced mind than mine to go there. The “real South,” isn't it rather there that you would find reasonableness, patience, serenity enough to make you like that good “Thebe, daughter of Thelhui, priestess of Osiris, who never complained of anyone.”

Compared with this I feel utterly ungrateful.

That is the happiness, the serenity, I am invoking for you and your wife on the occasion of your marriage, so that you may have this “real South” within your soul.

If I want this letter to go today, I must finish it. A handshake, a pleasant journey, many kind regards to our mother and sister.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Paul Signac to Vincent van Gogh

Arles, 4 April 1889

[Postcard written by Signac to Vincent, from Cassis (B.d.R.), postmarked April 4, 1889, addressed to “L'Hôtel Dieu,” Arles.]

My dear friend,

After having rambled along the coast, I settled in Cassis. I am sending you my address so that you can let me know how you are getting on. I have written to your brother, but he has not answered me at all. With a cordial handshake,

Yours, P. Signac
2 Place de la République - Cassis

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 5 April 1889

My dear Theo,

A few words to wish you and your fiancée all happiness these days. It is a sort of nervous affliction with me that on festive occasions I generally find difficulty in formulating good wishes, but you must not conclude from that that I wish you happiness less earnestly than anyone else, as you well know.

I have still to thank you for your last letter, as well as for the consignment of paints from Tasset and for several numbers of Le Fifre with drawings by Forain. These last especially had the effect on me of making me see my own stuff as very sentimental beside them.

I waited several days before answering, not knowing which day you were leaving for Amsterdam. Besides I do not know either if you are getting married in Breda or in Amsterdam. But if as I am inclined to think it will be in Amsterdam, then I have assumed that you would find this letter there by Sunday.

By the way - just today our friend Roulin came to see me. He told me to give you many greetings from him and to congratulate you. His visit gave me a lot of pleasure; he often has to carry loads you would call too heavy, but it doesn't prevent him, as he has the strong constitution of the peasant, from always looking well and even jolly. But for me, who am perpetually learning from him afresh, what a lesson for the future it is when one gathers from his talk that life does not grow any easier as one gets on in life.

I talked to him so as to have his opinion as to what I ought to do about the Studio, which I have to leave in any case at Easter, according to the advice of M. Salles and M. Rey.

I said to Roulin that having done a good many things to put the house into a far better state than when I took it, especially as regards the gas I had put in, I considered it as a definite piece of work.

They are forcing me to leave - very well - but I should be pretty well justified in taking away the gas and making a rumpus about damages or something only I haven't the heart to do it.

The only thing I feel I can do in this business is to tell myself that it was an attempt to make an abiding place for unknown successors. Besides, before seeing Roulin I had already been to the gas works to arrange it this way. And Roulin was of the same opinion. He expects to stay in Marseilles.

I am well just now, except for a certain undercurrent of vague sadness difficult to define - but anyway - I have rather gained than lost in physical strength, and I am working.

Just now I have on the easel an orchard of peach trees beside a road with the Alpilles in the background. It seems that there was a fine article in the Figaro on Monet, Roulin had read it and been struck by it, he said. Altogether it is a rather difficult problem to decide whether to take a new flat, and even to find it, especially by the month.

M. Salles has spoken to me of a house at 20 francs which is very nice, but he is not sure if I could have it. At Easter I shall have to pay three months' rent, the removal, *etc.* All this is not very cheering or convenient, especially as there seems no prospect of any better luck anywhere.

Roulin said or rather hinted that he did not at all like the disquiet which has reigned here in Arles this winter, considered even quite apart from what has fallen on me.

After all it is rather like that everywhere, business not too good, resources exhausted, people discouraged and ... as you said, not content to remain spectators, and becoming nuisances from being out of work - if anybody can still make a joke or work fast, down they come on him.

And now, my dear lad, I do believe I shall soon not be ill enough to have to stay shut up. Otherwise I am beginning to get used to it, and if I had to stay for good in an asylum, I should make up my mind to it and I think I could find subjects for painting there as well.

Write to me soon if you can find the time.

Roulin's family was still in the country and though he earns slightly more, the separate expenses are greater in proportion, and so they are not really a farthing better off and he was not without very heavy anxieties. Fortunately the weather is fine and the sun glorious, and people here quickly forget all their griefs for the time being and then they brim over with high spirits and illusions.

I have been re-reading Dickens's “Christmas Books” these days. There are things in them so profound that one must read them over and over, there are tremendously close connections with Carlyle.

Roulin, though he is not quite old enough to be like a father to me, has all the same a silent gravity and tenderness for me such as an old soldier might have for a young one. All the time - but without a word - a something which seems to say, We do not know what will happen to us tomorrow, but whatever it may be, think of me. And it does one good when it comes from a man who is neither embittered, nor sad, nor perfect, nor happy, nor always irreproachably right. But such a good soul and so wise and so full of feeling and so trustful. I tell you I have no right to complain of anything whatever about Arles, when I think of some things I have seen there which I shall never be able to forget.

It is getting late. Once more I wish you and Jo plenty of happiness, and a handshake in thought.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Paul Signac

Arles, c. 10 April 1889

Arles, c. 10 April 1889

My dear friend Signac,

Many thanks for your postcard and the information it contained. As to my brother's not having replied to your letter, I am inclined to think that it is hardly his fault. I myself have not heard from him for a fortnight. The fact is that he is in Holland, where he is getting married one of these days.

Well, look here, without denying the least bit in the world the advantages of marriages, once it has been contracted, and of being quietly settled down in one's own home, when I think of the obsequial pomp of the reception and the lamentable congratulations on the part of the two families (still in a state of civilization), not to mention the fortuitous appearances in those chemist's jars where the antediluvian civil and religious magistrates are kept - goodness gracious - mustn't one pity the poor wretch who is obliged after having provided himself with the necessary documents, to repair to a locality, where, with a ferocity unequaled by the cruelest cannibals, he is married alive at a slow fire of receptions and the aforesaid funereal pomp.

I remain greatly obliged to you for your friendly and beneficial visit, which contributed considerably to raising of my spirits. At present I am well, and I work at the sanatorium and its surroundings. From there I have just returned with two studies of orchards.

[Here Vincent drew a sketch of Orchard in Bloom.]

Here is a hasty sketch of them - the big one is a poor green landscape with little cottages, blue line of the Alpines, sky white and blue. The foreground, patches of land surrounded by cane hedges, where small peach trees are in bloom - everything is small there, the gardens, the fields, the orchards, and the trees, even the mountains, as in certain Japanese landscapes, which is the reason why the subject attracted me.

The other landscape is nearly all green with a little lilac and grey - on a rainy day.

I was very pleased to hear that you have settled down now, and I am longing for news about the progress of your work and about the character of the seaside scenery there.

Since your visit my head has just about returned to its normal state, and for the time being I desire nothing better than that this will last. Above all it will depend on a very sober way of living.

I intend to stay here for the next few months at least; I have rented an apartment consisting of two very small rooms.

But at times it is not easy for me to take up living again, for there remain inner seizures of despair of a pretty large caliber.

My God - those anxieties - who can live in the modern world without catching his share of them? My best consolation, if not the best remedy, is to be found in deep friendships, even though they have the disadvantage of anchoring us more firmly in life than would seem desirable in the days of our great sufferings.

Once more many thanks for your visit, which gave me so much pleasure.

A hearty handshake in thought,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 13 April 1889

My dear Theo,

I am rather surprised that you have not written to me once during these days. However, as on the previous occasion when you went to Holland, it is mostly accidental.

I hope that everything has gone off well with you. Meanwhile I have been obliged to ask Tasset for 10 meters of canvas and some tubes.

And I still need:

12	Zinc white	Big tubes	1	Vermilion	Big tubes
1	Emerald	“	4	Malachite green	“
2	Cobalt	“	3	Chrome 1	“
2	ultramarine	“	1	Chrome 11	“
			2	Geranium lake	Medium tubes

I have six studies of the spring, two of them big orchards. It is very urgent, because these effects are so short-lived.

So write me by return mail. I've taken an apartment consisting of two little rooms (at 6 to 8 francs per month, water included) *belonging to M. Rey*. It is certainly not expensive but nothing like as nice as the other studio.

But before I could manage the move or send you some canvases, I had to pay the other proprietor. And that is why I have been more or less surprised at your not sending anything. But no matter.

Hoping again that everything to do with your marriage has gone off to your liking, and wishing you and your wife much happiness from the bottom of my heart.

Ever yours, Vincent

Signac asked me to join him at Cassis, but seeing that we have enough expenses without that, whatever I do or whatever you do, it was unthinkable.

Colours brayed, coarser grained, in large tubes like the large tubes of flake white and zinc white.

6	Cobalt	large	tubes	2	Orange lead	large	Tubes
6	Ultramarine	“	“	1	Yellow ochre	“	“
6	Malachite green	“	“	6	Zinc white	“	“
6	Emerald green	“	“	6	Flake white	“	“
6	Vermilion	“	“	6	Prussian blue	“	“

6	Chrome 1 citron	“	“	6	Geranium lake	“	“
6	“ 2 “	“	“	6	Carmine	“	“
6	“ 3 “	“	“	6	Ordinary lake	“	“

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 19 April 1889

Arles, 19th April 1889
Dear Sir,

I have not written to you for some time, because I supposed that your brother has informed you of his own situation. He is infinitely better, as you can judge from his letters; sometimes it would seem that he has no trace of the trouble that affected him so acutely. He had decided that he would leave the hospice after he had found a suitable apartment. I looked for him and with him, and he was about to sign with a proprietor, when all of a sudden he made me the confession that he didn't have the courage at present to take possession of himself, and that it would agree infinitely better with him, that it would be wiser for him to spend two or three months in a nursing home.

He is entirely conscious of his condition and talks to me of what he has been through and which he fears may return, with a candour and simplicity which is touching. “I am not capable,” he told me the day before yesterday, “of looking after myself and control myself; I feel quite different from what I used to be.” In view of this there was no reason to look for an apartment and we have given up all attempts in this respect. He has, therefore, requested me to obtain the necessary information, in order that he may be admitted somewhere and also to write to you in this sense.

Considering this decision, taken after mature deliberation, I thought that, before turning to you, I would obtain some information regarding a private institution outside the gates of Arles, at Saint-Rémy, where it appears that the inmates are very well treated. I send you the reply which I have received and the prospectus that came with it.

I am, as always, at your entire service, and you can use me freely. I must add that those who know your brother, notably the physicians, approve this decision and consider it very wise, considering the state of isolation your brother would be in after he leaves the hospice.

At present his furniture has been stored at a neighbours, to whom your brother paid three month's rent for this purpose, 18 f. in all.

And now I will leave you to your reflections. Nothing can be done without your direct intervention. You would not believe how much your brother is preoccupied and grieved with the idea of giving you problems. “My brother, he told me, who has always done so much for me! and now to create more cares for him!”

My best wishes to you. I cordially shake your hand. Salles

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 21 April 1889

My dear Theo,

You will probably be back in Paris at the moment when this letter arrives. I wish you and your wife a great deal of happiness. Thank you very much for your kind letter and for the 100-franc note it contained.

Out of the 65 francs which I owe, I have paid only 25 francs to my landlord, having had to pay three months' rent in advance for a room which I shan't be living in, but where I have sent my furniture, and having besides had expenses of 10 francs or so for moving, *etc.*

Then as my clothes were not in too brilliant a condition and I had to have something new to go out in the street in, I got a suit for 35 francs and spent 4 francs on six pairs of socks. So out of the note I have only a few francs left, and at the end of the month I must pay the landlord again, though he might be kept waiting for a few days.

I settled my bill at the hospital today, and there is still almost enough for the rest of the month out of the money I still have on deposit. At the end of the month I should like to go to the hospital in St. Rémy, or another institution of this kind, of which M. Salles has told me. Forgive me if I don't go into details and argue the pros and cons of such a step.

Talking about it would be mental torture.

It will be enough, I hope, if I tell you that I feel quite unable to take a new studio and to stay there alone - here in Arles or elsewhere, for the moment it is all the same; I have tried to make up my mind to begin again, but at the moment it's not possible.

I should be afraid of losing the power to work, which is coming back to me now, by forcing myself and by having all the other responsibilities of a studio on my shoulders besides.

And temporarily I wish to remain shut up as much for my own peace of mind as for other people's. What comforts me a little is that I am beginning to consider madness as a disease like any other and accept the thing as such, whereas during the crises themselves I thought that everything I imagined was real. Anyway, the fact is that I do not want to think or talk about it. You'll spare me any explanations, but I ask you and Messrs. Salles and Rey to arrange things so that I can go there as a resident boarder at the end of this month or the beginning of

May.

Beginning again that painter's life I have been living, isolated in the studio so often, and without any other means of distraction than going to a café or a restaurant with all the neighbors criticizing, etc., *I can't face it*; going to live with another person, say another artist - difficult, very difficult - it's taking too much responsibility on oneself. I dare not even think of it.

So let's try it three months to begin with, and afterward we shall see. Now one's board ought to be about 80 francs, and I shall do a little painting and drawing without putting such frenzy into it as a year ago. Do not be grieved at all this. Certainly these last days were sad, with all the moving, taking away all my furniture, packing up the canvases that are going to you, but the thing I felt saddest about was that you had given me all these things with such brotherly love, and that for so many years you were always the one who supported me, and then to be obliged to come back and tell you this sorry tale - but it's difficult to express it as I felt it. The goodness you have shown me is not lost, because you had it and it remains for you; even if the material results should be nil, it remains for you all the more; but I can't say it as I felt it. Meanwhile you do understand that if alcohol has undoubtedly been one of the great causes of my madness, then it came on very slowly and will go away slowly too, assuming it does go, of course. Or the same thing if it comes from smoking. But I should only hope that it - this recovery [probably a word has been omitted here] the frightful superstition of some people on the subject of alcohol, so that they prevail upon themselves never to drink or smoke.

We are already ordered not to lie or steal, etc., and not to commit other crimes great or small and it would become too complicated if it was absolutely indispensable to have nothing but virtues in the society in which we are very undeniably planted, whether it be good or bad.

I assure you that during those queer days when many things seem odd to me because my brain is agitated, through it all I don't dislike old Pangloss.

But you would do me a service by discussing the question frankly with M. Salles and M. Rey.

I should think that with an allowance of 75 francs or so a month there must be a way of interning me so that should have everything I need.

Then, if it is possible, I'd very much like to be able to go out in the daytime and draw or paint outside. Seeing that I go out every day now here, and think that this could continue.

Paying more, I warn you, would make me less happy. The company of other patients, you understand, is not at all disagreeable to me; on the contrary, it distracts me.

Ordinary food suits me quite well, especially if they gave me a little more wine there, as they do here usually a half-liter instead of a quarter for instance.

But a private room - it remains to be seen what the arrangements of an institution like that would be. Mind you Rey is overburdened with work, overburdened. If he writes to you, or M. Salles, better do exactly what they say. After all we must take our share, my boy, of the diseases of our time - in a way it is only fair after all that, having lived some years in comparatively good health, we should have our share sooner or later. As for me, you know well enough that I should not exactly have chosen madness if I had had a choice, but once you have an affliction of that sort, you can't catch it again. And there'll perhaps be the consolation of being able to go on working a bit at painting.

How will you manage not to speak too well or too ill of Paris and many other things to your wife? Do you feel in advance that you will be quite capable of keeping exactly the golden mean all the time and from all points of view?

I shake your hand in thought. I do not know if I shall write very, very often because not all my days are clear enough for me to write fairly logically, All your kindness to me seemed greater than ever to me today. I can't put the way I feel it in words, but I assure you that this kindness has been pure gold, and if you do not see any results from it, my dear brother, don't fret about it; your own goodness abides. Only transfer this affection to your wife as much as possible. And if we correspond somewhat less, you will see that if she is what I think her, she will comfort you. That is what I hope.

Rey is a very nice fellow, a tremendous worker, always on the job. What men the modern doctors are! If you see Gauguin or write to him, remember me to him.

I shall be very glad to hear any news you can give me of our mother and sister, and if they are well; tell them to look upon this affair of mine - I mean it - as nothing to be inordinately distressed about, because I may be comparatively unfortunate, but after all, in spite of that, I may still have some almost normal years before me. It is a disease like any other, and now almost everyone we know among our friends has something the matter with him. So is it worth talking about? I am sorry to give trouble to M. Salles, and Rey, and above all to you too, but what is one to do? My head isn't steady enough to begin again as before - then the important thing is not to cause any more scenes in public, and naturally, being a little calmer now, I distinctly feel that I was mentally and physically in an unhealthy condition. And then people have been kind, those I remember, and as for the others, after all I caused some uneasiness, and if I had been in a normal condition, things would never have happened the way they did.

Goodbye, write when you can.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 24 April 1889

My dear Theo,
I have seen M. Salles again, and he said that he has written to you. I think that this will be for the best, and I see no other way. The power of thought is coming back to me gradually, but I am much less able to manage practical things than hitherto.

I am absent-minded and could not direct my own life just now.

But let's leave that alone as much as possible. How are things going, are you back?

I must tell you that I think you may find M. Salles' letter still addressed to Rue Lepic.

How are things at home? I think Mother must have been pleased.

I assure you that I am much calmer now that I can tell myself that you have a companion for good. Above all, do not imagine that I am unhappy.

I feel deeply that this has been at work within me for a very long time already, and that other people, seeing symptoms of mental derangement, have naturally had apprehensions better founded than my unfounded certainty that I was thinking normally, which was not the case. So that has much softened many of the judgements which I have too often passed with more or less presumption on people who nevertheless were wishing me well. Anyhow, it is certainly a pity that with me these reflections reach the *stage of feeling* rather late.

But I want you to think all that over and to consider the step we are taking now, just as I spoke of it to M. Salles, this going into an asylum, as purely a formality, and in any case the repeated attacks seem to me to have been serious enough to leave no room for hesitation.

Besides, as to my future, it is not as if I were twenty, since I have turned thirty-six.

Really, I think it would be torture for other people as well as for myself if I were to leave the hospital, for I feel and am, as it were, paralyzed when it comes to acting and shifting for myself. Later on - well, let's wait and see.

I should like to ask you loads of things about Holland and about these days. Poor egoist that I have always been and still am, I can't get the idea out of my head, although I have already explained it to you two or three times, that it is really for the best if I go into an asylum immediately. Things may come out right perhaps in the long run. Anyway, my very poor excuse is that painting narrows your ideas about other things, perhaps you cannot be doing your work and think of other things at the same time. It's hard enough, come to think of it, for the job is pretty thankless and its usefulness is certainly questionable. There remains, however, the idea of an association of painters, of lodging them in common, some of them; though we did not succeed, though it is a deplorable and melancholy failure, the idea is still true and reasonable, like so may others. But we won't begin again.

Understand clearly that we must get absolutely the simplest board and lodging, 80 francs ought to be enough and can be, M. Salles says. Rey warns me about St. Rémy that it is as well to remember that a good many of the patients are fairly well off and some of them spend a lot of money. Which often does them more harm than good. I can well believe it.

And I think that in my case nature by herself will do much more for me than any remedies. Here I take *nothing*. I may still have to pay 11.87 fr. in installment for the furniture - at least they sent me a bill for it - besides the rest of the rent which I still owe the landlord. And I must send you my collection of pictures before going to St. Rémy. I have one case already packed.

I would like to write you about something else, but my mind is taken up with arranging this business, and I can't find the ideas I am seeking, so as to write you about several things at once.

Goodbye for now. I hope you and your wife have had a good journey.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Arles, 24 April 1889
Paris, 14 April 1889
My dear Vincent,
I was greatly touched by your letter, which we received yesterday ; really, you are making far too much of something which is entirely natural, without taking into account that you have repaid me many times over, by your work as well as by your friendship, which is of greater value than all the money I shall ever possess. It is very painful for me to know that you are still in an imperfect state of health. Though it seems to me that nothing in your letter betrays a weakness of the mind - on the contrary - the fact that you deem it necessary to go to a sanatorium is in itself rather serious. Let's hope that this is meant only as a preventative measure. Seeing that I know you well enough to consider you capable of all imaginable sacrifices, I have been contemplating the possibility that you have thought of this solution in order to inconvenience less those who know you. If this should be the case, I implore you not to do it, for life in such an establishment can hardly be pleasant. So you should know well what you are going to do, and I think you ought to consider whether you should perhaps try something else first. Either you might come here for some time, or you might go to Port-Aven during the summer, or again you might go and board with people who would take care of you.

If, however, there was no hidden meaning in what you said when you wrote me, I think that you are quite right in going to St. Rémy. By staying there for some time you will be able to regain confidence in your strength, and nothing will prevent you from returning to Arles after a certain lapse of time, if you should feel the inclination. Mr. Salles sent me some prospectuses of the St. Rémy establishment, and it says that a third person should apply for admission. So I enclose the letter to the director of the establishment, which you may use as you think fit. As soon as you have decided in going away, I shall let you have the necessary money.

Now I only want to add that we have been here since Saturday. By Monday we had more or less installed ourselves, and the apartment looks more lived in every day, thanks to all sorts of inventions of Jo's. We thoroughly understand each other, so we feel such a complete mutual satisfaction that we feel happier than I should say. We left Mother and the sisters in perfect health. Mother seems to be growing younger. She has now returned to Breda after an absence of about a month.

My wedding gave her a lot of pleasure, particularly because Jo and she and Wil got on perfectly with each other; besides, she has something so sincere in her ways that there are quite a number of persons on whom she makes a very pleasant impression.

Although there are many things in life which she knows nothing of, and which she will have to form an opinion about, she has such a foundation of good will and of zeal for doing the right thing that I am no longer afraid of the disillusions which I feared before our marriage. Up till now all goes better than I have been able to imagine, and I never dared hope for so much happiness.

In Holland I lacked the time to see many pictures; notwithstanding this I saw the “Jewish Bride” and the other Rembrandts again, the Frans Halses at Haarlem which I thought more beautiful than ever before, and the portrait of an old woman by Rembrandt in the Museum at Brussels. How beautiful the last-named picture is. There is really nothing more remarkable and characteristic in Holland than those old portraits. One feels far removed from this epoch when one looks at the follows of today. There was an exhibition at C.M.'s of charcoal sketches by Mauve, leaves out of his sketchbooks. Very touching things. Jet gave us one of these drawings as a present, which I am very, very glad of.

Write us soon what you have definitely decided, and do not despair, for assuredly better days will come to you.

I shake both your hands.

Theo

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, c. 25-28 April 1889

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your kind letter, thanks for the good news it contained and also for the 100-franc note. I was very, very glad to hear that you feel easier in your mind since your marriage. Then one thing that gave me great pleasure was your saying that Mother looks as if she were growing younger. Naturally very soon, or even now already, her mind will be running on seeing you with a child. That is dead certain.

I very much regret for your sake and for your wife's too that you are not living at Ville d'Avray, for instance, instead of in Paris. But that will come, I hope. The great thing now is that you should pick up again instead of wearing yourself down.

I went to see M. Salles and took your letter for the director of the asylum at St. Rémy, and he is going there today, so I hope it will be fixed up by the end of the week. For myself, I shouldn't be unhappy or discontented if some time from now I could enlist in the Foreign Legion for five years (they take men up to forty, I think). From the physical point of view my health is better than it used to be, and perhaps being in the army would do me more good than anything else. Anyway, I don't say that we must or can do this without consideration and consulting a doctor, but after all, we must count on it that whatever we do, it will not be quite so good as one could wish.

But if not, naturally I can always do painting or drawing as long as it will work, and I do not in the least say No to that. As for coming to Paris or going to Pont-Aven, I do not feel I can, besides most of the time I have no very keen desire or keen regret.

Sometimes, just as the waves pound against the sullen, hopeless cliffs, I feel a tempest of desire to embrace something, a woman of the domestic hen type, but after all, we must take this for what it is, the effect of hysterical overexcitement rather than a vision of actual reality.

Besides, Rey and I have laughed about it sometimes, for he says that love is a microbe too, which does not surprise me much, and could not shock anyone, it seems to me. Isn't Renan's Christ a thousand times more comforting than so many papier mâche Christs that they serve up to you in the Duval establishments called Protestant, Roman Catholic or something or other churches? And why shouldn't it be so with love? As soon as I can, I am going to read Renan's Antichrist. I haven't the slightest idea what it will be like, but I believe beforehand that I shall find one or two ineffable things in it.

Oh, my dear Theo, if you saw the olives just now...The leaves, old silver and silver turning to green against the blue. And the orange-coloured ploughed earth. It is something quite different from your idea of it in the North, the tender beauty, the distinction!

It is like the pollard willows of our Dutch meadows or the oak bushes of our dunes, that is to say the rustle of an olive grove has something very secret in it, and immensely old. It is too beautiful for us to dare to paint it or be able to imagine it. The oleander - ah! that speaks of love and is beautiful like the Lesbos of Puvis de Chavannes, with women on the seashore. But the olive is different, if you want to compare it to something, it is Delacroix.

This letter ends abruptly. I wanted to talk to you about lots more things, but it is just as I have already written, my ideas are not orderly.

I will send shortly, by goods train, two cases of pictures, of which you must not hesitate to destroy a good number.

I had a letter from Wil, who is going back to *Mme.* D.'s, a very nice letter. Ah! Cancer - it is cruel and difficult; by the way, it is very curious, but do you know that during all this strange and inexplicable commotion which has taken place in Arles, and in which I was mixed up, there was a perpetual talk of cancer? I understand that according to the belief of these virtuous natives who know the future so well, it appears - I believe that according to them I must be blessed with that particular malady. About which I naturally know nothing, but all the same it's an occurrence which remains absolutely inexplicable to me; besides, for the most part I have completely lost the recollection of those days in question, and I can reconstruct none of it. Even if it were so, I should try to console myself by thinking that diseases like this are perhaps to men what ivy is to the oak.

A good handshake, and many thanks. Goodbye for now.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Dr. Th. Peyron to Theo van Gogh

St-Rémy, 29 April 1889

St-Rémy, April 29th 1889

Sir,

Yesterday Mr. Salles, the Protestant minister of Arles handed me your letter, which is at the same time a request for admission for your brother, a painter in Arles; he also told me the conditions that you want for your patient during his stay in the house; among these conditions there are some that will be a pleasure to grant him, but there is one that I cannot accept in advance, that of granting him permission to walk out of the establishment any time that he wants. You will understand, I hope, that under these conditions my responsibility would be strongly compromised, since I could not watch over him.

What I can assure you in advance is that after I have observed your patient for some time and I have acquired the certainty that he can enjoy a greater liberty without inconveniences, I will be the first to grant it to him.

As for doing painting and not to be sequestered in the establishment, I promise you that we will facilitate every means to allow him his natural tastes and, in the house, allow him the greatest liberty compatible with his mental state.

In the same way, we will grant him wine with all his meals, especially since all my patients drink wine every day. I must tell you that in these conditions, the price of the pension remains fixed at 100 f. per month, and that it would be impossible for me to make a reduction. I have to add that you will have to pay, just for the first month, a supplement of ten francs for the medical certificate from the physician named by the administration to control the admissions of the patients; this expense is only payable for the first month.

Medical treatment is given with the same solicitude for all classes of patients.

I must ask you to give me his birth certificate at the time of admission. As for his clothing requirements needed to maintain the cleanliness of the patients, I have fixed this up with M. Salles, who will accompany him to St-Rémy.

Sincerely Yours.

Dr. Th. Peyron.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh

Arles, 30 April 1889

Arles, 30 April 1889

My dear sister,

Your letter affected me above all because I learned from it that you have returned in order to nurse *Mme.* Duquesne.

Cancer is certainly a terrible disease - as for me, I always tremble when I see a case of it - and this is no rare occurrence in the South, though it is often not the real, incurable and mortal cancer, but cancerous tumors from which people occasionally recover. However this may be, I think it very brave of you, Sister, not to shrink from this Gethsamane. I feel I am less brave than you, when I think of such things, for I feel clumsy, unwieldy, awkward in their presence. If my memory does not deceive me, we have a Dutch proverb bearing on this - They are not the worst fruits that wasps gnaw at …

This leads me straight to what I wanted to say. The ivy loves the old branchless willow - every spring the ivy loves the trunk of the old oak tree - and in the same way cancer, that mysterious plant, so often fastens on people whose lives were nothing but love and devotion. However terrible the mystery of these sufferings may be, yet there is in reality something sweet and pathetically touching about it, which has the same effect as seeing the abundant growth of green moss on the old thatched roof. All the same I know nothing about it, and I haven't the right to assert anything.

Not very far from here there is an old, old tomb, much older than Christ's sepulcher, bearing the following inscription: “Blessed be Thebe, daughter of Telhui, priestess of Osiris, who never complained of anyone.” I could not help thinking of this when you told me that the patient you are nursing never complains …

Mother will doubtless be pleased with Theo's marriage, and he writes me that she seems to be getting younger in appearance. This pleases me very much indeed. Now he too is very contented with his experience of matrimony, and feels considerably reassured. He has very few illusions about it all, for he possesses to a rare degree that strength of mind which enables him to take things as they are without expressing himself about the good or the bad of them. And he is quite right in this, for what do we know about what we are doing?

As for myself, I am going to an asylum in St. Rémy, not far from here, for three months. I have had in all four great crises, during which I didn't in the least know what I said, what I wanted and what I did. Not taking into account that I had previously had three fainting fits without any plausible reason, and without retaining the slightest remembrance of what I felt.

Well, this is bad enough, the fact is that I have been much calmer since then, and that I am perfectly well physically. I still feel incapable of taking a new studio. Notwithstanding this I am working, and have just finished two pictures of the hospital, one of a ward, a very long ward, with rows of beds with white curtains, in which some figures of patients are moving. The walls, the ceiling with big beams, all in white, lilac-white or green-white. Here and there a window with a pink or bright green curtain. The floor paved with red bricks. At the end a door with a crucifix over it. It is all very, very simple. And then, as a pendant, the inner court. It is an arcaded gallery like those one finds in Arab buildings, all white-washed. In front of those galleries an antique garden with a pond in the middle, and eight flower beds, forget-me-nots, Christmas roses, anemones, ranunculus, wallflowers, daisies, and so on. And under the gallery orange trees and oleander. So it is a picture quite full of flowers and vernal green. However, three gloomy black tree trunks pass through it like serpents, and in the foreground four big dismal clusters of somber box shrub. It is probable that people here won't see very much in it, but nevertheless it has always been my great desire to paint for those who do not know the artistic aspect of a picture.

What shall I say? You don't know the arguments of the good Father Pangloss in Voltaire's Candide, nor do you know Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet. These are books written by men for men, and I don't know whether women can understand them. But the memory of them often sustains me in the hours and days and nights that are hardly easy or enviable.

I have reread Uncle Tom's Cabin by Beecher Stowe with *extreme attention*, for the very reason that it is a book written by a woman, written, as she tells us, while she was making soup for the children - and after that, also with extreme attention, Charles Dickens's Christmas Tales.

I read a little in order to meditate all the more. It is very probable that I shall have to suffer a great deal yet. And to tell the honest truth, this does not suit me at all, for under no circumstances do I long for a martyr's career. For I have always sought something different from heroism, which I do not have, which I certainly admire in others, but which, I tell you again, I consider neither my duty nor my ideal.

I haven't reread the excellent books by Renan, but how often I think of them here, where we have olive trees and other characteristic plants, and the blue sky …

Oh, how right Renan is, and how beautiful that work of his, in which he speaks to us in a French that nobody else speaks. A French that contains, *in the sound of the words*, the blue sky, the soft rustling of the olive trees, and finally a thousand *true and explanatory* things which give his History the character of a Resurrection. One of the saddest things I know is that prejudice of people who in their self-conceit oppose so many good and beautiful things which were created in our own time. Ah, the eternal “ignorance,” the eternal misunderstandings - and how much good it does one to come across a word which is really serene …

Blessed be Thebe, daughter of Telhui, priestess of Osiris, who never complained of anyone.

As for me, I am rather often uneasy in my mind, because I think that my life has not been calm enough; all those bitter disappointments, adversities, changes keep me from developing fully and naturally in my artistic career.

“A rolling stone gathers no moss,” they say, don't they?

But what does it matter, seeing that, as the above-mentioned Father Pangloss proves all by himself “[que] tout va pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes.”

Last year I did ten or a dozen orchards in bloom, and this year I have done only four, so the work doesn't go very vigorously.

If you have the book by Drône which you speak about I should like very much to read it, but do me the favour of *not* buying it expressly for me at the present moment. I have seen very interesting nuns here, but the majority of the priests seem to be in a wretched state. I have been so afraid of religion for many years. For instance, do you happen to know that love may not exist in the way people imagine? - the resident physician here, the worthiest man you could possibly imagine to yourself, the most devoted, the most courageous, a warm and manly heart, amuses himself now and then by mystifying the good women here by telling them that love is a microbe. And when on hearing this the good women and even some men raise a loud outcry, he doesn't care a rap, and remains imperturbable on this point. And as regards kissing, all the other things we like to do in addition, these are only actions of a natural order, like drinking a glass of water or eating a slice of bread. Certainly kissing is rather indispensable, otherwise serious disorders might result. Now must the intellectual sympathies always go with or without what went on previously? Why regulate all this, what is the good of it?

As far as I'm concerned, I won't dispute that love is a microbe, and notwithstanding this it would not prevent one from feeling something like respect in the face of the sufferings caused by cancer, for instance.

And look here, the doctors, who you say cannot do very much now and then, which you are at liberty to say as often as you think proper - very well - but do you know what they can do nevertheless? - they can press your hand more cordially and more gently than many other people can, and their presence may at times be very sympathetic and reassuring.

Look here, very often I let myself talk on and on, and yet I cannot write two lines, and I am much afraid that this time too my ideas are futile and incoherent.

Only in any case I wanted to write you a letter which you would receive while you're there.

I am unable to describe exactly what is the matter with me; now and then there are horrible fits of anxiety, apparently without cause, or otherwise a feeling of emptiness and fatigue in the head.

I look upon the whole thing as a simple accident. There can be no doubt that much of this is my own fault, and at times I have attacks of melancholy and of atrocious remorse; but you know, the fact is, that when all this discourages me and gives me spleen, I am not ashamed to tell myself that the remorse and all the other things that are wrong might possibly be caused by microbes too, like love.

Every day I take the remedy which the incomparable Dickens prescribes against suicide. It consists of a glass of wine, a piece of bread with cheese and a pipe of tobacco. This is not complicated, you will tell me, and you will hardly be able to believe that this is the limit to which melancholy will take me; all the same, at some moments - oh dear me …

Well, it is not always pleasant, but I do my best not to forget altogether how to make contemptuous fun of it. I try to avoid everything that has any connection with heroism or martyrdom; in short, I do my best not to take lugubrious things lugubriously.

Now I wish you good night, and my kind regards to your patient, though I do not know her.

All yours, Vincent

I do not know whether Lies is at Soesterberg at the moment; if she is there, remember me most kindly to her.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 30 April 1889

My dear Theo,

On the occasion of the first of May [Theo's birthday] I wish you a tolerably good year, and above all good health.

How I should like to pass on to you some of my physical strength. I have the feeling I've too much of it at the moment. Which does not prevent my head from still not being all that it should be.

How right Delacroix was, who lived on bread and wine alone, and who succeeded in finding a way of life in keeping with his vocation. But the inevitable question of money is ever-present - Delacroix had private means. Corot too. And Millet - Millet was a peasant and the son of a peasant.

You may perhaps be interested in reading this article I cut out of a Marseilles paper because one catches a glimpse of Monticelli in it, and I find the description of the painting representing a corner of the churchyard very interesting. But alas, it's yet another deplorable story.

How sad it is to think that a painter who succeeds, even if only in part, pulls along half a dozen artists who are worse failures than himself.

However, remember Pangloss, remember Bouvard et Pécuchet - I do - and even that becomes clear then. But perhaps those people don't know Pangloss, or else, fatally marked by real despair and great suffering, they have forgotten all they knew about him.

And anyway, we are falling back again in the name of optimism on a religion that strikes me as the rear end of some sort of Buddhism. No harm in that, on the contrary, if that's what one wants.

I don't like the article on Monet in the Figaro very much - how much better that other article in the 19me Siécle was! One could see the pictures in that, and this one is full of nothing but depressing banalities.

Today I am stuck in the middle of packing a case of pictures and studies. I've stuck some newspapers on to one which is flaking - it's one of the best, and I think that when you've had a look at it you'll understand more clearly what my studio, now come to grief, could have been. This study, just like some of the others, was spoiled by the damp while I was ill.

The flood water came up to within a stone's throw of the house, and more important, since the house wasn't heated during my absence, by the time I got back water and saltpeter were oozing from the walls.

That was a blow to me, since not only the studio had come to grief, but even the studies that would have been reminders of it. It is all so final, and my urge to found something very simple but lasting was so strong. I was fighting a losing battle, or rather it was weakness of character on my part, for I am left with feelings of deep remorse about it, difficult to describe. I think that was the reason I cried out so much during the attacks - I wanted to defend myself and couldn't do it. For it was not to me, it was precisely to painters such as the poor wretch about whom the enclosed article speaks that the studio could have been of use.

In fact, we had several predecessors. Bruyas at Montpellier gave a whole fortune to that, a whole life, and without the slightest apparent result.

Yes - a chilly room in the municipal gallery where you can see a troubled face and many fine pictures, where you certainly feel moved, but, alas, moved as in a graveyard.

Yet it would be difficult to walk through a graveyard that demonstrated more clearly the existence of that Espérance which Puvis de Chavannes has painted.

Pictures fade like flowers - even some of Delacroix's have suffered in this way, the magnificent Daniel, Les odalisques (quite different from those in the Louvre, it was in a single range of purplish-blue), but how they impressed me, those pictures fading there, little understood, that's for sure, by most of the visitors who look at Courbet and Cabanel and Victor Giraud, *etc.*

What are we, we other painters?

Oh, well, I'm sure Richepin is quite right, for instance when he brutally bursts in and consigns them straight back to the madhouse with his profanities.

However, I assure you that I know of no hospital where they would be willing to take me in for nothing, even supposing that I myself shouldered the painting expenses and left the whole of my work to the hospital.

And that is, I don't say a great, but still a small injustice. Even so, I should feel resigned if one took me in. If I were without your friendship, they would drive me remorselessly to suicide, and coward that I am, I should end by committing it. At this point, I hope, we are permitted to protest against society and to defend ourselves.

We can be fairly sure that the Marseilles artist who committed suicide in no way did it under the influence of absinthe, for the simple reason that no one is likely to have offered him any and he could not have had anything to buy it with. Besides, he would not have drunk it purely for pleasure, but because, being ill already, he kept himself going with it.

M. Salles has been to Saint-Rémy - they are not willing to give me permission to paint outside the institution, nor take me for less than 100 francs.

So this is pretty bad news.

If I could get out of this mess by joining the Foreign Legion for 5 years, I think I should prefer that.

For on the one hand, being locked up and not working, I should find it hard to get better, and on the other hand, they would make us pay 100 francs a month during the whole long life of a madman.

It's a bad business, and what are we to make of it? But would they be willing to have me as a soldier?

I feel very tired after the conversation with M. Salles, and I don't quite know what to do. I myself advised Bernard to do his service there, so it's hardly surprising that I'm considering going to Arabia as a soldier myself.

I say that so you will not blame me too much if I do go. Everything else is so vague and so strange. And you know how doubtful it is that one will ever get back what it costs to paint. For the rest, it seems I am physically well.

Supposing I am only allowed to work under supervision! And in the institution - my God, is it worth paying money for that? In that case I could certainly work just as well, even better, in the barracks.

Anyway, I'm thinking about it. You do so as well. Let us remember that all is for the best in the best of all worlds - it's not impossible.

A really good handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Here is what I think is worth putting on stretchers from the consignment.

The Night Café - The Alyscamps (lane of tombs)
The Green Vineyard - ditto
The Red Vineyard - Garden with large conifer bush and oleanders [Painting lost]
The Bedroom
The Furrows - ditto with cedar & geraniums
ditto [Unknown painting] - Sunflowers
Portrait of Boch - Flowers, scabious, etc.[Unknown painting]
Portrait of Laval - ditto, asters, marigolds, etc.[Unknown painting]
Portrait of Gauguin
Portrait of Bernard

The packing case contains some studies by Gauguin which belong to him, and his two fencing masks and some fencing gloves.

If there is room in the packing case, I'll add some stretchers.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 2 May 1889

My dear Theo,
I have sent off two cases of canvases recently, D 58 and 59, by goods train, and it will be at least a week or so before you get them. There are lots of daubs among them, which you will have to destroy, but I have sent them, such as they are, so that you will be able to keep what seems passable to you. I have put in some fencing masks and some studies of Gauguin's and the book by Lemonnier.

Having taken the precaution of paying 30 francs in advance to the manager, I am naturally here still, but they cannot keep me indefinitely and it is more than time to decide. Bear in mind that shutting me up in an asylum will be expensive in the long run, though probably less so than taking a house again; besides, the thought of beginning to live alone again is an absolute horror to me.

I should like to enlist. What I am afraid of is - as my accident is known all over town here - that they would refuse me, but the thing I dread, or rather the thing that makes me faint-hearted, is the possibility, the probability of a refusal here. If I had some acquaintance who could shove me into the Legion for five years, I should go.

Only I do not want this to be thought a fresh act of madness on my part, and that is why I speak of it to you, as well as to M. Salles, so that if I did go, it would be in all serenity and after mature consideration.

For bear in mind, to go on spending money on this painting when things might come to such a pitch that you would be short of money for your own housekeeping would be atrocious, and you know well that the chances of success are abominable. Besides, I am so convinced that it is an irresistible *force majeure* that has frustrated me. Moreover, in the future there might possibly be our sister to be provided for.

Possibly, I say, but however this may be, if I knew I'd be accepted, I'd join the Legion. The thing is I have become timid and hesitant since I have been living like a machine.

However, my health is very good and I am working a little. I am doing an avenue of pink flowering chestnuts and a little cherry tree in flower and a wisteria plant and a path in the park splashed with light and shade.

This will make a pendant to the garden which is in the walnut frame.

If I talk about enlisting for five years, don't go thinking that I am doing this with the idea of sacrificing myself or of doing a good deed.

I have been "in a hole" all my life, and my mental condition is not only vague *now*, but *has always been so*, so that whatever is done for me, I *cannot* think things out so as to balance my life. Where I *have* to follow a rule, as here in the hospital, I feel at peace. And it would be more or less the same thing if I were in the army. Now if I certainly run a great risk here of being refused because they know that I am a madman or an epileptic probably for good (though according to what I have heard, there are 50,000 epileptics in France, only 4,000 of whom are confined**,** and so it is not extraordinary), perhaps I should soon be provided for after speaking, for instance, to Détaille or Caran d'Ache in Paris. This idea would really be no wilder than any other, so let's think it over, but think in order to act. Meanwhile I am doing what I can and I have good will enough for any kind of work, it *does not matter what*, painting included.

But the money painting costs crushes me with a feeling of debt and worthlessness, and it would be a good thing if it were possible that this should stop.

Besides, I have said once and for all, if at present there is a decision to be made, it is better that you and M. Salles should make it for me. And mind, I shan't say No to anything, not even to going to St. Rémy, in spite of the obstacles of higher terms than we had hoped for, and of not having full liberty to go outside to paint. We really must decide, because they cannot keep me here indefinitely.

I told the manager that I'd be glad to pay them 60 francs, for instance, instead of 45 if I could stay here indefinitely.

But their terms are fixed, it appears.

So although up till now nobody has said anything to me, I think it would be right to go. I might go and stay again at the night café, where I have stored my furniture, but...I should be in daily contact there with the very people who used to be my neighbours, for it is next door to the house where I had my studio.

However, nobody says anything to me now in town, and I actually paint in the public garden without being much bothered by anything but the curiosity of passers-by.

I have reread the article on Monet in Figaro and I like it much better than at first.

Don't let's lose heart too much over material things, but at least try to be sensible about them. It is to the good that *if necessary* I can go and lodge in the night café here and even board here, for the people there are friends of mine, naturally enough, since I have been and am one of their customers. It has been very hot today and that always does me good. I have worked with more spirit than I have yet had.

With a good handshake for you and also for your wife.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Arles, 2 May 1889
Paris, 2 May 1889
My dear Vincent,

Many thanks for your letter, which shows us that at least your physical strength leaves nothing to be desired, seeing that you say you have too much of it; however, this is something you should not rely on; *feeling* one's strength does not mean having much of it; but if it is really true, all the better. Now there is one thing in your letter which I entirely disapprove of, and I am going to tell you what it is, and after that you may do what you like. I mean your plans to join the Foreign Legion.

It is meant as an act of despair, isn't it? For I don't think you have developed a taste for that profession spontaneously. The fact is that you can do no painting at the moment; that you are in a state of convalescence, and this fact has given you the idea that you will never be able to paint again, and so you tell yourself that three months of being taken care of without being able to work cost money and don't bring any in. But you forget that, suppose they let you work when you are a soldier, you will be kept like a boy in a boarding school, and that, if you are already afraid of the supervision of an establishment like the one at St. Rémy, you will have a great deal more to fear from the practices of military life. Viewed as a whole, this idea is born of an exaggerated dread and causing me expense and worry, and you consequently bother your head unnecessarily. Last year was not a bad one for me as far as money is concerned, so you may count on what I sent you before without any scruple and without fear of causing me trouble. If it is not repulsive to you to go to St. Rémy, say for only a month, you will be examined by medical specialists, and you will probably be able to profit by their advice.

On the other hand, the director of the establishment at St. Rémy tells me in a letter he wrote me that he will not pledge himself to anything with reference to allowing you to go out before he has examined you, but I suppose that after he has seen you, there will be no doubt about his leaving you free to go out in order to work.

As for me, I attribute a large part of your disease to the fact that your material existence has been too neglected. In an establishment like the one at St. Rémy there will be approximately the same regularity in the mealtimes and so on, and I think this regularity will do you no harm - on the contrary. Now if you should prefer, we might try to get information about the establishment at Aix or Marseilles in order to see whether they make other conditions there. What you ought to know is that from one point of view you are not to be pitied, though it may not seem so.

How many are there who would be glad of having done the work you have accomplished; what more do you ask; wasn't it your cherished wish to create something, and if it was granted you to make what you have made, then why do you despair that a time will come when you will do good work again? However bad society may be at present, there are still ways of living in it; witness Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, and others. I feel sure that if you have the will, you'll be able to take up your work again very soon. For all that don't think that I am without fellow feeling for your disillusionment when, for example, you went back to your studio and found it all moldy because of the moisture.

Yet be of good heart; your disasters will surely come to an end.

The kindest regards from my wife, who is in good health. She is getting quite accustomed to the house. A hearty handshake.

Theo

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 3 May 1889

My dear Theo,

Your kind letter did me good today, honestly - so now here's for St. Rémy. But I tell you once more, if on consideration and after consulting the doctor it should perhaps be either necessary or simply advisable and wise to enlist, let's give it the same consideration as everything else and have no prejudice against it. That's all! You must put aside any idea of sacrifice in it. The other day I again wrote our sister that all through my life, or at least most of it, I have sought something other than a martyr's career, for which I am not cut out.

If I find trouble or cause it, honestly, I am aghast at it. Certainly I should respect, I should heartily admire martyrs and the like, but you must know that in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, for instance, there's something very different which accords better with these little lives of ours.

And now I am packing my trunk, and probably M. Salles will go over with me as soon as he can.

Ah! what you say about Puvis and Delacroix is damn true, those two have indeed demonstrated what painting could be, but don't let's confuse things that are worlds apart. Now I as a painter shall never amount to anything important, I am absolutely sure of it. Suppose all were changed, character, education, circumstances, then this or that might have been. But we are too positive to get confused. I sometimes regret I did not simply stick to the Dutch palette with its grey tones, and brush away at landscapes of Montmartre without any fuss. I am also thinking again of beginning to draw more with a reed pen, which, like last year's views of Montmajour for instance, costs less and distracts my mind just as much.

Today I made a drawing of that sort, which has turned out very dark and rather melancholy for one of spring, but anyhow whatever happens to me and in whatever circumstances I find myself, it's something which will keep me occupied enough and in some fashion might even make me a sort of livelihood.

After all, for you as well as for me, in the long run what is having a little more or a little less to contend with to us?

Certainly you *enlisted* a good deal sooner than I, if we come to that, at Goupils', where, indeed, you had some pretty bad moments often enough, and didn't always get much thanks for them.

And, indeed, you did it with zeal and devotion, for just then Father was somewhat broke with that big family, and everything had to be kept going, and you threw yourself into it body and soul - during my illness I have been thinking of all these old things with a good deal of emotion.

And after all, the main thing is to feel our closeness to one another, and that is not yet shaken.

I have a sort of hope that with what on the whole I know of my art, the time will come when I shall produce again, even in the asylum. What use would the more artificial life of an artist in Paris be to me? I should never be more than half taken in by it, and so should lack the initial enthusiasm indispensable to starting me off.

It is amazing how well I am physically, but it isn't enough to be the basis of any hope for its being the same with me mentally.

I would willingly, once I am a little known there, try to become a hospital orderly little by little, in short, to work at something and have some occupation again - whatever presents itself.

I should be terribly in need of old Pangloss if in the natural course of things I should happen to turn amorous again. After all alcohol and tobacco have so much good or bad - it's rather relative - that they are anti-aphrodisiacs, if one might call it that, I think. Not always to be despised in the exercise of the arts. Well, well, that's going to be the test, and one mustn't wholly forget to poke fun at things. For virtue and temperance, I am only too afraid, will again lead me into those parts where the compass is apt to go overboard pretty quickly, and where this time I must try to have less passion and more good humour.

The passionate factor is no great matter to me, as long as the power remains, as I dare hope, of feeling affection for the fellow creatures with whom one must live.

How is old Tanguy? - you must remember me to him.

I see in the papers that there are some good things at the Salon.

Listen - do not become completely and exclusively impressionist; after all, if there is good in anything, don't let's lose sight of it. Certainly colour is progressing *primarily under the influence* of the impressionists, even when they go astray, but already Delacroix had reached more completeness than they.

And confound it all, Millet, who has hardly any colour, what work it is!

Madness is salutary in that one becomes less exclusive.

I am not sorry that I wanted to go into this question of the theories of colour rather technically.

As an artist you are only a link in a chain, and whatever you find or whatever you do not find, you can find comfort in it.

I have heard of an interior all in green with a woman in green at the Salon, which was well spoken of, also of a portrait by Mathey and another by Besnard, “The Siren.” They also say that there is something extraordinary by someone called Zorn, but they did not say what, and that there was a Carolus Duran, “Triumph of Bacchus,” bad. Nevertheless I still think his “Lady with a Glove” in the Luxembourg very good; after all, there are some not-too-serious things which I like very much, such as a book like Bel Ami. And the work of Carolus is a little like that. However, our period has been like that, and all Badinguet's period as well. And if a painter paints as he sees, he always remains somebody.

Ah, to paint figures as Claude Monet paints landscapes! That still, in spite of everything, remains to be done, unless one is to see only Monet in all the impressionists. For after all, in figure Delacroix, Millet, and several sculptors have done far better work than the impressionists and even J. Breton. In short, my boy, let's be fair, and, while withdrawing: I tell you whenever we think we are getting too old to class ourselves with the younger men, let us remember that in our time we have loved Millet, Breton, IsraÃ«ls, Whistler, Delacroix and Leys.

And I'm quite sure that for my part I am pretty well convinced that I shall see no future beyond that, nor desire one.

Now society being what it is, we naturally cannot wish that it should conform to our personal needs. And so, though I am very, very glad to be going to St. Rémy, nevertheless it would be really fairer to men like myself to shove them into the Legion.

We can do nothing about it, it's more than likely that they would turn me down, at least here where what has happened to me is too well known, and above all exaggerated. I say this very, very seriously; physically I am better than I have been in years and years, and I could quite well be a soldier. Let's think this over again, even though I'm going to St. Rémy.

A good handshake for you and your wife.

Ever yours, Vincent

When I wrote that one must not forget to appreciate what is good in those who are not impressionists, I didn't mean exactly that I wanted to urge you to an unbounded admiration of the Salon, but I was thinking of a lot of men like Jourdan for example, who has just died at Avignon, of Antigna, Feyen-Perrin, all the people we used to know so well when we were younger. Why forget them or why attach no importance to their equals? Why aren't Daubigny and Quost and Jeannin colourists, for instance?

So many distinctions in impressionism have *not* the importance that people have chosen to see in them.

Crinolines had something pretty about them and consequently good, but in the end the fashion was fortunately short-lived for all that. Not for some people.

And thus we shall always keep a sort of passion for impressionism, but I feel that I return more and more to the ideas that I already had before I came to Paris.

Now that you are married, we don't have to live for great ideas any longer, but, believe me, for small ones only. And I find that a wonderful relief, and don't complain of it at all.

In my room I have the famous “Portrait of a Man” - the wood engraving which you know - a “Tangerine” by Monorobu (the big plate in Bing's sketchbook), the “Blade of Grass” (from the same book), the “PietÃ ” and the “Good Samaritan” by Delacroix, and the “Reader” by Meissonier, and then two big reed pen drawings. Just now I am reading Balzac's Médecin de Campagne, which is splendid; there is a character of a woman in it, not mad but too sensitive, which is very attractive; I will send it to you when I have finished it. They have lots of room here in the hospital, there would be enough to make studios for a score or so of painters.

I really must make up my mind, it is only too true that lots of painters go mad, it is a life that makes you, to say the least, very absent-minded. If I throw myself fully into my work again, very good, but I shall always be cracked.

If I could enlist for five years, I should recover considerably and be more rational and more master of myself.

But one way or the other, it's all the same to me.

I hope that there will be some canvases in the batch I have sent you which may give you some pleasure. If I go on being a painter, then sooner or later I shall probably be in Paris again, and I promise myself in that case to give some old canvases a good overhaul.

What is Gauguin doing? Am putting off writing him again until I am quite normal, but I often think of him and I should so much like to know if everything is going comparatively well with him.

If I had not been in such a hurry, if I had kept my studio, then this summer I should have touched up all the canvases I sent you. Of course, so long as the impasto isn't dry all the way through, you cannot scrape at it.

You will see that the expressions of the two women are different from the expressions one sees in Paris.

Is Signac back in Paris yet?

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Saint-Rémy, 8 May 1889
Paris, 8 May 1889
Dear Brother,
It is high time at last that your new little sister had a chat with you herself, instead of leaving it to Theo to send her regards. When we were not yet married I was always thinking, Oh, at present you haven't yet got the courage to write about everything to Vincent, but now we are really and truly brother and sister, and I should be so very happy if you knew me a little too, and, if possible, loved me a little.

As for me, this has been the case for quite a long time . . . Wil as well as Theo have told me so many things about you, and here in the house there are so many things which remind one of you; at the moment I come across a charming little jug or vase or some such thing, I am sure to hear, *This* was bought by Vincent, *that* Vincent thought so pretty. Hardly ever a day passes without our speaking of you. You see, I still speak of "our house," and do not seem to be able to accustom myself to saying "the apartment"; I should so much like you to see how pretty and cozily Theo had everything arranged before I came. The bedroom especially is so sweet, very light and a great deal of pink in it - in the morning, when I am lying in bed, I have to look at that fine little peach tree in bloom of yours, which looks at me so kindly every morning in its turn. Over the piano in our drawing room (we have one; Aunt Cornélie gave it to us) there also hangs a picture by you - a large one which I like very much. It is a landscape in the neighbourhood of Arles. The dining room is also full of them, but Theo is still dissatisfied with the arrangement, and every Sunday morning is spent hanging the pictures in other places and rearranging everything.

It is so delightful on Sundays when Theo is at home all day; I well remember how as a child I always loved Sundays, because at home they were so pleasant and cozy (something which most people could not understand), and now they are much more so. So Monday meant a double festivity for me, for all the art shops were closed on account of the opening of the exhibition - of course we did not go to the exhibition, but enjoyed ourselves in our own way. Paris certainly looked beautiful that day - I so hope I shall come to love it as much as Theo does - but at times I am very much afraid it won't be possible. It is so noisy that we are living in our quiet cité - it may not be an aristocratic quarter but it is certainly a highly typical one — a big painters' studio across the way, a little arbour and a few lilac trees, which are in deliciously full flower at the moment. What a lot of beautiful flowers there are in Paris - if I should have to enumerate some good qualities of Paris, this would surely be one of the very first things!

A great number of Theo's acquaintances have already come to see us in the evening — last night, for instance, there was quite a reunion. Pissarro and his son, Isaäcson and the young Nibbrig (but I don't know whether you know the latter) and my brother - who for some time now has been dining with us every day because his wife has gone to Holland.

I certainly wish I could speak French a little better - I can manage on my own when I do my shopping or when I speak to the femme de ménage [charwoman], but I think carrying on a conversation, especially when Theo is present, is something horrible. So I did not venture on a French letter - although I know that in point of fact you would have preferred it, but Wil told me that she also confines herself to writing in Dutch. As soon as I feel that I am getting to be a bit of a Parisienne, I'll start writing in French - is that a bargain?

Lies and Wil have laid a little plot to come here this summer, the two of them; how pleasant it would be particularly to have Wil here. How she would laugh at me - for she herself is such a clever little housekeeper. She can do everything - whereas I - to make a clean breast of it - I don't know how to do anything - twice already I've let the rice burn and once the prunes - poor Theo, he has to swallow it all.

For the rest we are getting along very well together - we have been married three weeks today - it seems to me as though it happened long ago and also only a short while ago - it doesn't seem the tiniest little bit strange to us - it's as if we had always been together. What is worst is that I don't at all look like a married lady yet - yesterday I went to pay our baker, and the good man could not possibly understand that I myself was Madame Van Gogh, and persisted in calling me mademoiselle, which is really something too frightful!

Now I have to prepared lunch for Theo will be coming home in a minute or two - so I will say goodbye for today - I hope I have not bored you too much, but the fact is that I have grown so accustomed lately to writing about all these little things, which they like to hear about so much, to Breda and also to Amsterdam that I am no longer able to write a serious letter - this will improve later on, I hope.

With most cordial regards, and wishing you all the best,

Your affectionate little sister, Jo

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Saint-Rémy, 8 May 1889
Paris, 8 May 1889
My dear Vincent,

Only a few words in a hurry to thank you for your last letter, and to tell you that I don't look upon your going to St. Rémy as a *retreat*, as you say, but simply as a temporary rest cure in order that you may come back after a short while with renewed strength. I remember seeing something a long time ago which struck me very much. In the Rue des Petits Carreaux (Little Tiles Street) I saw a very heavy dray which had to go up the incline of that street. The coachman whipped the four horses with redoubled lashes, but nevertheless they absolutely refused to take another step forward. So he let them turn around; and when he had gone back to the bottom of the street, he turned around again, almost without giving them a moment's rest, and went up to the top of the street without difficulty.

You would greatly oblige me by letting me know how you are treated in the establishment and how the food is, *etc.* Mr. Salles spoke very well of what he had seen. This gentleman has been extremely kind; he wrote me a long letter to give an account of his visit. As I cannot tell from your telegram whether you have gone, I do not know whether he accompanied you, as he proposed to do.

There is a very fine picture by Raffaelli at the Salon, two absinthe drinkers. I think him most forceful when he paints such déclassés, though the portrait of the two young girls in white is perhaps the best portrait at the Salon. Zorn has a picture of girls bathing on the beach, which you remember. There is a “Birth of Christ” by Uhde, a triptych, in which there is a pretty sentiment. Otherwise there is very little of interest in the whole bazaar. I quite agree with you that one should not believe exclusively in impressionism, yet it is a fact that there is that individual something in it which is missing in nearly everything to be seen at the Salon.

I hope to see you soon, and keep well. A cordial handshake.

Theo

Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh

Arles, 10 May 1889

Arles, May 10th 1889
Dear Sir,
Last Monday I received by telegraphic mandate your 200 francs, and, after hearing what your brother had to say, we left together on Wednesday morning for Saint Rémy. Since then I have been away, and on my return I found your letter.

Your brother had told me that the sum you sent me, 150 f., should be handed to the establishment (that is what I have done) and that the rest, 50 f., will stay in my hands to pay for the journey to St-Rémy, or keep in case he writes me to ask for a book or something else he needs. He hasn't spoken about his linen and his clothes to me, and last week I questioned him about the outfit he needs. He answered that he was sufficiently provided for. For the rest, if he lacks something in this respect you can talk it over with doctor Peyron, the director of the Establishment; I believe he is a man of confidence who will only ask for what is necessary without trying to make anything out of it.

There remains the settlement with the treasurer of the hospice. I asked him for his bill so that I could send it to you, without speaking to your brother about it, in order not to worry him unduly. You will find it enclosed along with the receipt for the 150 f. that I handed to M. Peyron.

Along the way, your brother spoke to me of the settlement with the treasurer of the hospice and asked me to do it. I didn't tell him that I already had the note in my hands. This note shows a deficit, and I didn't want to cause him any worries. I only asked him if he remembered the amount he had handed to the treasurer. It was not at all very clear in his mind. He thought he had given 30 f. before: I can't find any trace in the note that I have in front of me, and the treasurer, who I have just seen, assures me that he accurately took into account everything that had been given him...

...I was writing my letter when the treasurer himself came to find me to tell me That he had indeed discovered in this particular case a paper containing 30 f. with a note saying that this money was handed him by your brother. He therefore took his bill back to redo it, and I will wait for it so that I can send it to you corrected.

Our journey to St-Réy took place under excellent conditions. Mr. Vincent was perfectly calm and explained his case to the director himself, like a man who completely understands his situation. He remained with me until I left, and when I took leave of him he thanked me heartily and appeared rather moved by the thought of the completely new life he was going to lead in this house. Let us hope that his stay is indeed beneficial to him, and that he will soon be judged capable of taking his full liberty. M. Peyron assured me that he would be shown every kindness and all the consideration his condition warrants.

Yours Faithfully, Salles.

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Saint-Rémy, c. 10-15 May 1889

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter. You are absolutely right when you say that M. Salles has been splendid in all of this, I am under the greatest obligation to him.

I want to tell you that I think I have done well to come here, because, by seeing the *reality* of the assorted madmen and lunatics in this menagerie, I am losing my vague dread, my fear of the thing. And bit by bit I am getting to consider that madness is just a disease like any other. Thus the change in surroundings will do me good, I think.

As far as I can tell, the doctor here is of the opinion that what I have had is some sort of epileptic attack. But I haven't asked him more about it.

Have you received the case of paintings, I am curious to know if they have suffered, yes or no?

I have two more on the go - violet irises and a lilac bush, two subjects taken from the garden.

The idea of my duty to get back to work occurs to me a lot and I believe that all my faculties for work will soon come back to me. It's just that the work often absorbs me so much that I think that for the rest of my life I will always be a bit absent-minded and awkward when shifting for myself.

I won't write you a long letter - I want to try to reply to my new sister's letter, which moved me very much, but I don't know if I'll be able to do it.

A handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

My dear sister,

Many thanks for your letter in which I especially looked for news of my brother. And I find it excellent. I see you have already noticed that he likes Paris, and this more or less surprises you, since you do not like it at all, or rather like mostly the flowers there, such as the wisterias, I suppose, which are probably coming into bloom.

Might it not be a fact that when you are fond of something, you see it better and more truly than when you are not fond of it? For him and me Paris is certainly already something like a graveyard where many artists have perished whom we once knew directly or indirectly.

Certainly Millet, whom you will learn to like very much, and many others with him, tried to get out of Paris. But as for Eugene Delacroix, for instance, it is difficult to imagine him, as a man, otherwise than as a Parisian.

All this is to urge you - with all caution it is true - to believe in the *possibility* that there are *homes* in Paris and not just apartments.

Anyway - fortunately you are yourself his home.

It is rather queer perhaps that the result of this terrible attack is that there is hardly any very definite desire or hope left in my mind, and I wonder if this is the way one thinks when, with the passions lessened, one descends the hill instead of climbing it. And anyhow, my sister, if you can believe, or almost believe, that everything is always for the best in the best of worlds, then perhaps you will also be able to believe that Paris is the best of the cities in it.

Have you noticed that the old cab horses there have large beautiful eyes, as heartbroken as Christians sometimes have? However it may be, we are neither savages nor peasants, and it is perhaps even a *duty* to like civilization (so called). After all it would probably be hypocrisy to say or think that Paris is bad when one is living there. Besides, the first time one sees Paris, it may be that everything in it seems unnatural, foul and sad.

Anyway, if you do not like Paris, above all do not like painting nor those who are directly or indirectly concerned in it, for it is only too doubtful whether it is beautiful or useful.

But what is to be done? - there are people who love nature even though they are cracked or ill, those are the painters; then there are those who like what is made by men's hands, and these even go so far as to like pictures.

Though here there are some patients very seriously ill, the fear and horror of madness that I used to have has already lessened a great deal. And though here you continually hear terrible cries and howls like beasts in a menagerie, in spite of that people get to know each other very well and help each other when their attacks come on. When I am working in the garden, they all come to look, and assure you they have the discretion and manners to leave me alone - more than the good people of the town of Arles, for instance.

It may well be that I shall stay here long enough - I have never been so peaceful as here and in the hospital in Arles - to be able to paint a little at last. Quite near here there are some little mountains, grey and blue, and at their foot some very, very green cornfields and pines.

I shall count myself very happy if I can manage to work enough to earn my living, for it worries me a lot when I think that I have done so many pictures and drawings without ever selling one. Do not be in too much of a hurry to think that this is an injustice. I myself don't know in the least.

Thanking you again for having written to me. I am so very glad to think that now my brother is not going home to an empty apartment when he goes back in the evening.

I shake your hand in thought, and believe me,

Your brother, Vincent

Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh

Saint-Rémy, 21 May 1889

Paris, 22 May 1889
My dear Vincent,
Many thanks for your letter; Jo too is very pleased with the one you wrote her. We hear with pleasure that your trip to St. Rémy was accomplished without a hitch, and that your stay there will not last very long, for it can hardly be pleasant to be near so many lunatics. What I should like is to be able to find people somewhere who would be able to take care of you, and would leave you entirely at liberty otherwise. Surely something like this might be found. If you don't have such a dread of going back to Paris or its environs, I myself would try to find a boarding house of this kind.

Please tell us in your next letter what you think of the establishment where you are now staying. How are you treated, do you get enough food, and what is the behaviour of the people you have to do with? Do you see anything of the countryside? Above all, don't harass yourself, either physically or mentally, because for the moment it is better to do everything in your power to regain your strength. Working will come of itself after that.

Some days ago I got your consignment, which is very important; there are superb things in it. Everything arrived in good condition and without any damage. The cradle, the portrait of Roulin, the little sower with the tree, the baby, the starry night, the sunflowers and the chair with the pipe and tobacco pouch are the ones I prefer so far.

The first two are very curious. Certainly there is none of the beauty which is taught officially in them, but they have something so striking and so near to truth. Who can tell whether we are more in the right than the simple people who buy pictures with glaring colours? Or rather, isn't it a fact that the charm they see in them is also an inspired sensation, as much as that of the pretentious fellows who look at pictures in museums? Now there is in your canvases a vigour which one certainly does not find in the chromos; in the course of time they will become very beautiful by reason of the settling of the layers of paint and they will undoubtedly be appreciated someday. When we see that the Pissarros, the Gauguins, the Renoirs, the Guillaumins do not sell, one ought to be almost glad of not having the public's favour, seeing that those who have it now will not have it forever, and it is quite possible that times will change very shortly. If you could see how feeble the Salon and the Universal Exhibition are with regard to the pictures, I think you would be of the opinion that they will not last much longer. The Dutch school cuts a very good figure beside them.

There are two watercolours by J.H. Weissenbruch which I am particularly fond of, also pieces by Willem and Jacob Maris and Bosboom, IsraÃ«ls and Breitner. One of the Weissenbruchs is a mill on the bank of a canal, a blue sky with a little cloud hiding the sun. The other is a canal at night with boats in the moonlight. He is a thundering good artist, that one, but Tersteeg says he isn't saleable.

Not long ago I saw Gauguin, who is now working at sculpting. Within a short time he will go to Pont-Aven, where De Haan is staying already. It seems that before long there will be an exhibition of the Independents; I should like very much to know what you think of it, and which canvases you think are most suitable to be shown. I hear tell that everyone can exhibit four canvases, as there is not enough room to admit more.

I shall write again soon, and you write me too if you are feeling well A cordial handshake,

Yours, Theo

Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh

Saint-Rémy, 22 May 1889

My Dear Theo,

The letter I have just received from you gives me great pleasure. You tell me that J. H. Weissenbruch has two pictures at the exhibition - but I imagined he was dead - am I wrong? Certainly he's a mighty good artist and a decent big-hearted fellow too.

What you say about “La Berceuse” pleases me; it is very true that the common people, who are content with chromos and melt when they hear a barrel organ, are in some vague way right, perhaps more sincere than certain men about town who go to the Salon.

If he will accept it, give Gauguin the copy of “La Berceuse” that was not mounted on a stretcher, and Bernard also, as a token of friendship, but if Gauguin wants the sunflowers, it is only fair that he should give you something you like equally well in exchange.

Gauguin himself liked the sunflowers better later on when he had been looking at them for a good while.

What you also have to know is that if you arrange them this way, namely “La Berceuse” in the middle and the two canvases of sunflowers to the right and left, it makes a sort of triptych.

[Vincent inserted a sketch of the three paintings here.]

And then the yellow and orange tones of the head will gain in brilliance by the proximity of the yellow wings.

And then you will understand what I wrote you, that my idea had been to make a sort of decoration, for instance for the end of a ship's cabin. Then, as the size increases, the summary technique is justified. The frame for the central piece is the red one. And the two sunflowers which go with it are the ones framed in narrow strips.

You see that this frame of plain laths does quite well, and a frame like this costs only a very little. It would perhaps be a good idea to frame the green and red vineyards that way, the “Sower” and the “Furrows” and the bedroom interior as well.

[A sketch of Ivy Covered Tree Trunks was drawn here.]

Here is a new size 30 canvas, once again as run of the mill as a cheap chromo, depicting age-old love nests in the greenery. Large tree trunks covered with ivy, the ground similarly covered with ivy and periwinkle, a stone bench and a bush of roses, pale in the cool shadow. In the foreground, some plants with white calyxes. It is green, violet and pink.

It's all a question - and this is unfortunately missing from the cheap chromos as well as from the barrel organs - of putting some style into it.

Since I've been here, there's been enough work for me to do, what with the neglected garden with its tall pines and long, unkempt grass mixed with all sorts of weeds, and I haven't even been outside.

However, the countryside around St. Rémy is very beautiful, and little by little I shall probably make a few short trips.

But while I stay here, the doctor is of course in a better position to see what is wrong, and will have his mind set at rest, I hope, about what he can let me paint.

I *assure* you that I am all right here, and that for the time being I see no reason at all to take lodgings in or around Paris. I have a small room with greenish-grey paper with two sea-green curtains with a design of very pale roses, brightened by touches of blood-red.

These curtains, probably the legacy of some deceased and ruined rich person, are very pretty in design. A very worn armchair, probably from the same source, is covered with a tapestry speckled like a Diaz or a Monticelli in brown, red, pink, white, cream, black, forget-me-not blue and bottle green. Through the iron-barred window I can see an enclosed square of wheat, a prospect like a Van Goyen, above which, in the morning, I watch the sun rise in all its glory.

In addition - as there are more than thirty empty rooms - I have another room for doing my work.

The food is all right as far as it goes. It tastes a bit musty, of course, as in a cockroach-infested restaurant in Paris, or in a boarding-house. The poor wretches here, having absolutely nothing to do (not a book, nothing more to distract them than a game of boules or a game of draughts), have no other daily distraction than to stuff themselves with chickpeas, haricot beans, lentils and other groceries and colonial produce, in set amounts and at stated hours.

As the digestion of these foodstuffs offers certain difficulties, they fill their days in a way as offensive as it is costly.

But joking apart, my *fear* of madness is wearing off markedly, since I can see at close quarters those who are affected by it in the same way as I may very easily be in the future.

Previously, I was repelled by these individuals, and I found it distressing to have to reflect that so many in our trade, Troyon, Marchal, Méryon, Jundt, M.

Maris, Monticelli and a whole lot more finished up like that. It was quite impossible for me to picture them in that condition.

Well, now I can think of all that without fear, that is to say, I find it is no more dreadful than if those people had died of something else, consumption or syphilis, for example. I see these artists being reinvested with their old serenity, and don't you think it's quite something to meet these old colleagues of ours again? That, joking apart, is what I am profoundly thankful for.

For though there are some who howl or rave a great deal, there is *much* true friendship here. They say we must tolerate others so that the others may tolerate us, and other very sound arguments, which they put into practice, too. And we understand each other very well. Sometimes, for instance, I can talk with one of them who can only reply in incoherent sounds, because he is not afraid of me. If someone has an attack, the others look after him and interfere so that he does not harm himself.

The same for those whose mania is to fly often into a rage. The old inhabitants of the menagerie come running and separate the combatants, if combat there is.

It is true there are some whose condition is more serious, who are either dirty or dangerous. These are in another ward.

I take a bath twice a week now, and stay in it for two hours; my stomach is infinitely better than it was a year ago; so as far as I know, I only have to go on. Besides, I shall spend less here, I think, considering that I have work in prospect again, for the scenery is lovely.

What I hope is that at the end of a year I shall know what I can do and what I want to do better than now. Then little by little the idea of a fresh start will come to me. Going back to Paris or anywhere at all in no way attracts me. I think my place is here. Extreme enervation is, in my opinion, what most of those who have been here for years suffer from. Now my work will preserve me from that to a certain extent.

The room where we stay on wet days is like a third-class waiting room in some stagnant village, the more so as there are some distinguished lunatics who always wear a hat, spectacles and a cane, and travelling cloak, almost like at a watering place, and they represent the passengers.

I am forced to ask you again for some paints and especially for canvas. When I sent you the four canvases of the garden I am working on, you will see that, considering my life is spent mostly in the garden, it is not so unhappy.

Yesterday I drew a very big, rather rare night moth, called a death's head, its colouring of amazing distinction, black, grey, cloudy white tinged with carmine or vaguely shading off into olive green; it is very big.

[Here he drew a sketch of the moth.]

To paint it I had to kill it, and it was a pity, the beast was so beautiful. I will send you the drawing along with some other drawings of plants.

You could take the canvases at Tanguy's or at your place off the stretchers, if they are dry enough, and then put on any new ones you think worth it.

Gauguin ought to be able to tell you the address of a man who could reline “The Bedroom,” and who won't be too expensive. The restoration ought, I *imagine*, to cost 5 francs. If it is more, then don't have it done. I'm sure Gauguin didn't pay any more on the many occasions when he had his canvases, or Cézanne's or Pissaro's, relined.

Again - speaking of my condition - I am so grateful for yet another thing. I've noticed that others, too, hear sounds and strange voices during their attacks, as I did, and that things seemed to change before their very eyes. And that lessened the horror with which I remembered my first attack, something that, when it comes upon you unexpectedly, cannot but frighten you terribly. Once you know it is part of the illness, you accept it like anything else. Had I had not seen other lunatics close to, I should not have been able to stop myself from thinking about it all the time. For the suffering and the anguish are not funny when you are having an attack.

Most epileptics bite their tongue and injure themselves. Rey told me that he had seen a case where someone had mutilated his own ear, just as I did, and I think I heard a doctor from here, who came to see me with the director, say that he too had seen it before. I like to think that once you know what it is, once you are conscious of your condition, and of being subject to attacks, then you can do something to prevent your being taken unawares by the anguish or the terror. Now that it has all been abating for five months, I have high hopes of getting over it, or at least of no longer having such violent attacks.

There is someone here who has been shouting and talking like me *all the time* for a fortnight. He thinks he hears voices and words in the echoes of the corridors, probably because the auditory nerve is diseased and over-sensitive, and in my case it was both sight and hearing at the same time, which is usual at the onset of epilepsy, according to what Rey said one day.

Now, the shock was such that even moving made me feel sick, and nothing would have pleased me better than never to have woken up again. At present this *horror of life* is already less pronounced, and the melancholy less acute. But I still have no *will*, and hardly any desires, or none at all that are to do with ordinary life, for example, almost no wish to see friends, although I do think of them. That is why I am not ready to leave here now or in the near future. I should feel depressed about everything again.

And anyway, it is only recently that my loathing of life has been drastically changed. There is still a long way to go from that to willing and doing.

What a pity that you are condemned to stay full-time in Paris and that you never see any part of the country other than that around Paris. I'm sure it's no worse for me to be in the company I now find myself than for you to be with that ill-fated Goupil & Co. all the time. In that respect, we are pretty much equal. For you, too, are only able to act partly in keeping with your ideas. However, once we have got used to these difficulties, it all becomes second nature.

Although the pictures swallow up canvas and paint, etc., nevertheless at the end of the month I'm sure it's more profitable to spend a little more on those, making use of what I've learned, than to abandon it all, when you have to pay for my board and lodging anyway. And that's why I'm carrying on. So this month I have four size 30 canvases and two or three drawings.

But the question of money, whatever one does, is always with us, like the enemy facing the troops, and cannot be denied or ignored.

As much as anyone, I know where my duties lie in that respect. And I may yet be able to pay back everything I've spent, for I consider it to have been, if not taken from you, at least taken from the family. So that's why I've been producing pictures and shall be doing some more. This is acting as you yourself are acting. If I were a man of means, perhaps my mind would be freer to produce art for art's sake. Now I content myself with the thought that by working diligently, I may perhaps make some progress, even without thinking about it

These are the paints I need:
3 emerald green
2 cobalt

1 ultramarine

1 orange lead (big tubes)
6 zinc white

5 meters of canvas

Thanking you for your kind letter, I shake your hand warmly, as I do your wife's.

Ever yours, Vincent

Letter from Dr. Th. Peyron to Theo van Gogh

St-Rémy, 26 May 1889

St-Rémy, May 26th 1889

Sir,

In Answer to your letter of the 23rd inst., I have the satisfaction of telling you that Mr. Vincent has been perfectly calm since his entry into the house, and that every day he observes that his health improves. In the beginning he was subject to distressing nightmares which troubled him, but he observes that these distressing dreams have tended to disappear and decrease in intensity, resulting in a more restful and restorative sleep for him; he also has a better appetite.

In short, since his entry he has made a slight improvement in his state and this makes him hope for a complete recovery in the future.

He is occupied all day drawing in the park, where he now is, but since I see he is perfectly calm, I promised him that I would allow him to go to see different points of view outside of the establishment.

You ask me for my opinion on the likely course of his malady; I must tell you that I reserve my prognosis for the moment, but I am afraid it is serious, because I have reason to believe that the attack that he had was caused by an epileptic condition, and if this is confirmed it will be necessary to be concerned for the future.

I intend to go to Paris during the month of June. I will have the honour of seeing you and better acquaint you about your patient than one can do by letter.

Sincerely Yours.

Dr. Th. Peyron.

Letter from Dr. T. Peyron to Theo van Gogh

St.-Rémy, 1889 - 1890

St.-Rémy, 29 January 1889.

I am writing to you on behalf of M. Vincent, who is the victim of another attack. I therefore confirm receipt of the registered letter you sent him and of a roll of papers sent by normal mail. M. Vincent was getting on very well and was completely himself when last week he wanted to go to Arles to see some people, and two days after he made the journey the attack took place. At present he is unable to do any work at all and only replies incoherently to any question put to him. I trust that this will pass again as it has done before.

St.-Rémy, 26 May 1889.

In reply to your letter of the 23rd inst., I am pleased to tell you that since his entry into this house M. Vincent is completely calm and that he finds that his health is improving day by day. At first he was subject to painful nightmares with disturbed him, but he tells me that these bad dreams tend to disappear and become less and less intense, so that now he has a more peaceful and restoring sleep; he also eats with a better appetite.

To sum up: since his arrival here there has been a slight improvement in his condition which makes him hope for a complete recovery.

He spends the entire day drawing in the park here, but as I find him entirely tranquil, I have promised to let him go out in order to find scenery outside this establishment.

You ask for my opinion regarding the probable cause of his illness. I must tell you that for the time being I will not make any prognosis, but I fear that it may be serious, as I have every reason to believe that the attack which he has had is the result of a state of epilepsy and if this should be confirmed one should be concerned about the future.

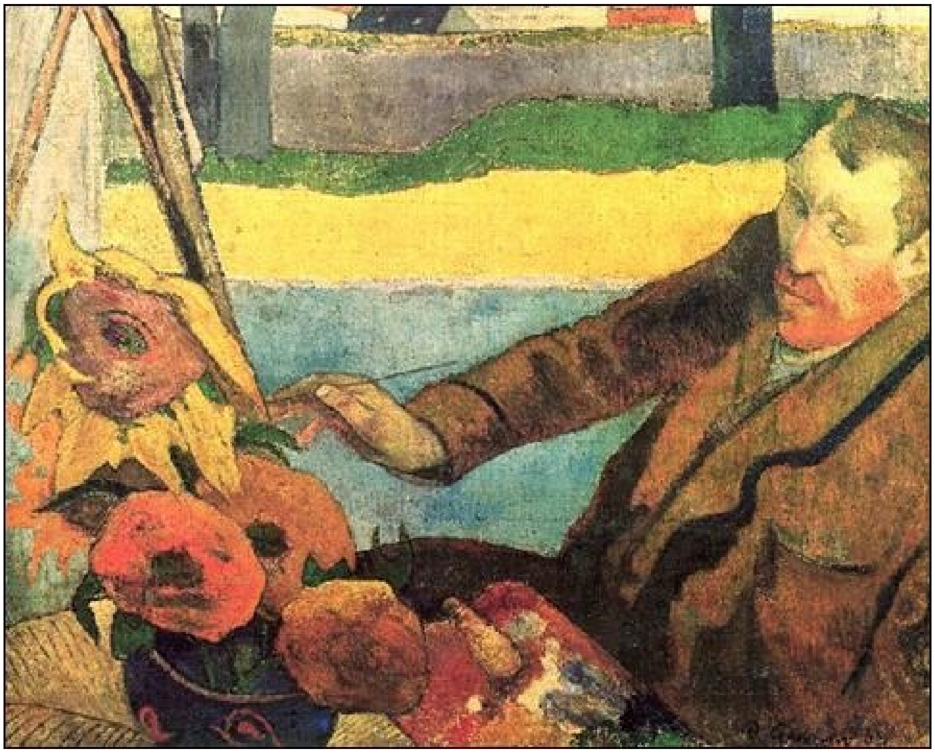
I hope to go to Paris in the course of June. It will be an honour to come and see you and talk to you about your patient better than one can do by letter…

St.-Rémy, 24 February 1890.

I again confirm receiving the registered letter addressed to M. Vincent. He had another attack, which prevents him from writing to you and which took place after a trip to Arles. I note that the attacks are becoming more frequent and take place quite suddenly after every journey he undertakes away from this house. I do not believe he gives himself over to any excess when he is at liberty, for I have always known him sober and reserved. However, I am forced to recognize the fact that each time he undertakes a little journey he becomes ill. It will only be for a few days and he will regain his sanity as before.

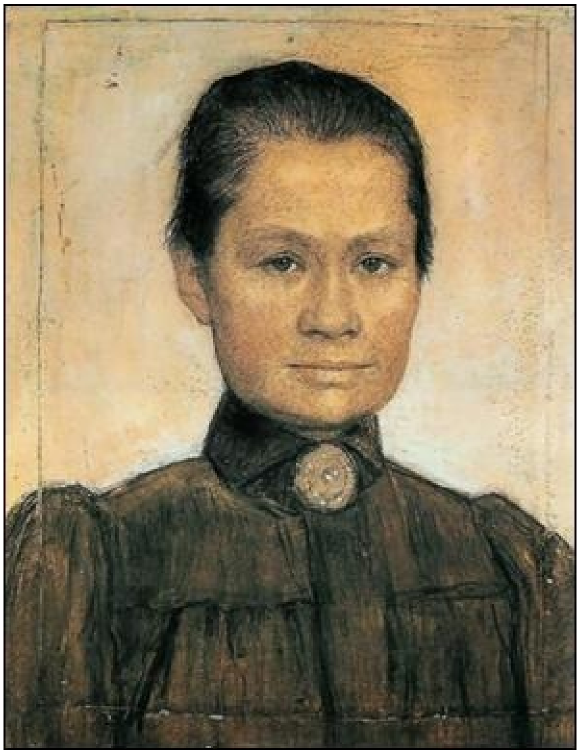
[Postscript] I have had to send two men with a carriage to fetch him from Arles, and it is not known where he spent the night from Saturday to Sunday. He had taken with him a painting of an Arlésienne, but it has not been found.

The Biography


‘The Painter of Sunflowers: Portrait of Vincent van Gogh’, by Paul Gauguin (1888)

MEMOIR OF VINCENT VAN GOGH by Johanna Gesina van Gogh

Johanna Gezina van Gogh-Bonger (1862-1925) was the wife of the artist’s brother Theo. After the death of Vincent and her husband, Johanna worked tirelessly on editing their correspondence, publishing this memoir in 1913 and producing the first volume of letters the following year. She played a key role in the growth of Vincent's fame and reputation through her donations of his work to various early retrospective exhibitions. Johanna also worked closely with German art dealers and publishers Paul Cassirer and his cousin Bruno to organise exhibitions of van Gogh's paintings in Berlin.



Johanna Bonger, 1905

MEMOIR OF VINCENT VAN GOGH

The family name, Van Gogh, is probably derived from the small town Gogh on the German frontier, but in the sixteenth century the Van Goghs were already established in Holland. According to the *Annales Généalogiques* by Arnold Buchelius, a Jacob van Gogh lived at that time in Utrecht, “in the Owl behind the Town Hall.” Jan, Jacob's son, who lived “in the Bible under the flax market,” sold wine and books and was Captain of the Civil Guard. Their coat of arms was a bar with three roses, and it is still the Van Gogh family crest.

In the seventeenth century we find many Van Goghs occupying high offices of state in Holland, Johannes van Gogh, magistrate of Zutphen, was appointed High Treasurer of the Union in 1628; Michel van Gogh--originally Consul General in Brazil and later treasurer of Zeeland--was a member of the Embassy that welcomed King Charles II of England on his ascent to the throne in 1660. In about the same period Cornelius van Gogh was a Remonstrant clergyman at Boskoop; his son Matthias started as a physician in Gouda, and later became a clergyman in Moordrecht.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century the social standing of the family was somewhat lower. David van Gogh, who settled at The Hague, was a gold-wire drawer. His eldest son, Jan, followed the same trade, and married Maria Stalvius; both belonged to the Walloon Protestant Church. David's second son, Vincent (1729-1802), was a sculptor by profession, and was said to have been in Paris in his youth; in 1749 he was one of the Cent Suisses. With him the practice of art seems to have come into the family, together with fortune; he died single and left some money to his nephew Johannes (1763-1840), his brother Jan's son.

Johannes was at first a gold-wire drawer like his father, but he later became a Bible teacher and a clerk in the Cloister Church at The Hague. He married Johanna van der Vin of Malines, and their son Vincent (1789 -1874) was enabled, by the legacy of his great-uncle Vincent, to study theology at the University of Leiden. This Vincent, the grandfather of the painter, was a man of great intellect, with an extraordinarily strong sense of duty. At the Latin school he distinguished himself and won all kinds of prizes and testimonials. “The diligent and studious youth, Vincent van Gogh, fully deserves to be set up as an example to his fellow students for his good behavior as well as for his persistent zeal,” declared the rector of the school, Mr. de Booy, in 1805. He finished his studies at the University of Leiden successfully, and graduated in 1811 at the age of twenty-two. He had many friends, and his *album amicorum* preserves their memory in Latin and Greek verse. A little silk-embroidered wreath of violets and forget-me-nots--signed, E. H. Vrydag 1810--was wrought by the girl who became his wife as soon as he secured the living of Benschop. They lived long and happily together, first at the parsonage of Benschop, then at Ochten, and from 1822 at Breda, where his wife died in 1875, and where he remained until his death, a highly respected and esteemed man.

Twelve children were born to them, of whom one died in infancy. There was a warm, cordial family feeling, and however far the children drifted apart in the world, they remained deeply attached and shared each other's fortunes and misfortunes. Two of the daughters married officers in high positions, the Generals Pompe and 's Graeuwen; the other three remained single.

All six sons occupied honorable positions in the world. Johannes went to sea and reached the highest rank in the Navy, that of Vice-Admiral; his nephew Vincent lived at his house for a time in 1877, while he was Commandant of the Navy Yard at Amsterdam. Three sons became art dealers; the eldest, Hendrik Vincent--”Uncle Hein,” as he was called in the letters--first had his business in Rotterdam and later settled in Brussels. Cornelius Marinus became the head of the firm C. M. van Gogh, so well known in Amsterdam (his nephews often called him by his initials, C. M.). The third, who had the greatest influence on the lives of his nephews Vincent and Theo, was Vincent. In his youth his health had been too weak for him to go to college, to the deep regret of his father, who had the greatest expectations for him. He opened a little shop in The Hague where he sold colours and drawing materials, and which he enlarged in a few years to an art gallery of European renown. He was an extraordinarily gifted, witty, and intelligent man, and had great influence in the world of art of that time. Goupil in Paris offered him a partnership in his firm, which achieved its highest renown only after Van Gogh joined it. He settled in Paris, and Mr. Tersteeg took his place as head of the firm in The Hague, where Vincent and Theo got their first training in business. Goupil was “the house” that played such a large part in their lives and where Theo remained and made a successful career. Vincent worked at Goupil's for six years; in spite of everything, his heart clung to it because in his youth it had been to him “finest, the best, the biggest in the world.”

Only one of parson Van Gogh's six sons chose his father's profession. Theodorus (8 February 1822--26 March 1885) studied theology at Utrecht, graduated, and in 1849 secured the living of Groot-Zundert, a little village in Brabant on the Belgian frontier, where he was confirmed by his father. Theodorus van Gogh was a man of prepossessing appearance (“the handsome dominie” he was called by some), with a loving nature and fine spiritual qualities; but he was not a gifted preacher, and for twenty years he lived forgotten in the little village of Zundert ere he was called to other places, and even then only to small villages like Etten, Helvoirt, and Nuenen. But in his small circle he was warmly loved and respected, and his children idolized him.

In May, 1851, he married Anna Cornelia Carbentus, who was born in 1819 at The Hague, where her father, Willem Carbentus, was a bookbinder. He had bound the first Constitution of Holland, thereby earning the title of “bookbinder to the King.” His youngest daughter, Cornelia, was already married to Vincent van Gogh, the art dealer; his eldest daughter was the wife of the well-known Amsterdam clergyman, Stricker. The married life of Theodorus van Gogh and Anna Carbentus was very happy. In his wife he found a helpmate who shared in his work with all her heart. Notwithstanding her own family and the work which it entailed, she visited his parishioners with him; and her cheerful, lively spirit was never damped by the monotony of the quiet village life. She was a remarkable, lovable woman, who in her old age (she reached her eighty-seventh year), after having lost her husband and three grown sons, still retained her energy and spirit and bore her sorrow with rare courage.

One of her qualities, next to her deep love of nature, was the great facility with which she could express her thoughts on paper: her busy hands, which were always working for others, grasped eagerly, not only needle and knitting needle, but also the pen. “I just send you a little word” was one of her favourite expressions, and how many of these “little words” came just in time to bring comfort and strength to those whom they were addressed to. For almost twenty years they have been to me a never-failing source of hope and courage, and in this book which is a monument to her sons, a word of grateful remembrance is due to their mother.

On March 30, 1852, a dead son was born at the vicarage of Zundert, but a year after on the same date Anna van Gogh gave birth to a healthy boy who was called Vincent Willem after his two grandfathers, and who, in qualities and character as well as in appearance, took after his mother more than his father. The energy and unbroken strength of will which Vincent showed in his life were, in principle, his mother's traits; from her also he took the sharp, inquisitive glance of the eye from under the protruding eyebrows. The blond complexion of both the parents became reddish in Vincent; he was of medium height, rather broadshouldered, and gave the impression of being strong and sturdy. This is also confirmed by his mother's words, that none of the children except Vincent were very strong. A weaker constitution than his would certainly have broken down much sooner under the heavy strain Vincent put upon it.

As a child he was of a difficult temper, often troublesome and self-willed; his upbringing was not fitted to counterbalance these faults, as the parents were very tender-hearted, especially toward their eldest. Once Grandmother Van Gogh, who had come from Breda to visit her children at Zundert, witnessed one of little Vincent's naughty fits. Having learned from experience with her own twelve babies, she took the little culprit by the arm and, with a sound box on the ears, put him out of the room. The tender-hearted mother was so indignant at this that she did not speak to her mother-in-law for a whole day, and only the sweet-tempered character of the young father succeeded in bringing about a reconciliation. In the evening he had a little carriage brought around, and drove the two women to the heath where, under the influence of a beautiful sunset, they forgave each other.

Little Vincent had a great love for animals and flowers, and made all kinds of collections. There was as yet no sign of any extraordinary gift for drawing; it was only noted that at the age of eight he once modelled a little clay elephant that drew his parents' attention, but he destroyed it at once when, according to his notion, such a fuss was made about it. The same fate befell a very curious drawing of a cat, which his mother always remembered. For a short time he attended the village school, but his parents found that the intercourse with the peasant boys made him too rough, so a governess was sought for the children of the vicarage, whose number had meanwhile increased to six. Two years after Vincent a little daughter had been born, and two years later, May 1, 1857, came a son who was named after his father. After him came two sisters and a little brother. (The younger sister, Willemien, who always lived with her mother, was the only one to whom Vincent wrote on rare occasions.) Theo was more tender and kind than his brother, who was four years older. He was more delicately built and his features were more refined, but he had the same reddish fair complexion and the same light blue eyes which sometimes darkened to a greenish-blue.

In letter 338 Vincent himself described the similarity and the difference in their looks. In 1889 Theo wrote to me about Rodin's marble head of John the Baptist: “The sculptor has conceived an image of the precursor of Christ that exactly resembles Vincent. Yet he never saw him. That expression of sorrow, that forehead disfigured by deep furrows which denotes high thinking and iron self-discipline, is Vincent's, though his is somewhat more sloping; the shape of the nose and structure of the head are the same.” When I later saw the bust, I found in it a perfect resemblance to Theo.

The two brothers were strongly attached to each other from childhood, whereas the eldest sister, recalling their childhood, spoke of Vincent's teasing ways. Theo remembered only that Vincent could invent such delightful games that once they made him a present of the most beautiful rosebush in their garden to show their gratitude. Their childhood was full of the poetry of Brabant country life; they grew up among the wheatfields, the heath and the pine forests, in that peculiar sphere of a village parsonage, the charm of which remained with them all their lives. It was not perhaps the best training to fit them for the hard struggle that awaited them both; they were still so very young when they had to go out into the world, and during the years following, with what bitter melancholy and inexpressible homesickness did they long for the sweet home in the little village on the heath.

Vincent came back there several times, and always appeared the “country boor”; Theo, who had become quite a refined Parisian, also kept in his heart something of the “Brabant boy,” as he laughingly liked to call himself.

As Vincent once rightly observed, “There will always remain in us something of the Brabant fields and heath.” When their father had died and their mother had to leave Brabant, he complained, “It will be a strange feeling to think that none of us has stayed in Brabant.” Later, when the faithful brother visited him in the hospital of Arles and in tender pity laid his head on the pillow beside him, Vincent whispered, “Just like Zundert.” Shortly afterward he wrote, “During my illness I saw again every room in the house at Zundert, every path, every plant in the garden, the view of the fields outside, the neighbors, the graveyard, the church, our kitchen garden at the back--down to a magpie's nest in a tall acacia in the graveyard”. So ineffaceable were those first sunny childhood's recollections.

When Vincent was twelve years old he was sent to Mr. Provily's boarding school in Zevenbergen; about this period not a single particular has been found, except that one of the sisters wrote to Theo, “Do you remember how on Mother's birthday Vincent used to come from Zevenbergen and what fun we had then?” Nothing is known of friends in that time.

When he was sixteen years old, the choice of a profession became urgent, and Uncle Vincent was consulted about this.

The latter, who meanwhile had acquired a large fortune as an art dealer, had been obliged by his feeble health to retire early from the strenuous business life in Paris--though still financially connected with the firm. He had settled at Prinsenhage, near his old father in Breda and his favorite brother in Zundert. Generally he passed the winter with his wife at Mentone in the South of France, and on his journey thither he always stayed some time in Paris, so that he remained in touch with the business. His beautiful country house at Prinsenhage had been enlarged by a gallery for his rare picture collection, and it was here that Vincent and Theo received their first impressions of the world of art. There was a warm, cordial intercourse between the Zundert parsonage and the childless home at Prinsenhage. “The carriage” from there was always loudly cheered by the children at Zundert, for it brought many surprises--flowers, rare fruits and delicacies; on the other hand, the bright, lively presence of the brother and sister from Zundert often cast a cheerful sunbeam on the life of the patient at Prinsenhage. These brothers, also called Vincent and Theo, differed but one year in age; they were thoroughly attached to each other, and their wives being sisters strengthened the bonds between them. What was more natural than that the rich art dealer destined the young nephew who bore his name to be his successor in the firm--perhaps even to become his heir?

Thus in 1869 Vincent entered the house of Goupil & Co., at The Hague, as youngest employee under the direction of Mr. Tersteeg. His future seemed bright. He boarded with the Roos family on the Beestenmarkt, where Theo later lived also. It was a comfortable home where his material needs were perfectly provided for, but there was no intellectual intercourse. This he found with various relations and friends of his mother's, whom he often visited: the Haanebeeks, the Van Stockums, and Aunt Sophie Carbentus and her three daughters. One of the latter married our famous Dutch painter, A. Mauve; a second, the less known painter, A. le Comte. Tersteeg sent the parents good reports about Vincent's zeal and capacities, and like his grandfather in his time, he was “the diligent, studious youth” whom everybody liked.

When he had been at The Hague for three years, Theo, who was still at school at Oisterwijk (near Helvoirt, to which village their father had been called), came to stay with him for a few days. It was after that visit in August, 1872, that the correspondence between the two brothers began, and from this now faded, yellow, almost childish little note it is carried on uninterruptedly until Vincent's death, when a half-finished letter to Theo was found on him. The desponding que veux-tu? at the end seems like the gesture of resignation with which he parted from life.

The principal events of both their lives are mentioned in the letters and are completed in this biographical notice by particulars, either heard from Theo himself, or found in the correspondence of the parents with Theo, also preserved in full. (Vincent's letters to his parents were unfortunately destroyed.) They date from January, 1873, when Theo, only fifteen years old, went to Brussels to be apprenticed as an art dealer also. These letters are full of the tenderest love and care for the boy who left home so young. “Well, Theo, you are quite a man now at fifteen,” said his mother in one of her letters. They clung fondly to him because he more than any of the other children repaid their love with never-failing tenderness and devotion, and grew up to be, as they so often said, “the crowning glory of their old age.” The letters tell of all the small events of daily life at the parsonage; what flowers were growing in the garden, and how the fruit trees bore, if the nightingale had been heard yet, what visitors had come, what the little sisters and brother were doing, what the text of Father's sermon was, and among all this, many particulars about Vincent.

In 1873 the latter had been transferred to the firm in London. When leaving The Hague, he got a splendid testimonial from Mr. Tersteeg, who also wrote to the parents that at the gallery everybody liked to deal with Vincent--art lovers, clients, as well as painters--and that he certainly would succeed in his profession. “It is a great satisfaction that he can close thc first period of his career in that way, and withal he has remained just as simple as he was before,” wrote Mother. At first everything went well with him in London; Uncle Vincent had given him introductions to some of his friends, and he threw himself into his work with great pleasure. He earned a salary of £90 a year, and though the cost of living was high, he managed to lay by some money to send home now and then. He bought himself a top hat like a real businessman--”You cannot be in London without one”--and he enjoyed his daily trips from the suburbs to the gallery on Southampton Street in the city.

The first boardinghouse he stayed in was kept by two ladies who owned two parrots. The place was nice, but somewhat expensive; therefore, he moved in August to the house of Mrs. Loyer, a curate's widow from the south of France, who with her daughter Ursula ran a day school for little children. There he spent the happiest year of his life. Ursula made a deep impression upon him. “I never saw or dreamed of anything like the love between her and her mother,” he wrote to one of his sisters; and, “Love her for my sake.”

He did not mention it to his parents, for he had not even confessed his love to Ursula herself--but his letters home were radiant with happiness. He wrote that he enjoyed his life so much--”Oh fullness of rich life, your gift O God.”[1]

In September an acquaintance was going over to London and undertook to bring a parcel for Vincent. Characteristically, it contained, among other things, a bunch of grass and a wreath of oak leaves made at home during the holidays by Theo, who had meanwhile been transferred from Brussels to the House of Goupil at The Hague. Vincent had to have something in his room to remind him of the beloved fields and woods.

He celebrated a happy Christmas with the Loyers. He would send home now and then a little drawing, from his house and the street and from the interior of his room, “so that we can imagine exactly how it looks, it is so well drawn,” wrote his mother. In this period he seems to have weighed the possibility of becoming a painter; later he wrote to Theo from Drenthe, “... how often I stood drawing on the Thames Embankment, on my way home from Southampton

Street in the evening and it came to nothing. If there had been somebody then to tell me what perspective was, how much misery I should have been spared, how much further I should be now!"

At that time he occasionally met Matthijs Maris[2], but was too bashful to speak out freely to him and shut all his longings and desires within himself--he still had a long road of sorrow to go ere he could reach his goal.

In January his salary was raised, and until spring his letters remained cheerful and happy. He intended to visit Holland in July, and before that time he apparently spoke to Ursula of his love. Alas, it turned out that she was already engaged to the man who boarded with them before Vincent came. He tried everything to make her break this engagement, but he did not succeed.

With this first great sorrow his character changed; when he came home for the holidays he was thin, silent, dejected--a different being. But he drew a great deal. Mother wrote, "Vincent made many a nice drawing: he drew the bedroom window and the front door, all that part of the house, and also a large sketch of the houses in London which his window looks out on; it is a delightful talent which can be of great value to him."

Accompanied by his eldest sister, who wanted to find a situation, he returned to London. He took furnished rooms in Ivy Cottage, 39 Kensington New Road; there, without any family life, he grew more and more silent and depressed, and also more and more religious.

His parents were glad he left the Loyers. "His living at the Loyers' with all those secrets has done him no good, and it was not a family like others...but not realizing his hopes must have been a great disappointment to him," Father wrote. Mother complained, "The evenings are so long already and his work finishes early; he must be lonely. If only it does not harm him."

They felt uneasy and worried about his solitary, secluded life. Uncle Vincent also insisted on his mixing more with other people: "That is just as necessary as learning your business." But the depression continued. Letters home grew more and more scarce, and Mother began to think that the London fog depressed him and that even a temporary change might do him good: "Poor boy, he means so well, but I believe things are very hard for him just now."

In October, 1874, Uncle Vincent did indeed effect a short removal to the firm in Paris. Vincent himself was little pleased by this, in fact, he was so angry that he did not write home, to the great grief of his parents. "He is only in a bad temper," his sister said; and Theo comforted, "He is doing all right."

Toward the end of December he returned to London, where he took the same rooms and led the same solitary life. For the first time he was described as eccentric. His love for drawing had ceased, but he read a great deal. The quotation from Renan which closes the London period clearly shows what filled his thoughts and how high he aimed even then: “... to sacrifice all personal desires...to realize great things...to attain nobility and to surmount the vulgarity of nearly every individual's existence.” He did not know yet how to reach his goal.

In May, 1875, he was transferred permanently to Paris and assigned especially to the picture gallery, where he felt quite out of place. He was more at home in his “cabin,” the little room in Montmartre where, morning and evening, he read the Bible with his young friend, Harry Gladwell, than among the mundane Parisian public.

His parents inferred from his letters that things were not going well. After he had come home at Christmas and everything had been talked over, Father wrote to Theo, “I almost think that Vincent had better leave Goupil within two or three months; there is so much that is good in him, yet it may be necessary for him to change his position. He is certainly not happy.” And they loved him too much to persuade him to stay in a place where he would be unhappy. He wanted to live for others, to be useful, to bring about something great; he did not yet know *how*, but *not* in an art gallery. On his return from Holland he had a decisive interview with Mr. Boussod (the son-in-law and successor of Mr. Goupil) that ended in his dismissal as from April 1, and he accepted it without offering any excuses for himself. One of the grievances against him was that he had gone home to Holland for Christmas and New Year's, the busiest time for business in Paris.

In his letters he seemed to take it rather lightly, but he felt how gloomily and threateningly the clouds were beginning to gather around him. At the age of twenty-three he had been thrown out of employment, without any chance of a better career; Uncle Vincent was deeply disappointed in his namesake and had washed his hands of him; his parents were well-meaning, but they could not do much for him, as they had been obliged to touch their capital for the education of their children. (The pastor's salary was about 820 guilders a year.) Vincent had had his share, now the others had to have theirs. It seemed that Theo, who was soon to become everybody's helper and adviser, had already at that time suggested Vincent's becoming a painter; but for the moment he would not hear of it. His father suggested a position in a museum or opening a small art gallery for himself, as Uncle Vincent and Uncle Cor had done before him; he would have then been able to follow his own ideas about art and have been no longer obliged to sell pictures which he considered bad. But his heart again drew him to England, and he planned to become a teacher.

Through an advertisement, in April, 1876, he got a position in Ramsgate at Mr. Stokes's, whose school moved in July to Isleworth. He received only board and lodging, no salary. He soon accepted another position at the somewhat richer school of Mr. Jones, a Methodist preacher, where Vincent finally acted as a kind of curate.

His letters home were gloomy. “It seems as if something were threatening me,” he wrote. His parents perceived full well that teaching did not satisfy him. They suggested his studying for a French or German college certificate, but he would not hear of it. “I wish he could find some work in connection with art or nature, wrote his mother, who understood what was going on within him. With the force of despair he clung to religion, in which he tried to satisfy his craving for beauty as well as his longing to live for others. At times he seemed to become intoxicated with the sweet, melodious words of the English texts and hymns, the romantic charm of the little village church, and the lovely, holy atmosphere that enveloped the English service. His letters in those days contained an almost morbid sensitivity. Over and over he spoke about a position connected with the church--but when he came home for Christmas, it was decided that he would not go back to Isleworth because there was absolutely no prospect for the future. He remained on friendly terms with Mr. Jones, who later came to stay a few days at the Etten parsonage, and whom he subsequently met in Belgium.

Once again Uncle Vincent used his influence and procured a place for him in the bookshop of Blussé and Van Braam in Dordrecht. He accepted it, but without great enthusiasm. The words written to Theo by one of the sisters were characteristic: “You think that he is something more than an ordinary human being, but I think it would be much better if he thought himself just an ordinary being.” Another sister wrote, “His religion makes him absolutely dull and unsociable.”

To preach the Gospel still seemed to him the only desirable thing, and at last an attempt was made to enable him to begin the study of theology. The uncles in Amsterdam promised to give their aid. He could live with Uncle Jan van Gogh, Commandant of the Navy Yard, which would be a great saving; Uncle Stricker found the best teacher in the classical languages, the well-known Dr. Mendes da Costa, and gave Vincent some lessons himself; he could satisfy his love for pictures and prints in Uncle Cor's art gallery. Everybody tried to make it easy for him, all except Uncle Vincent, who was strongly opposed to the plan and would not help promote it--in which he proved to be right after all. Vincent set to work full of courage; first, he had to prepare himself for a State examination before he could he admitted to the university, and then it would take seven years to become fully qualified. His parents anxiously asked themselves whether he would have the strength to persevere, and whether he, who had never been used to regular study, would be able to force himself to it at the age of twenty-four.

That period in Amsterdam, from May, 1877, to 1878, was one long tale of woe. After the first half year Vincent began to lose ardour and courage. Writing exercises and studying grammar was not what he wanted to do; he wanted to comfort and cheer people by bringing them the Gospel--and surely he did not need so much learning for that! He really longed for practical work, and when at last his teacher also perceived that Vincent would never succeed, he advised him to give up his studies. In the Handelsblad of December 2, 1910, Dr. Mendes da Costa wrote his personal recollections of the pupil who later became so famous. He recorded many characteristic particulars: Vincent's nervous, strange appearance that yet was not without charm; his fervent intention to study well; his peculiar habit of self-discipline, self-chastisement; and finally, his total unfitness for regular study. Not along that path was he to reach his goal! He confessed openly that he was glad things had gone so far and that he could look forward to his future with more courage than when he devoted himself hopelessly to his theological studies, which period he afterward called “the worst time of my life.”

He would remain “humble,” and now wanted to become an evangelist in Belgium; for this no certificates were required, no Latin or Greek--only three months at the School of Evangelization at Brussels. There the lessons were free, the only charges being board and lodging, and he could get his nomination. In July he traveled thither with his father, accompanied by Mr. Jones, who on his way to Belgium had spent a few days with them at Etten. Together they visited the members of the Committee of Evangelization: the Reverend Mr. Van den Brink from Rousselaere; the Reverend Mr. Pietersen from Malines; and the Reverend Mr. De Jong from Brussels. Vincent explained his case clearly and made a very good impression. His father wrote: “His stay abroad and that last year at Amsterdam have not been quite fruitless after all, and when he takes the trouble to exert himself, he shows that he has learned and observed much in the school of life.” Vincent consequently was accepted as a pupil.

But the parents regarded this new experiment with fresh anxiety: “I am always so afraid that wherever Vincent may be or whatever he may do, he will spoil everything by his eccentricity, his queer ideas and views on life,” his mother wrote. His father added, “It grieves us so to see that he literally knows no joy of life, but always walks with bent head, whilst we did all in our power to bring him to an honorable position! It seems as if he deliberately chooses the most difficult path.”

In fact, that was Vincent's aim--to humble himself, to forget himself, to sacrifice himself, *mourir à soi-même* (to mortify himself)--that was the severe ideal he tried to reach as long as he sought his refuge in religion, and he never did a thing by halves. But to follow the paths trodden by others, to submit to the will of other people, that was not in his character; he wanted to work out his own salvation. Toward the end of August be arrived at the school in Brussels which had been opened only recently and had but three pupils. He certainly was the most advanced in Mr. Bokma's class, but he did not feel at home at the school, he was "like a fish out of water," he said, and was ridiculed for his peculiarities in dress and manners. He also lacked the ability to extemporize, and was therefore obliged to read his lectures from manuscript. But the greatest objection against him was, "He is not submissive"; and when the three months had elapsed, he did not get his nomination. Though he wrote (in letter 126) in an offhand way to Theo, he seems to have been greatly upset by it. His father received a letter from Brussels, probably from the school, saying that Vincent was weak and thin, did not sleep, and was in a nervous and excited state, so that it would be best to come and take him home.

He immediately traveled to Brussels and succeeded in arranging everything. At his own risk Vincent went to the Borinage, where he boarded at 30 francs a month with M. Van der Haegen, Rue de L'Église 39, at Pâturages near *Mons.* He taught the children in the evening, visited the poor, and held Bible classes; when the Committee met in January, he would again try to get a nomination. The intercourse with the people pleased him very much, and in his leisure hours he drew large maps of Palestine, of which his father ordered four at 10 francs apiece. At last, in January, 1879, he got a temporary nomination for six months at Wasmes at 50 francs a month, for which he would have to give Bible classes, teach the children, and visit the sick--the work of his heart. His first letters from there were very contented, and he devoted himself heart and soul to his work, especially the practical part of it; his greatest interest was in nursing the sick and wounded. Soon, however, he fell back into the old exaggerations--he tried to practice the doctrines of Jesus, giving away everything--his money, clothes and bed--leaving the good Denis boardinghouse in Wasmes, and retiring to a miserable hut where every comfort was wanting. Already his parents had been notified of it, and when, toward the end of February, the Reverend Mr. Rochelieu came for inspection, the bomb exploded. So much zeal was too much for the Committee, and a person who neglected himself so could not be an example to others. The Church Council at Wasmes held a meeting, and it agreed that if he did not listen to reason, he would lose his position. He himself took it rather coolly. "What shall we do now?" he wrote. "Jesus was also very calm in the storm; perhaps it must grow worse before it grows better." Again his father went to him and succeeded in stilling the storm; he brought him back to the old boardinghouse and advised him to be less exaggerated in his work.

For some time everything was all right, at least he wrote that there were no complaints. About that time a heavy mine explosion occurred and a strike broke out, so Vincent could devote himself completely to the miners. In her naive religious faith his mother wrote, “Vincent's letters, which contain so many interesting things, prove that with all his peculiarities, he yet shows a warm interest in the poor; that surely will not remain unobserved by God.” During that same period he also wrote that he had tried to *sketch the dresses and tools of the miners and would show them when he came home*. In July bad tidings came again. “He does not comply with the wishes of the Committee, and nothing will change him. It seems that he is deaf to all remarks that are made to him,” wrote his mother. When the six months of probation had passed, he was not appointed again, but was given three months to look for another position.

He left Wasmes and traveled on foot to Brussels to ask the Reverend Mr. Pietersen, who had moved there from Malines, for advice. The latter painted in his leisure hours and had a studio, which was probably why Vincent went to him for help. He arrived there tired and hot, exhausted and in a nervous condition; his appearance was so neglected that the daughter of the house who opened the door was frightened, called for her father and ran away. The Reverend Mr. Pietersen received him kindly; he procured him good lodgings for the night, invited him to his table the next day, showed him the studio, and as Vincent had brought some of his sketches of the miners, they probably talked as much about drawing and painting as about evangelization.

“Vincent impresses me as somebody who stands in his own light,” wrote the Reverend Mr. Pietersen to Vincent's parents.

Mother replies, “How lucky it is that he still always finds somebody who helps him on, as the Reverend Mr. Pietersen has now.”

In accordance with the latter's advice, Vincent resolved to stay in the Borinage at his own expense, as he could not do so in the service of the Committee, and board with the Evangelist Frank, in Cuesmes. About the middle of August, at their request, he visited his parents again at Etten. “He looks well, except for his clothes. He reads Dickens all day and speaks only when he is spoken to; about his future, not a single word,” wrote his mother. What could he say about his future? Did it ever look more hopeless than it did now? His illusion of bringing comfort and cheer into the miserable lives of the miners through the Gospel had gradually been lost in the bitter struggle between doubt and religion which took place within him at that time, and which made him lose his former faith in God. (The Bible texts and religious reflections, which had become more and more rare in his last letters, stopped entirely.) Nothing else had taken its place yet. He drew and read a great deal--among others Dickens, Beecher Stowe, Victor Hugo, and Michelet--but it was all done without system or purpose. Back in the Borinage he wandered about without work, without friends and very often without bread; for though he received money from home and from Theo, they could not give him more than was strictly necessary, and as it came very irregularly and Vincent was a very poor financier, there were days, even weeks, when he was quite without money.

In October Theo, who had secured a permanent position at Goupil's in Paris, visited him on his journey thither and tried in vain to induce him to adopt some fixed plan for the future. He was not yet ready to make any decision; before he became conscious of his real power, he was to struggle through the awful winter of 1879-80, that saddest, most hopeless time of his never very fortunate life. It was during these days that he undertook, with 10 francs in his pocket, the hopeless expedition to Courrières, the dwelling place of Jules Breton, whose pictures and poems he so much admired, and with whom he secretly hoped to come into contact in some way or other. But all he saw was the inhospitable exterior of Breton's newly built studio; he lacked the courage to introduce himself. Disappointed, his money spent, he made the long journey home; mostly he slept either in the open air or in a hayloft. Sometimes he exchanged a drawing for a piece of bread, but he suffered so much fatigue and want that his health never fully recovered.

In spring he returned to the vicarage of Etten and spoke again about going to London. “If he really wants to, I shall help him go,” wrote his father. But finally he went back to the Borinage, and that summer of 1880 he lived in the house of the miner Charles Decrucq at Cuesmes. There he wrote in July the wonderfully touching letter (133) which tells what is going on in his innermost self, “...my only anxiety is, how can I be of use?...Can't I serve some purpose and be of any good ?” It is the old wish, the old longing to serve and comfort humanity, which made him write later, when he had found his calling, “And in a picture I want to say something comforting as music is comforting.” Now, in the days of deepest discouragement and darkness, at last the light began to dawn. Not in books would he find satisfaction, nor find his work in literature, as his letters sometimes suggested; he turned back to his old love, “I said to myself...I will take up my pencil...I will go on with my drawing. From that moment everything has seemed transformed for me...” It sounds like a cry of deliverance, and once more, “...do not fear for me. If I can only continue to work...it will set me right again.” At last he had found his work, and his mental equilibrium was restored; he no longer doubted himself, and however difficult or hard his life became, the inner serenity, the conviction of having found his own calling, never deserted him again.

The little room in the house of the miner Decrucq, which he had to share with the children, was his first studio. There he began his painter's career with the first original drawings of miners going to work in the early morning. There he copied with restless activity the large drawings after Millet, and when the room got too narrow for him, he took his work out into the garden.

When the cold autumn weather prevented this, and because his surroundings at Cuesmes were getting too cramped for him, he moved in October to Brussels, where he settled in a small hotel on the Bd. du Midi 72. He was longing to see pictures again, but above all he hoped to become acquainted with other artists.

Deep in his heart there was such a great longing for sympathy, for kindness and friendship, and though his difficult character generally prevented him from finding this and left him isolated in life, yet he always kept on longing for somebody with whom he could live and work.

Theo, who meanwhile had acquired a good position in Paris, could now assist him in word and deed. He brought Vincent into contact with the young Dutch painter Van Rappard, who had worked some time in Paris and was then studying at the academy in Brussels. At first the acquaintance did not progress, for the outward difference between the rich young nobleman and the neglected wanderer from the Borinage was too great; yet the artistic taste and opinions of both were too similar for them not to find each other eventually. A friendship arose--perhaps the only one that Vincent ever had in Holland; it lasted for five years and then was broken through a misunderstanding which Van Rappard always regretted, though he acknowledged that intercourse with Vincent was very difficult.

“I remember as if it happened yesterday the moment of our first meeting at Brussels when he came into my room at nine o'clock in the morning, how at first we did not get on very well together, but so much the better after we had worked together a few times,” wrote Van Rappard to Vincent's mother after his death. And again, “Whoever had witnessed this wrestling, struggling and sorrowful existence could not but feel sympathy for the man who demanded so much of himself that it ruined body and mind. He belonged to the breed that produces the great artists.

“Though Vincent and I had been separated the last years by a misunderstanding which I have often regretted--I have never ceased to remember him and the time we spent together with great sympathy.

“Whenever in the future I shall remember that time, and it is always a delight for me to recall the past, the characteristic figure of Vincent will appear to me in such a melancholy but clear light, the struggling and wrestling, fanatic, gloomy

Vincent, who used to flare up so often and was so irritable, but who still deserved friendship and admiration for his noble mind and high artistic qualities.”

Vincent's own opinion of Van Rappard is clearly shown in his letters. A second acquaintance that Vincent made through Theo, with the painter Roelofs, was of lesser importance. Vincent did not take Roelofs' advice to enter the academy; perhaps he was not admitted because he was not far enough advanced, but probably he had more than enough of academical institutions and theories. In painting as well as in theology he preferred to do his own way; that is why he did not come into contact with other Dutch painters who were at that same time at the Brussels Academy, for instance, Haverman.

He studied anatomy by himself, drew diligently from living models, and from a letter to his father it seems that he took lessons in perspective from a poor painter at 1.50 francs for a two hour lesson; it has not been possible to ascertain the name of the painter, but it may have been Madiol.

At the end of the winter, with the departure of Van Rappard, in whose studio he had often worked because his own little bedroom was too small, he longed for other surroundings, especially for the country. Expenses in Brussels were also somewhat heavy, and he thought it would be cheapest to go to his parents in Etten, where he had board and lodging free and could use all the money he received for his work.

He stayed there for eight months, and the summer of 1881 was again a happy time for him. First, Van Rappard came to visit him, and he too always remembered with pleasure his stay at the vicarage. “And my visit to Etten! I can still see you sitting at the window when I came in,” he wrote to Vincent's mother in the letter quoted above. “I still enjoy the beautiful walk we all took together that first evening, through the fields and along the small path! Our excursions to Seppen, Passievaart, Liesbosch--I often look through my sketchbooks for them.”

In the beginning of August Theo came over from Paris. Shortly after, Vincent made a trip to The Hague to consult Mauve about his work; the latter firmly encouraged him so that he continued with great animation. Finally, in those days he met for the second time a woman who had great influence on his life. Among the guests who spent that summer at the vicarage at Etten was a cousin from Amsterdam--a young widow with her little four-year-old son. Quite absorbed in her grief over the loss of her husband, whom she had loved so tenderly, she was unconscious of the impression which her beauty and touching sorrow made on the cousin who was a few years her junior. “He was so kind to my little boy,” she said when she later remembered that time. Vincent, who was very fond of children, tried to win the mother's heart by great devotion to the child. They walked and talked much together, and he also drew a portrait of her (which seems to have been lost). The thought of a more intimate relation did not occur to her, and when Vincent at last spoke to her of his love, a very decided no was the immediate reply. She went back to Amsterdam and never saw him again. Vincent could not abide by her decision, and with his innate tenacity he kept on persevering and hoping for a change in her feelings for him. When his letters were not answered, he accused both his and her parents of opposing the match, and only a visit to Amsterdam, where she refused to see him, convinced him of the utter hopelessness of his love.

"He fancied that he loved me," she said afterward, but for him it was sad earnest, and her refusal became a turning point in his life. If she had returned his love, it would perhaps have spurred him on to acquire a social position--he would have had to provide for her and her child. As it was he lost all worldly ambition, and subsequently lived only for his work, without taking one step to make himself independent. He could not bear to stay in Etten any longer. He had become irritable and nervous, his relations with his parents became strained, and in December, after a violent altercation with his father, he left suddenly for The Hague.

The two years he spent there were for his work a very important period, of which his letters give a perfect description. His low spirits rose at first with the change of surroundings and the intercourse with Mauve; but the feeling of having been slighted and wronged did not leave him, and he felt utterly abandoned. When in January he met a poor neglected woman approaching her confinement, he took her under his protection, partly from pity but also to fill the great void in his life. "I hope there is no harm in his so-called model. Bad connections often arise from a feeling of loneliness, of dissatisfaction," his father wrote to Theo, who was always the confidant of both parties and had to listen to all the complaints and worries. Father was not far from being right. Vincent could not be alone; he wanted to live for somebody, he wanted a wife and children, and as the woman he loved had rejected him, he took the first unhappy woman who crossed his path, with children that were not his own. At first he feigned happiness and tried to convince Theo in every letter how wisely and well he had acted; the touching care and tenderness with which he surrounded the woman when she left the hospital after her confinement strike us painfully when we think on whom that treasure of love was lavished. He prided himself now on having a family of his own, but when their living together had become a fact and he was continually associated with a coarse, uneducated woman, marked by smallpox, who spoke with a vulgar accent and had a spiteful character, who was addicted to liquor and smoked cigars, whose past life had not been irreproachable, and who drew him into all kinds of intrigues with her family, he soon wrote no more about his home life. Even the posing, by which she won him (she sat for the beautiful drawing, “Sorrow”) and of which he had expected so much, soon ceased altogether.

This unfortunate liaison deprived him of the sympathy of all in The Hague who took an interest in him. Neither Mauve nor Tersteeg could approve of his taking upon himself the cares of a family--and such a family!--while he was financially dependent on his younger brother. Acquaintances and relatives were shocked to see him walking about with such a slovenly woman; nobody cared to associate with him any longer, and his home life was such that nobody came to visit him. The solitude around him became greater and greater and, as usual, it was only Theo who understood and continued to help him.

When the latter came to visit Vincent for the second time in The Hague, in the summer of 1883, and saw the situation for himself (he found the household neglected, everything in bad condition and Vincent deeply in debt), he too advised him to let the woman go her own way, as she was not able to live an ordered life. She herself had already realized that things could not continue, because Vincent required too much money for his painting to leave enough for the support of her and the children, and she and her mother were already planning to earn money another way. Vincent himself felt that Theo was right, and in his heart he longed for a change of surroundings and the liberty to go where his work called him; but it cost him a bitter struggle to give up what he had taken upon himself and to leave the poor woman to her fate. Till the last he defended her and excused her faults with the sublime words, “...she has never seen what is good, how can she be good.”

In those days of inner strife he allowed Theo to read deeper than ever into his heart. These last letters from The Hague give the key to many things that were incomprehensible until now. For the first time he spoke openly about what had happened at the time of his dismissal from Goupil, explained his strange indifference to showing his own work or trying to make it profitable when he wrote, “I am so afraid that the steps I might take to introduce myself would do more harm than good...It is...so painful for me to speak to people. I am not afraid of it, but I know I make an unfavorable impression.” How naively he added, “...human brains cannot beat everything...Look at Rappard, who got brain fever, and had to travel as far as Germany to recover.” As if he wanted to say, “Do not let me make efforts to know strangers, as the same thing might happen to me.” Once more he touched on the old love story of Etten. “A simple word... made me feel that...nothing is changed within me in that respect, that it is and remains a wound which I carry with me; it lies deep and cannot be healed. After years it will be the same as it was the first day.” And he expressed openly how different his life would have been without this disappointment in love.

When at last in September he started alone for Drenthe, he had made all possible provisions for the woman and the children. There was a sorrowful parting, especially from the little boy, to whom he had become attached as if to his own child.

The trip to Drenthe proved a failure, instead of doing him any good. But some of his most beautiful letters date from those days. The season was too far advanced, the country too inhospitable, and what Vincent so ardently desired--to come into contact with some artists, for instance, Liebermann--was not realized.

Bitter loneliness and lack of money put too heavy a strain on his nerves. He was afraid of falling ill, and in December, 1883, hastened back to the parental vicarage, the only place where he could find a safe shelter.

His father had meanwhile left Etten and been called to Nuenen, a village in the neighborhood of Eindhoven. The new place and surroundings pleased Vincent so much that instead of paying a short visit, as he originally intended, he stayed there for two years. He wanted to paint the Brabant landscape and the Brabant types, and in doing so he ignored every obstacle.

Living with his parents was very difficult for him as well as for them. In a small village vicarage, where nothing can happen without everybody's knowing it, a painter was obviously an anomaly; how much more a painter like Vincent, who had so completely broken with all formalities, conventionalities and with all religion, and who was the last person in the world to conform himself to other people. On both sides there must have been great love and patience for it to have lasted so long.

When his letters from Drenthe to his parents had become more and more melancholy, his father had anxiously written to Theo, “It seems to me that Vincent is again in a wrong mood. He seems to be in a melancholy state of mind; but how can it be otherwise? Whenever he looks back into the past and recalls how he has broken with all former relations, it must be very painful to him. If he only had the courage to think of the possibility that the cause of much which has resulted from his eccentricity lies in himself. I don't think he ever feels any self-reproach, only spite against others, especially against the gentlemen in The Hague. We must be very careful with him, for he seems to be in a contrary mood.”

And they were so careful. When he came back to them of his own will, they received him with so much love and tried everything in their power to make him comfortable. They were proud, too, of the progress in his work, of which it must be said they had no great expectations at first. “Do you not like the pen drawings of the tower that Vincent sent you? It seems to come to him so easily," wrote his father in the first days of December to Theo. Then on December 20, "You will be eager to know how Vincent is getting on. At first it seemed hopeless, but by and by things arranged themselves, especially since we approved of his staying here for some time to make studies. He wanted the mangling room fitted up for him, although we did not think it was suitable. We had a nice stove put in; as the room had a stone floor, we had it covered with boards and made it as comfortable as possible: we put in a bed on a wooden stand, so that it might not be too damp. Now we will make the room nice and warm and dry, so that it may turn out better than we expected. I proposed having a large window made in it, but he did not want that. In short, we undertake this experiment with real confidence, and we intend to leave him perfectly free in his peculiarities of dress, *etc*. The people here have seen him anyhow, and though it is a pity he is so reserved, we cannot change the fact of his being eccentric..." "He seems to occupy himself a great deal with your plans for the future, but you will be wise enough not to let yourself be influenced into doing things that are not practical, for alas, that certainly is his foible. One thing is certain, he works hard and finds lots of subjects here; he has already made several drawings which we like very much."

Such was the feeling from their side; but Vincent was not satisfied with all that kindness and craved a deeper understanding of his innermost self than his parents could give, however much they tried. About the middle of January, '84, when his mother had an accident and was brought home from Helmond with a fractured thighbone, the relations became less strained. Vincent, who had become an expert nurse in the Borinage, helped to nurse his mother with the greatest devotion, and in every letter during that period they praised him for his faithful help. "Vincent is untiring, and the rest of his time he devotes to his painting and drawing with the greatest zeal." "The doctor praised Vincent for his ability and care." "Vincent proves an ideal nurse and at the same time he works with the greatest ambition." "I fervently hope that his efforts may find success, for it is edifying to see how much he works," stated the February letters.

Vincent's own letters at that time were gloomy and full of complaints and unjust reproaches to Theo that he never sold anything for him and did not even try, ending at last with the bitter cry: "A wife you cannot give me, a *child* you cannot give me, work you cannot give me. Money, yes. But what good is it to me if I must do without the rest!" Theo, who always understood him, never gave a sharp or angry answer to those reproaches: a light sarcasm was the only reply he sometimes allowed himself.

In May Vincent's spirits rose somewhat when he moved into a new, larger studio--two rooms in the house of the sexton of the Catholic church. Shortly after, Van Rappard came to spend some time with him again. Besides, during his mother's illness Vincent had increasingly come into contact with neighbors and friends in the village, who daily came to visit the patient, so that he then wrote, “I have been getting on better with people here than I did at first, which is of great importance to me, for one decidedly needs some distraction, and if one feels too lonely, the work suffers from it.” But he continued prophetically, “… however, perhaps one must be prepared for it not to last.”

Indeed, difficult times were approaching again. With one of his mother's visitors, the youngest of three sisters who lived next door to the vicarage, he had soon got into a more intimate relation; she was much older than he and neither beautiful nor gifted, but she had an active mind and a kind heart. She often visited the poor with Vincent; they walked much together, and on her part at least the friendship soon changed into love. As to Vincent, though his letters do not give the impression of any passionate feeling for her (the fact is, he wrote very little about it), yet he seemed to have been inclined to marry her. However, the family vehemently protested against the plan, and violent scenes took place between the sisters, which were not conducive to keeping Vincent in a pleasant mood.

“Vincent works hard, but he is not very sociable,” wrote his mother in July. It was to get worse still, for the young woman, violently excited by the scenes with her sisters, tried to commit suicide. She failed, but her health had been so shocked that she had to be nursed at a doctor's in Utrecht. She recovered completely, and after half a year she came back to Nuenen; but their relations were broken forever, and the whole affair left Vincent in a gloomy, bitter mood.

For his parents the consequences were also painful, because the neighbors avoided the vicarage from that time on, not wishing to meet Vincent, “which is a great privation for me, but it is not your mother's way to complain,” Mother wrote in October of that year. During that period Van Rappard came to stay with them again. “He is not a talkative person, but a hard worker,” wrote Mother. Van Rappard himself wrote in 1890, in the letter to her quoted above, “How often I think of the studies of the weavers which he made in Nuenen and the intensity of feeling with which he depicted their lives; what deep melancholy pervaded his work, however clumsy its execution may have been then. And what beautiful studies he made of the old church tower in the churchyard. I always remember a moonlight effect of it which particularly struck me at that time. When I think of those studies in these two rooms near the church, so many memories are conjured up, and I am reminded of all the surroundings--the cheerful, hospitable vicarage with its beautiful garden, the Begemann family, our visits to the weavers and peasants. How I did enjoy it all!”

After Van Rappard's visit Vincent had no distraction other than a few acquaintances in Eindhoven, with whom he had come into contact through the house painter, who furnished his colours. They were a former goldsmith, Hermans; a tanner, Kerssemakers ; and also a telegraphist whose name was not mentioned--all of whom Vincent initiated into the art of painting. Mr. Kerssemakers recorded his reminiscences of that time in the weekly *De Amsterdammer*[3] of April 14 and 21, 1912, and included the following description of Vincent's studio, which according to him looked quite “Bohemian.”

“One was amazed at the way all the available hanging or standing room was filled with paintings, drawings in watercolour and in crayon: heads of men and women whose clownish turned-up noses, protruding cheekbones and large ears were strongly accentuated, the rough paws calloused and furrowed; weavers and weaving looms, women spooling yarn, potato planters, women busy weeding, innumerable still lifes, certainly as many as ten studies in oils of the little old chapel at Nuenen, which he was so enthusiastic about that he had painted it in all seasons and in all weathers. (Later this little chapel was pulled down by the Nuenen vandals, as he called them). A great heap of ashes around the stove, which had never known a brush or stove polish, a small number of chairs with cane bottoms, and a cupboard with at least thirty different birds' nests, all kinds of mosses and plants brought along from the moor, some stuffed birds, a spool, a spinning wheel, a complete set of farm tools, old caps and hats, coarse bonnets and hoods, wooden shoes, etc.”

He also told about their trip to Amsterdam (in the autumn of 1885) to see the “Rijksmuseum,” how Vincent in his rough ulster and his inseparable fur cap calmly sat painting a few small views of the city in the waiting room of the station; how they saw the Rembrandts in the museum, how Vincent could not tear himself away from the “Jewish Bride” and said at last, “Would you believe it...I should be happy to give ten years of my life if I could go on sitting here in front of this picture for a fortnight, with only a crust of dry bread for food?”

Dry bread was nothing unusual to him; according to Kerssemakers, Vincent never ate it any other way, in order not to “pamper” himself too much. His impression of Vincent's work is given as follows:

“On…my first visit to…Nuenen it was impossible for me to get the right insight into his work; it was so totally different from what I had imagined it would be...so rough and unkempt, so harsh and unfinished, that…I was unable to think it good or beautiful.

“On my second visit the impression...was considerably better, although in my ignorance I still thought that either he could not draw or that he carelessly neglected to draw his figures, and I took the liberty of telling him so straight out. He was not at all cross at this, he only laughed and said, “Later on you will think differently.”

Meanwhile the winter days passed gloomily at the vicarage. “For Vincent I should wish that the winter were over; he cannot work out of doors and the long evenings are not profitable for his work. We often think that it would be better for him to be among people of his own profession, but we cannot dictate to him,” wrote his father in December. Mother complained, “How is it possible to behave so unkindly? If he has wishes for the future, let him exert himself, he is still young enough; it is almost impossible to bear it. I think he wants a change--perhaps he might find something that would give him inspiration. Here it is always the same, and he never speaks to anyone.” But still she found one bright spot: “We saw that Vincent received a book from you. He seems to enjoy reading it very much. I heard him say, 'That is a fine book,' so you have given him great pleasure. I am glad that we get books regularly from the reading club; the illustrations in the magazines interest him most, and then there is the *Nouvelle Revue*, etc.; every week something new is a great pleasure to him.”

Incessantly Vincent continued his work in the gloomy cottages of peasants and weavers. “I've hardly ever begun a year with a gloomier aspect, in a gloomier mood,” he wrote on New Year's Day, '85. “He seems to become more and more estranged from us,” complained his father, whose letters became more and more melancholy, as if he was not equal to the difficulties of living with his gifted, unmanageable son, and felt helpless against Vincent's unbridled violence. “This morning I talked things over with Vincent; he was in a kind mood and said there was no particular reason for his being depressed,” said the father. “May he meet with success anyhow,” are the last words he wrote about Vincent in a letter of March 25. Two days later, coming home from a long walk across the heath, he fell down on the threshold of his home and was carried lifeless into the house. Hard times followed in the vicarage; Mother could remain there another year, but for Vincent it brought immediate changes. As a result of several unpleasant discussions with the other members of the family, he resolved to live no longer at the vicarage, but took up his abode in the studio, where he stayed from May to November. Henceforth there was not a single thing to distract him from his aim--to paint peasant life. He spent those months in the cottages of the weavers or with the peasants in the field. “It is a good thing to be deep in the snow in the winter; in autumn, deep in the yellow leaves, in summer, amid the ripe wheat; in spring, in the grass... always with the mowers and the peasant girls, with a big sky overhead in summer, by the fireside in winter, and to feel that it has always been so and always will be”. He was now in harmony with himself and his surroundings, and when he sent Theo his first great picture, “The Potato Eaters,” he could say in good reason that it is “from the heart of the peasant's life.”

An uninterrupted series of studies follow; the cottages of the old peasants and their witchlike wives, the old church tower of the cemetery, the autumn landscapes and the bird's nests, a number of still lifes and the strong drawings of the Brabant peasants. In Nuenen he also wrote the beautiful passages about colour, in reference to Delacroix's laws of colours. It seems strange for him, afterward one of the first impressionists, even neo-impressionists, to declare, “There is a school--I believe--of impressionists. But I know very little about it” , and in his usual spirit of contradiction he later adds, “From what you have told me about impressionism I have learned that it is different from what I thought; but as for me, I find Israëls, for instance, so enormous that I am not very curious about it or desirous of anything different or new. I think I shall change a great deal in touch and colour, but I expect to become rather darker in my colours than lighter.” A soon as he came to France, he thought differently.

During the last days of his stay in Nuenen difficulties arose between him and the Catholic priest, who had for a long time looked askance at the studio next to his church, and now forbade his parishioners to pose for Vincent. The latter was already thinking about a change. He gave notice of leaving his studio May 1, but started for Antwerp toward the end of November, leaving all his Brabant work behind. When in May his mother also left Nuenen, everything belonging to Vincent was packed in cases, left in the care of a carpenter in Breda and--forgotten! After several years the carpenter finally sold everything to a junk dealer.

What Theo's opinion of his brother was at that time is shown in his letter to his sister on October 13, '85, in which he wrote: “Vincent is one of those who has gone through all the experiences of life and has retired from the world; now we must wait and see if he has genius. I think he has...If he succeeds in his work, he will be a great man. As to worldly success, it will perhaps be the same with him as with Heyerdahl[4]: appreciated by some but not understood by the public at large. Those, however, who care whether there is really something in the artist more than mere superficial brilliance will respect him; and in my opinion that will be sufficient revenge for the animosity of so many others.”

In Antwerp Vincent rented for 25 francs a month a little room over a small paint dealer's shop at “194 Rue des Images.” It was only a very small room, but he made it cosy with Japanese prints on the wall. When be had rented a stove and a lamp, he felt himself safe and wrote with profound satisfaction, “I shall not easily get bored, I assure you.” On the contrary, he spent this three months' stay in one feverish intoxication of work. The town life which he had missed so long fascinated him; he had neither eyes enough to see nor hands enough to paint: to make portraits of all the interesting types he met was his delight, and in order to pay the models, he sacrificed everything he had. He did not bother about food. “…when I receive...money my greatest appetite is not for food, though I have fasted, but the appetite for painting is even stronger, and I at once set out to hunt for models, and continue until all the money is gone,” he wrote.

In January when he realized that he could not go on like that, the expenses being too heavy, he became a pupil at the academy, where the tuition was free and he found models every day. Hageman and De Baseleer were there among his fellow pupils, and from Holland there was Briët. In the evening he worked again in the drawing class and after that, often till late at night, at a club where they also drew from life. His health could not stand the strain, and in the beginning of February he wrote that he was literally worn out and exhausted; according to the doctor it was complete prostration. He seemed to have no thought of giving up his work, however, though he began to make plans for a change: the course at the academy was almost over and he had already had many disagreements with his teachers, for he was much too independent and self-willed to submit to their guidance. Something had to be done. Theo thought it best for Vincent to go back to Brabant, but he himself wanted to go to Paris. Theo asked him to put off the visit at least till June, when he would have rented a larger apartment; but with his usual impetuosity Vincent could not wait so long, and one morning toward the end of February Theo received in his office at the Boulevard a little note written in crayon: Vincent had arrived and awaited him in the Salon Carré of the Louvre. Probably he left all his work in Antwerp--perhaps his landlord the paint dealer kept it for the unpaid rent of the room. Certainly none of the studies which he wrote about--the view of the park, of the Cathedral, Het Steen, etc.--has ever been found again.

After the meeting in the Louvre Vincent moved into Theo's apartment on the Rue de Laval. As there was no room for a studio, he worked during the first month at Cormon's studio, which did not satisfy him at all. When they moved in June to 54 Rue Lepic in Montmartre, he had a studio of his own and never went back to Cormon.

The new apartment on the third floor had three rather large rooms, a small room and a kitchen. The living room was comfortable and cosy with Theo's beautiful old cabinet, a sofa and a big stove, for both the brothers were very sensitive to the cold. Next to that was Theo's bedroom. Vincent slept in the small room and behind that was the studio, an ordinary-sized room with one not very large window. Here he first painted his immediate surroundings--the view from the studio window, the Moulin de la Galette viewed from every side, the window of Madame Bataille's small restaurant where he had his meals, little landscapes of Montmartre, which was at that time still quite countrified--all painted in a soft, tender tone like that of Mauve. Later he painted flowers and still life and tried to renew his palette under the influence of the French plein air painters such as Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, etc., for whom Theo had long since opened the way to the public.

The change of surroundings and the easier and more comfortable life, without any material cares, at first greatly improved Vincent's health. In the summer of '86 Theo wrote to his mother, “We like the new apartment very much; you would not recognize Vincent, he has changed so much, and it strikes other people more than it does me. He has undergone an important operation in his mouth, for he had lost almost all his teeth through the bad condition of his stomach. The doctor says that he has now quite recovered his health; he makes great progress in his work and has begun to have some success. He is in much better spirits than before and many people here like him...he has friends who send him every week a lot of beautiful flowers which he uses for still life. He paints chiefly flowers, especially to make the colours of his next pictures brighter and clearer. If we can continue to live together like this, I think the most difficult period is past, and he will find his way.”

To continue living together, that was the great difficulty; of all that Theo did for his brother, there was perhaps nothing that entailed a greater sacrifice than his having endured living with him for two years. For when the first excitement of all the new attractions in Paris had passed, Vincent soon fell back into his old irritability; perhaps the city life did not agree with him either and overstrained his nerves. Whatever might be the cause, his temper during that winter was worse than ever, and made life very hard for Theo, whose own health was not of the best at that time. Circumstances put too heavy a strain on him, his own work was very strenuous and exhausting, he had made the gallery on the Boulevard Montmartre a center of the impressionists; there were Monet, Sisley, Pissarro and Raffaelli, Degas--who exhibited nowhere else--Seurat, *etc.* But to introduce that work to the public, which filled the small entresol every afternoon from five until seven, what discussions, what endless debates, had to be held. On the other hand, how he had to defend the rights of the young painters against ces messieurs, as Vincent always called the heads of the firm. When he came home tired out in the evening, he found no rest; the impetuous, violent Vincent would begin to expound his own theories about art and art dealing, which always concluded that Theo ought to leave Goupil and open a gallery for himself. This lasted till far into the night; indeed, sometimes he sat down on a chair beside

Theo's bed to spin out his last arguments. “Do you feel how hard it sometimes is to have no other conversation than with gentlemen who speak of business matters and with artists whose life generally is difficult enough--but never to come into contact with women and children of your own sphere? You can have no idea of the loneliness in a big city,” Theo once wrote to his youngest sister, and to her he sometimes opened his heart about Vincent. “My home life is almost unbearable. No one wants to come and see me any more because it always ends in quarrels, and besides, he is so untidy that the room looks far from attractive. I wish he would go and live by himself. He sometimes mentions it, but if I were to tell him to go away, it would just give him a reason to stay; and it seems I do him no good. I ask only one thing of him, to do me no harm; yet by his staying he does so, for I can hardly bear it.” “It seems as if he were two persons one, marvellously gifted, tender and refined, the other, egoistic and hard-hearted. They present themselves in turns, so that one hears him talk first in one way, then in the other, and always with arguments on both sides. It is a pity that he is his own enemy, for he makes life hard not only for others but also for himself.” But when his sister advised him to “leave Vincent for God's sake,”' Theo answered, “It is such a peculiar case. If only he had an other profession, I would long ago have done what you advise me. I have often asked myself if I have not been wrong in helping him continually, and have often been on the point of leaving him to his own devices. After receiving your letter I have thought it over again, but I think in this case I must continue in the same way. He is certainly an artist, and if what he makes now is not always beautiful, it will certainly be of use to him later; then his work will perhaps be sublime, and it would be a shame to have kept him from his regular study. However unpractical he may be, if he succeeds in his work there will certainly come a day when he will begin to sell his pictures…

“I am firmly resolved to continue in the same way as till now, but I do hope that he will change his lodgings in some way or other.”

However, that separation did not take place. The old love and friendship which had bound them together since childhood did not fail them, even now. Theo managed to restrain himself, and in the spring he wrote, “As I feel much stronger than last winter, I hope to be able to bring a change for the better in our relations; there will be no other change for the present, and I am glad of it. We are already most of us so far from home that it's no use causing still more separation.” Full of courage, he continued to help Vincent bear the burden of his life.

With spring everything improved. Vincent could work in the open air again and painted much at Asnières, where he painted the beautiful triptych of “L'Isle de la grande Jatte,” the borders of the Seine with their gay, bright restaurants, the little boats on the river, the parks and gardens, all sparkling with light and colour. At that time he saw much of Émile Bernard, a young painter fifteen years younger than himself, whom he had met at Cormon's. He had a little wooden studio in his parents' garden at Asnières where they sometimes worked together and where Vincent began a portrait of Bernard. But one day he had a violent quarrel with old Mr. Bernard about the latter's projects for his son. Vincent could bear no contradiction; he ran away in a passion with the still-wet portrait under his arm, and he never set foot again in the Bernards' house. But the friendship with young Bernard continued, and his *Letters of Vincent van Gogh* (published by Vollard in Paris) contain the most beautiful pages ever written about Vincent.

In the winter of '87--'88, Vincent again painted portraits--the famous self-portrait before the easel, and many other self-portraits, as well as father Tanguy, the old merchant of colours in the Rue Clauzel who allowed his customers to exhibit their pictures in his show window. He has occasionally been described as a Maecenas; but the poor old man completely lacked the necessary qualities, and even if he had possessed them, his shrewd wife would not have allowed him to use them. He sent, and justly too, very meticulous bills for the colours he furnished and did not understand very much about the pictures on view in his window.

The famous picture “Interior with Lady by a Cradle” was created during that time. When Theo, who had that winter bought a few pictures from young artists to help them, wanted to do the same for Vincent, the latter painted for him the beautiful “Still Life in Yellow,” sparkling and radiant as from an inner glow, and in red letters he dedicated it “To my brother Theo.”

Toward the end of the winter he became tired of Paris; city life was too much for him, the climate too grey and chilly. In February, '88 he traveled south. “After all these years of care and misfortune his health has not grown any stronger, and he decidedly wanted to be in a milder climate,” Theo wrote. “He has first gone to Arles to look about him, and then will probably go to Marseilles.

“Before he went away I went a few times with him to hear a Wagner concert; we both enjoyed it very much. It still seems strange that he is gone. He has meant so much to me of late.” And Bernard tells how busy Vincent was that last day in Paris arranging the studio, “so that my brother will think me still here.”

At Arles, Vincent reached his peak. After the oppressiveness of Parisian life he, with his innate love of nature, revived in sunny Provence. There followed a happy time of undisturbed and immense productivity. Without paying much attention to the town of Arles itself, with its famous remains of Roman architecture, he painted the landscape, the glorious wealth of spring blossoms in a series of orchards in bloom, the wheatfields under the burning sun at harvest time, the almost intoxicating richness of the autumn colours, the glorious beauty of the gardens and parks, “The Poet's Garden,” where he saw as in a vision the ghosts of Dante and Petrarch. He painted “The Sower,” “The Sunflowers,” “The Starry Night,” the sea at Sts.-Maries: his creative impulse and power were inexhaustible. “I have a terrible lucidity at moments, these days when nature is so beautiful, I am not conscious of myself any more, and the picture comes to me as in a dream.” And he exclaimed rapturously, “Life is almost enchanted after all.”

Thereafter his letters, written in French, completely reflected what was going on inside him. Sometimes when he had written in the morning, he sat down again in the evening to tell his brother how splendid the day had been. “I have never had such a chance, nature being so here extraordinarily beautiful.” And a day later, “I know...that I have already written you once today, but it has been such a lovely day again. My great regret is that you cannot see what I am seeing here.”

Completely absorbed in his work as he was, the great loneliness that surrounded him in Arles was no burden. Except for a short acquaintance with McKnight, Bock and the Zouave lieutenant Milliet, he had no friends whatever. But after he had rented a little house of his own on the Place Lamartine and arranged it after his own taste--decorating it with his pictures, and making it a maison d'artiste--he again felt the old longing which he had already expressed at the start of his painting career in 1880: to associate with another artist and live and work together. Just then he received a letter from Paul Gauguin in Brittany; he was in the greatest pecuniary embarrassment and was trying in this roundabout way to ask Theo to sell some of his pictures for him: “I wanted to write to your brother but I am afraid to bother him because he's so busy from morning until night. The little I have sold is just enough to pay some urgent debts and in a month I shall have absolutely nothing left. Zero is a negative force...I do not want to importune your brother, but a little word from you on this subject would set my mind at ease or at least help me to have patience. My God, how terrible are these money questions for an artist.”

At once Vincent grasped at the idea of helping Gauguin. He had to come to Arles, and they would live and work together. Theo would pay the expenses and Gauguin would give him pictures in exchange. Again and again he insisted on this plan with his innate perseverance and stubbornness, though Gauguin did not at first seem at all inclined to it. They had met in Paris, but it had been no more than a superficial acquaintance, and they were too different in talent and character ever to harmonize in daily intercourse.

Gauguin, born in Paris in 1848, was the son of a Breton father, a journalist in Paris, and a Creole mother. His youth was full of adventures; he had gone to sea as a cabin boy, had worked in a banker's office and had painted only in his leisure hours. Then, after he had married and had a family, he devoted himself wholly to his art. His wife and children returned to her native city, Copenhagen, as he was not able to provide for them. He himself made a journey to Martinique, where he painted, among others, his famous picture, “The Negresses.” He was now in Pont Aven in Brittany, without any source of income; the great need of money made him accept Vincent's proposition and come to Arles. The whole undertaking was a sad failure and ended fatally for Vincent.

Notwithstanding the months of superhuman exertion which lay behind him, he strained every nerve in a last manifestation of power before Gauguin's arrival. “I am vain enough to want to make a certain impression on Gauguin with my work...I have...pushed what I was working on as far as I could in my great desire to show him something new, and not to be subjected to his influence...before I can show him indubitably my own originality,” wrote Vincent in letter 556. When we realize that to this last work belongs one of Vincent's most famous pictures, “La chambre à coucher” [The Bedroom], and the series, “The Poet's Garden,” we are rather skeptical about Gauguin's later assertion that before his arrival Vincent had merely been bungling along, and that he made progress only after Gauguin's lessons. It gives us some perspective on Gauguin's whole description of the episode at Arles, which is such a mixture of truth and fiction.[5]

The fact is that Vincent was completely exhausted and overstrained, and was no match for the iron Gauguin with his strong nerves and cool arguing. It became a silent struggle between them, and the endless discussions held while they sat smoking in the little yellow house were not calculated to calm Vincent. “Your brother is indeed a little agitated, and I hope to calm him by and by,” Gauguin wrote Theo shortly after his arrival at Arles. And to Bernard he related more frankly how little sympathy there really was between Vincent and himself. “Vincent and I generally agree very little, especially about painting. He admires Daudet, Daubigny, Ziem, and the great Rousseau--all people whom I cannot bear. And on the contrary he detests Ingres, Raphael, Degas--all people whom I admire. I answer, “Brigadier, you are right,” in order to have peace. He loves my pictures very much, but when I make them he always finds I am wrong in this or that. He is romantic, and I am rather inclined to the primitive state.”[6] In later years when Gauguin again remembered this period, he wrote, “Between the two of us, he like a Vulcan, and I boiling too, a kind of struggle was preparing itself…”[7]

The situation became more and more strained. In the latter half of December Theo received from Gauguin the following letter: “Dear Mr. van Gogh, I would he greatly obliged to you for sending me part of the money for the pictures sold.

After all, I must go back to Paris. Vincent and I simply cannot live together in peace because of incompatibility of temper, and we both need quiet for our work. He is a man of remarkable intelligence; I respect him highly, and regret leaving; but I repeat, it is necessary. I appreciate all the delicacy in your conduct toward me and I beg you to excuse my decision.” Vincent also wrote, in letter 565, that Gauguin seemed to be tired of Arles, of the yellow house, and of himself. But the quarrel was made up; Gauguin asked Theo to consider his return to Paris as an imaginary thing, and the letter he bad written as a bad dream. But it was only the calm before the storm.

The day before Christmas--Theo and I had just become engaged and intended to go to Holland together (I was staying in Paris with my brother, A. Bonger, a friend of Theo's and Vincent's)--a telegram arrived from Gauguin which called Theo to Arles. On the evening of December 24 Vincent had in a state of violent excitement, *un accès de fièvre chaude* (an attack of high fever), cut off a piece of his ear and brought it as a gift to a woman in a brothel. A big tumult had ensued. Roulin the postman had seen Vincent home; the police had intervened, had found Vincent bleeding and unconscious in bed, and sent him to the hospital. There Theo found him in a severe crisis, and stayed with him during the Christmas days. The doctor considered his condition very serious.

“There were moments while I was with him when he was well; but very soon after he fell back into his worries about philosophy and theology. It was painfully sad to witness, for at times all his suffering overwhelmed him and he tried to weep but he could not; poor fighter and poor, poor sufferer; for the moment nobody can do anything to relieve his sorrow, and yet he feels deeply and strongly. If he might have found somebody to whom he could have disclosed his heart, it would perhaps never have gone thus far,” Theo wrote to me after he had come back to Paris with Gauguin. And a day later, “There is little hope, but during his life he has done more than many others, and he has suffered and struggled more than most people could have done. If it must be that he dies, so be it, but my heart breaks when I think of it.”

The anxiety lasted a few more days. Dr. Rey, the house doctor at the hospital, to whose care Theo had so urgently entrusted Vincent, kept him constantly informed. “I shall always be glad to send you tidings, for I too have a brother, I too have been separated from my family,” he wrote December 29 when the news was still very bad. The Protestant clergyman, the Reverend Mr. Salles, also visited Vincent and wrote Theo about his condition. Then, last but not least, there was the postman, Roulin, who was quite dismayed at the accident that had befallen his friend Vincent, with whom he had spent so many pleasant hours at Joseph Ginoux's Café de la Gare," and who had painted such beautiful portraits of him and his whole family! Every day he went to the hospital for news and conveyed it faithfully to Paris; as he was not a good penman, his two sons, Armand and Camille, took turns serving as his secretary. His wife, too, who posed for "La Berceuse" (Mme. Ginoux was the original of the "Arlésienne"), visited her sick friend, and the first sign of recovery was Vincent's asking her about little Marcelle, the handsome baby he had painted such a short time before.

Then his condition suddenly changed for the better. The Reverend Mr. Salles wrote on December 31 that he had found Vincent perfectly calm, and that he was longing to start work again. A day later Vincent himself wrote a short note in pencil to reassure Theo, and on January 2 another note came from him, to which Dr. Rey added a word of reassurance. On January 3 an enthusiastic letter from Roulin: "Vincent has quite recovered. He is better than before that unfortunate accident happened to him." He, Roulin, would go to the doctor and tell him to allow Vincent to go back to his pictures. The following day they had been out and spent four hours together. "I am very sorry my first letters were so alarming, and I beg your pardon; I am glad to say I have been mistaken in this case. He only regrets all the trouble he has given you, and he is sorry for the anxiety he has caused. You may rest assured that I will do all I can to give him some distraction," wrote Roulin.

On January 7 Vincent left the hospital, apparently entirely recovered; but, alas, any great excitement or fatigue caused the nervous attacks to return...They lasted a varying length of time, but also left him periods of almost perfect health, during which he went back to work with the old vigour. In February he was taken back to the hospital for a short time. After his return to his little house the neighbors, who had grown afraid of him, petitioned the mayor, complaining that it was dangerous to leave him at liberty. Consequently he was actually sent to the hospital again on February 27--this time without any cause. Vincent himself kept the deepest silence about this unhappy affair for a whole month, but the Reverend Mr. Salles sent Theo a faithful report. On March 2 he wrote, "The neighbors have raised a fuss over nothing. The acts with which they have reproached your brother (even if they were exact) do not justify charging a man with insanity or depriving him of his liberty. Unfortunately, the foolish act which necessitated his original removal to the hospital made people misunderstand anything singular which the poor young man does; from anyone else it would remain unobserved, from him, everything at once assumes a particular importance...As I told you yesterday, at the hospital he has won everybody's favour; after all, the doctor--not the chief of police--is the judge in these matters.”

The whole affair made a deep impression on Vincent and caused another attack, from which he recovered with astonishing rapidity. Again, it was the Reverend Mr. Salles who told Theo of Vincent's recovery. On March 18 he wrote, “Your brother has spoken to me with perfect calmness and lucidity about his condition and also about the petition signed by his neighbors. The petition grieves him very much. 'If the police,' he says, 'had protected my liberty by preventing the children and even the grownups from crowding around my house and climbing the windows as they have done (as if I were a curious animal), I should have more easily retained my self-possession; in any event I have done no harm to anyone.' In short, I found your brother transformed; God grant that this favorable change he maintained. His condition has an indescribable quality: it is impossible to understand the sudden and complete changes which have taken place in him. It is evident that as long as he is in the condition in which I found him, there can be no question of interning him in an asylum; nobody, so far as I know, would have this sinister courage.” A day after this interview with the Reverend Mr. Salles, Vincent wrote again to Theo and justly complained that such repeated emotions might cause a passing nervous attack to change into a chronic evil. And with quiet resignation, he added, “...to suffer without complaint is the one lesson that has to be learned in this life.”

He soon recovered his liberty, but continued to live in the hospital until the Reverend Mr. Salles could find him new lodgings in a different part of town. His health was so good that the Reverend Mr. Salles wrote on April 19, “Sometimes not even a trace seems left of the disease which has affected him so grievously.”

But when he was going to settle with the new landlord, he suddenly avowed to the Reverend Mr. Salles that he lacked the courage to start a new studio again, and that he himself thought it best to go to an asylum for a few months. “He is fully conscious of his condition, and speaks with me about his illness, which he fears will come back, with a touching candour and simplicity,” wrote the Reverend Mr. Salles. “I am not fit,” he told me the day before yesterday, “to govern myself and my affairs. I feel quite different than I was before.” The Reverend Mr. Salles then looked around and advised the asylum of St. Rémy, situated quite near Arles; he added that the doctors at Arles approve of it, “given the state of isolation in which your brother would find himself upon leaving the hospital.”

It was that which troubled Theo most. Shortly before our marriage, in answer to my question whether Vincent would not rather return to Paris or spend some time with his mother and sisters in Holland, as he was so alone in Arles, Theo wrote me, “Yes, one of the greatest difficulties is that, whether in good or bad health, his life is so utterly cut off from the outer world. But if you knew him, you would be doubly aware of how difficult it is to solve the question of what must and can be done for him.

“As you know, he has long since broken with what is called convention. His way of dressing and his manners show directly that he is an unusual personality, and people who see him say, 'He is mad.' To me it does not matter, but for Mother that is impossible. Then there is something in his way of speaking that makes people either like or dislike him strongly. He always has people around him who sympathize with him, but also many enemies. It is impossible for him to associate with people in an indifferent way; it is either one thing or the other. It is difficult even for those who are his best friends to remain on good terms with him, as he spares nobody's feelings. If I had time, I would go to him and, for instance, go on a walking tour with him. That is the only thing, I imagine, that would do him good. If I can find somebody among the painters who would like to do it, I will send him. But those with whom he would like to go are somewhat afraid of him, a circumstance which Gauguin's visit did nothing to change.

“Then there is another thing which makes me afraid to have him come here. In Paris he saw so many things which he liked to paint, but again and again it was made impossible for him to do so. Models would not pose for him and he was forbidden to paint in the streets; with his irascible temper this caused many unpleasant scenes which excited him so much that he became completely unapproachable and at last he developed a great aversion for Paris. If he himself wanted to come back here, I would not hesitate for a moment...but again I think I can do no better than to let him follow his own inclinations. A quiet life is impossible for him, except alone with nature or with very simple people like the Roulins; for wherever he goes he leaves the trace of his passing. Whatever he sees that is wrong he must criticize, and that often occasions strife.

“I hope that he will find, sometime, a wife who loves him so much that she will share his life; but it will not be easy. Do you remember that girl in *Virgin Soil* by Tourgenev, who was with the nihilists and brought the compromising papers across the frontiers? I imagine she might he like that--somebody who has gone through life's misery to the bottom...It pains me not to be able to do anything for him, but for uncommon people, uncommon remedies are necessary, and I hope these will be found where ordinary people would not look for them.”

Vincent himself now decided to go to St. Rémy.

Theo's first impression of Vincent's resolution was that it might be a kind of self-sacrifice to avoid being in anybody's way, and he wrote him once more, asking with emphasis whether he would not rather go to Pont-Aven or come to Paris.

But as Vincent stuck to his decision, Theo wrote him: “I do not consider your going to St. Rémy a retreat, as you call it, but simply a temporary rest cure which will help you come back with renewed strength. For my part I attribute your illness principally to neglect of your material existence. In an establishment like that of St. Rémy there is a great regularity in the hours for meals, etc., and I think that such regularity will do you no harm--quite the contrary.”

When Theo had arranged everything with the director of the establishment, Dr. Peyron, including a free room for Vincent and a room where he could paint and as much liberty as possible to wander about as he liked, Vincent left for St. Rémy on May 8, accompanied by the Reverend Mr. Salles, who wrote Theo the next day: “Our journey to St. Rémy has been accomplished under the most excellent conditions. Monsieur Vincent was perfectly calm and explained his case himself to the director as a man fully conscious of his condition. He remained with me till my departure, and when I took leave of him he thanked me warmly and seemed somewhat moved, thinking of the new life he was going to lead in that house. Monsieur Peyron has assured me that he will show him all the kindness and consideration which his condition demands.”

How touching sounds that “somewhat moved” at the departure of the faithful companion! His leave-taking broke the last tie that united Vincent with the outer world; he stayed behind in what was worse than the greatest loneliness, surrounded by neurotics and lunatics, with nobody to whom he could talk, nobody who understood him. Dr. Peyron was kindly disposed, but he was reserved and silent; the monthly letters by which he kept Theo informed of the situation lacked the warm sympathy of the doctors in the hospital at Arles.

Vincent spent a full year in these cheerless surroundings, struggling with unbroken energy against the ever-returning attacks of his illness but continuing his work with the old restless zeal which alone could keep him living now that everything else had failed him. He painted the desolate landscape which he saw from his window at sunrise and sunset; he wandered far to paint the wide fields, bordered by the foothills of the Alps; he painted the olive orchards with their dismally twisted branches, the gloomy cypresses, the somber garden of the asylum; and he also painted the “Reaper”--”an image of death as the great book of nature speaks of it.”

It was no longer the buoyant, sunny, triumphant work of Arles. There sounded a deeper, sadder tone than the piercing clarion of his symphonies in yellow during the previous year: his palette had become more sober, the harmonies of his pictures had passed into a minor key.

“To suffer without complaint”--well had he learned that lesson. When the treacherous evil attacked him again in August, just when he had hoped to be cured for good, he only uttered a despondent, “I no longer see any possibility of having courage or hope...”

He struggled painfully through the winter, during which, however, he painted some of his most beautiful works: the “Pieta” after Delacroix; the “Resurrection of Lazarus,” and the “Good Samaritan” after Rembrandt; the “Four Hours of The Day” after Millet. A few months followed during which he was unable to work, but now he felt that he would lose his energy forever if he stayed in those fatal surroundings any longer; he must get away from St. Rémy.

For some time Theo had been looking around for a suitable place--near Paris and yet in the country--where Vincent could live under the care of a physician who would at the same time be a friend to him. On Pissarro's recommendation he finally found this at Auvers sur Oise, an hour by train from Paris; Dr. Gachet, who in his youth had been a friend of Cézanne, Pissarro and the other impressionists, lived there.

Vincent returned from the South on May 17, 1890. First he was going to spend a few days with us in Paris. A telegram from Tarascon informed us that he was going to travel that night and would arrive at ten in the morning. That night Theo could not sleep for anxiety lest something happen to Vincent on the way; he had only just recovered from a long and serious attack, and had refused to be accompanied by anyone. How thankful we were when it was at last time for Theo to go to the station!

From the Cité Pigalle to the Gare de Lyon was a long distance; it seemed an eternity before they came back. I was beginning to be afraid that something had happened when at last I saw an open fiacre enter the Cité; two merry faces nodded to me, two hands waved--a moment later Vincent stood before me.

I had expected a sick man, but here was a sturdy, broadshouldered man, with a healthy colour, a smile on his face, and a very resolute appearance; of all the self-portraits, the one before the easel is most like him at that period. Apparently there had again come the sudden puzzling change in his condition that the Reverend Mr. Salles had already observed to his great surprise at Arles.

“He seems perfectly well; he looks much stronger than Theo,” was my first thought.

Then Theo drew him into the room where our little boy's cradle was; he had been named after Vincent. Silently the two brothers looked at the quietly sleeping baby--both had tears in their eyes. Then Vincent turned smilingly to me and said, pointing to the simple crocheted cover on the cradle, “Do not cover him too much with lace, little sister.”

He stayed with us three days, and was cheerful and lively all the time. St. Rémy was not mentioned. He went out by himself to buy olives, which he used to eat every day and which he insisted on our eating too. The first morning he was up very early and was standing in his shirt sleeves looking at his pictures, of which our apartment was full. The walls were covered with them--in the bedroom, the “Orchards in Bloom”; in the dining room over the mantelpiece, the “Potato Eaters”; in the sitting room (salon was too solemn a name for that cosy little room), the great “Landscape from Arles” and the “Night View on the Rhône.” Besides, to the great despair of our femme de ménage, there were under the bed, under the sofa, under the cupboards in the little spare room, huge piles of unframed canvases; they were now spread out on the ground and studied with great attention.

We also had many visitors, but Vincent soon perceived that the bustle of Paris did him no good, and he longed to set to work again. So he started on May 21 for Auvers, with an introduction to Dr. Gachet, whose faithful friendship was to become his greatest support during the short time he spent at Auvers. We promised to come and see him soon, and he also wanted to come back to us in a few weeks to paint our portraits. In Auvers he lodged at an inn and went to work immediately.

The hilly landscape with the sloping fields and thatched roofs of the village pleased him, but what he enjoyed most was having models and again painting figures. One of the first portraits he painted was of Dr. Gachet, who immediately felt great sympathy for Vincent. They spent most of their time together and became great friends--a friendship not ended by death, for Dr. Cachet and his children continued to honour Vincent's memory with rare piety, which became a form of worship, touching in its simplicity and sincerity.

“The more I think of it, the more I think Vincent was a giant. Not a day passes that I do not look at his pictures. I always find there a new idea, something different each day...I think again of the painter and I find him a colossus. Besides, he was a philosopher...” Gachet wrote to Theo shortly after Vincent's death. Speaking of the latter's love for art, he said, “*Love of art* is not exact; one must call it *faith*--a faith that maketh martyrs!” None of his contemporaries had understood him better.

It was curious to note that Dr. Cachet himself somewhat resembled Vincent physically (he was much older), and his son Paul--then a boy of fifteen years--looked somewhat like Theo.

The Gachet house, built on a hill, was full of pictures and antiques, which received but scanty daylight through the small windows; in front of the house there was a splendid terraced flower garden, at the back a large yard where all kinds of ducks, hens, turkeys and peacocks walked about in the company of four or five cats. It was the home of an original, but an original of great taste. The doctor no longer practiced in Auvers, but had an office in Paris where he held consultations several days a week; the rest of the time he painted and etched in his room, which looked like the workshop of an alchemist of the Middle Ages.

Soon after, on June 10, we received an invitation from him to spend a whole day in Auvers and bring the baby. Vincent came to meet us at the train, and he brought a bird's nest as a plaything for his little nephew and namesake. He insisted upon carrying the baby himself and had no rest until he had shown him all the animals in the yard. A too-loudly crowing cock made the baby red in the face with fear and made him cry; Vincent cried laughingly, “The cock crows *cocorico,*” and was very proud that he had introduced his little namesake to the animal world. We lunched in the open air, and afterward took a long walk; the day was so peacefully quiet, so happy, that nobody would have suspected how tragically our happiness was to be destroyed a few weeks later. Early in July, Vincent visited us once more in Paris. We were exhausted by a serious illness of the baby; Theo was again considering the old plan of leaving Goupil and setting up in business for himself; Vincent was not satisfied with the place where the pictures were kept, and our removal to a larger apartment was talked of--so those were days of much worry and anxiety. Many friends came to visit Vincent--among others Aurier, who had recently written his famous article about Vincent[8] and now came again to look at the pictures with the painter himself. Toulouse Lautrec stayed for lunch and made many jokes with Vincent about an undertaker's man they had met on the stairs. Guillaumin was also expected, but it became too much for Vincent, so he did not wait for this visit but hurried back to Auvers--overtired and excited, as his last letters and pictures show, in which the threatening catastrophe seems approaching like the ominous black birds that dart through the storm over the wheat fields.

“I hope he is not getting melancholy or that a new attack is threatening again, everything has gone so well lately,” Theo wrote to me on July 20, after he had taken the baby and me to Holland and had returned to Paris for a short time, until he also could take a vacation. On July 25 he wrote to me, “I have a letter from Vincent which seems quite incomprehensible; when will there come a happy time for him? He is so thoroughly good.” That happy time was never to come for Vincent; fear of an impending attack or the attack itself drove him to death.

On the evening of July 27 he shot himself with a revolver. Dr. Gachet wrote that same evening to Theo: “With the greatest regret I must disturb your repose. Yet I think it my duty to write to you immediately. At nine o'clock in the evening of today, Sunday, I was sent for by your brother Vincent, who wanted to see me at once. I went there and found him very ill. He has wounded himself...as I did not know your address and he refused to give it to me, this note will reach you through Goupil.” Consequently, the letter did not reach Theo until the next morning; he immediately started for Auvers. From there he wrote to me the same day, July 28, “This morning a Dutch painter[9] who also lives in Auvers brought me a letter from Dr. Gachet that contained bad news about Vincent and asked me to come. Leaving everything, I went and found him somewhat better than I expected. I will not write the particulars, they are too sad, but you must know, dearest, that his life may be in danger...

“He was glad that I came and we are together all the time...poor fellow, very little happiness fell to his share, and no illusions are left him. The burden grows too heavy at times, he feels so alone. He often asks after you and the baby, and said that you could not imagine there was so much sorrow in life. Oh! if we could only give him some new courage to live. Don't get too anxious; his condition has been just as hopeless before, but his strong constitution deceived the doctors.” This hope proved idle. Early in the morning of July 29 Vincent passed away.

Theo wrote to me, “One of his last words was, 'I wish I could pass away like this,' and his wish was fulfilled. A few moments and all was over. He had found the rest he could not find on earth...The next morning there came from Paris and elsewhere eight friends who decked the room where the coffin stood with his pictures, which came out wonderfully. There were many flowers and wreaths. Dr. Gachet was the first to bring a large bunch of sunflowers, because Vincent was so fond of them...

“He rests in a sunny spot amid the wheat fields...”

From a letter of Theo's to his mother: “One cannot write how grieved one is nor find any comfort. It is a grief that will last and which I certainly shall never forget as long as I live; the only thing one might say is that he himself has the rest he was longing for…Life was such a burden to him; but now, as often happens, everybody is full of praise for his talents...Oh Mother! he was so my own, own brother.”

Theo's frail health was broken. Six months later, on January 25, 1891, he followed his brother.

They rest side by side in the little cemetery amid the wheat fields of Auvers.

December, 1913

J. VAN GOGH-BONGER

Auvers-sur-Oise Town Cemetery, Ile-de-France Region — van Gogh's final resting place

ICI REPOSE
VINCENT VAN GOGH
1853 1890
ICI REPOSE
THEODORE VAN GOGH

Van Gogh’s grave, beside his beloved brother Theo